

# Tevet: Working with Anger

*Sefer Yetzirah (The Book of Formation) is a work of meditative proto-Kabbalah with strong magical elements. It is the earliest extant work of Jewish mysticism and it is traditionally attributed to Abraham (18<sup>th</sup> Century BCE) and/or R' Akiva (2<sup>nd</sup> Century CE). In it, each month is associated with a Hebrew letter, a constellation, a part of the human body and a human emotion, sense, or faculty. How does this passage reflect our month's position in the cycle of the seasons and festivals?*

<p><b>Sefer Yetzirah 5:10</b> (translated by R' Aryeh Kaplan)</p> <p>He made the letter Eyin king over anger          And He bound a crown to it          And He combined one with another          And with them He formed          Capricorn in the Universe          Tevet in the Year          And the liver in the Soul          Male and female</p>	<p><b>ספר היצירה ה'י:</b></p> <p>המליך אות ע' ברוגז          וקשר לו כתר          וצרפן זה בזה          וצר בהם          גדי בעולם          וטבת בשנה          וכבד בנפש          זכר ונקבה</p>
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*Do you agree with this proverb? Is self-control a battle you fight regularly?*

<p><b>Proverbs 16:32</b></p> <p>Its is better to be slow to anger than mighty, to have self-control than to conquer a city.</p>	<p><b>משלי טז:לב</b></p> <p>טוֹב אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם מִגִּבּוֹר          וּמִשָּׁל בְּרוּחוֹ מִלְכָּד עֵיר</p>
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*What is R' Ilai's point about anger here? Do you agree with it?*

<p><b>Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin 65b</b></p> <p>Says R' Ilai: With three things a person can be discerned: in his cup, his anger and his wallet, and some say even in his recreation.</p>	<p><b>תלמוד בבלי - עירובין סה:ב</b></p> <p>א"ר אילעאי          בשלשה דברים אדם ניכר          בכוסו ובכיסו ובכעסו ואמרי ליה אף בשחקו</p>
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*Consider these two teachings from our sages. Do they reflect the same attitude towards anger?*

<p><b>Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 105b</b></p> <p>If someone tears their garment in their anger, breaks their utensils in their anger or scatters their money in their anger, they should be regarded as an idolater, as that is the craft of the evil inclination: today it tells them “do this,” and the next day it tells them “do this” until it tells them “worship idols” and they go and worship.</p>	<p><b>תלמוד בבלי - שבת קה:ב</b></p> <p>המקרע בגדיו בחמתו          והמשבר כליו בחמתו          והמפזר מעותיו בחמתו          יהא בעיניך כעובד ע"ז שכך אומנתו של יצה"ר          היום אומר לו עשה כך          ולמחר אומר לו עשה כך          עד שאומר לו עבוד עבודה זרה והולך ועובד</p>
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<p><b>Babylonian Talmud, Pesachim 66b</b></p> <p>Reish Lakish said: Any person who becomes angry, if he is a Torah scholar, his wisdom departs from him, and if he is a prophet, his prophecy departs from him.</p>	<p><b>תלמוד בבלי - פסחים ס"ו:</b></p> <p>ריש לקיש אמר כל אדם שכועס אם חכם הוא חכמתו מסתלקת ממנו אם נביא הוא נבואתו מסתלקת ממנו</p>
<p><i>R' Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040 – 1105), known by the acronym Rashi, was a French scholar and author of the most authoritative commentaries on both the Tanach (Hebrew Bible) and the Talmud. Both of these works are centerpieces of Torah study, and have long been printed with standard editions of their subjects.</i></p> <p><i>Rashi here provides us with a very pragmatic reason to avoid anger. In your own experience, is this teaching accurate?</i></p>	
<p><b>Rashi on Numbers 31:21</b> (based on Sifrei Mattot 48)</p> <p>Since Moses came to a state of anger, he came to err, for the laws of purging gentile vessels eluded him. A similar incident happened on the eighth day of the installment [of the priests], as it says, “He [Moses] became angry with Eleazar and Itamar” (Lev. 10:16); he came to a state of anger, so he came to err. Similarly, in the episode of “Now listen, you rebels... and struck the rock” (Num. 20:10-11); through anger, he came to err.</p>	<p><b>רש"י על במדבר לא:כא</b></p> <p>לפי שבא משה לכלל כעס בא לכלל טעות שנתעלמו ממנו הלכות גיעולי נכרים וכן אתה מוצא בשמיני למלואים שנאמר ויקצף על אלעזר ועל איתמר בא לכלל כעס בא לכלל טעות וכן בשמעו נא המרים ויך את הסלע על ידי הכעס טעה</p>
<p><i>Interestingly, our sages view anger as entirely incompatible with prayer. Given that anger might be directed in service of the Divine, and often is in the Tanach (Hebrew Bible), why do you think this is?</i></p>	
<p><b>Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 93:2</b></p> <p>One should not stand to pray until they are in a state of deep awe and surrender. [One should not just rise to pray] in a state of frivolity, immersion in idle matters or mundane speech. And not in a state of anger but rather, in a state of joy...</p>	<p><b>שולחן ערוך - אורח חיים צ"ג:</b></p> <p>לא יעמוד להתפלל אלא באימה והכנעה לא מתוך שחוק וקלות ראש ודברים בטלים ולא מתוך כעס אלא מתוך שמחה</p>
<p><i>R' Moshe ben Maimon (Spain, Morocco and Egypt, 1135 – 1204), known as Maimonides or Rambam, was and remains a towering figure in Judaism, whose Mishneh Torah was the first comprehensive code of post-Talmudic Jewish law. What do you think of his approach to anger? What might be the dangers inherent within it?</i></p>	
<p><b>Mishneh Torah, Human Dispositions 2:2-3</b></p> <p>The good way is the middle path in each and every tendency.</p>	<p><b>משנה תורה - הלכות דעות ב:ב-ג</b></p> <p>דִּרְךְ הַטּוֹבָה וְהִיא מִדָּה בִּיְנוֹנִית שֶׁבְּכָל דָּעָה וְדָעָה</p>

<p>And, yet, there are certain tendencies which a person is forbidden to follow in the middle-way, but must distance themselves from extreme to extreme.</p> <p>Anger is one such extremely evil tendency, and it is proper for a person to remove himself from it to the other extreme. One should teach themselves not to get angry, even over a matter which calls for anger.</p> <p>If one desires to bring awe on their children and their household, or in the public, if they are the head of a community, even if they desire to get angry at them in order that they return to the good way, they should only act angry in their presence so as to discipline them, but their consciousness should remain calm within them, even as a person imitates, who is angry when the time calls for anger, but they are not [really] angry.</p>	<p>וְיֵשׁ דְּעוֹת שְׂאָסוּר לוֹ לְאָדָם לְנֶהֱגַ בְּהֵן בְּבִינֹנוּת אֲלֵא יִתְרַחֵק מִן הַקְּצָה הָאֶחָד עַד הַקְּצָה הָאֲחֵר ... וְכֵן הַכַּעַס מִדָּה רָעָה הִיא עַד לְמֵאֵד וְרָאוּי לְאָדָם שְׂיִתְרַחֵק מִמֶּנָּה עַד הַקְּצָה הָאֲחֵר וְיִלְמַד עֲצָמוֹ שֶׁלֹּא יִכְעַס וְאִפְלוּ עַל דָּבָר שֶׁרָאוּי לְכַעַס עָלָיו ... וְאִם רָצָה לְהִטִּיל אִימָה עַל בְּנָיו וּבְנֵי בֵיתוֹ אוֹ עַל הַצְּבֹר אִם הִיָּה פְּרָנָס וְרָצָה לְכַעַס עֲלֵיהֶן כְּדֵי שְׂיִחְזְרוּ לְמוֹטֵב יִרְאֶה עֲצָמוֹ בְּפְנֵיהֶם שֶׁהוּא כּוֹעֵס כְּדֵי לִיִּסְרָם וְתִהְיֶה דְּעָתוֹ מִיִּשְׁבֵּת בֵּינוֹ לְבֵין עֲצָמוֹ כְּאָדָם שֶׁהוּא מְדַמָּה כּוֹעֵס בְּשַׁעַת כְּעֶסוֹ וְהוּא אֵינוֹ כּוֹעֵס</p>
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*R' Elimelech Weisblum of Lizhensk (1717 – 1787), was a student of the Maggid of Mezritch and one of the key founders of the Chasidic movement in Poland. His students included the Chozeh of Lublin, the Maggid of Kozhnitz and R' Menachem Mendel of Rimanov. His Torah commentary, Noam Elimelech (The Pleasantness of Elimelech) was compiled from written recordings of his spoken teachings and published by his son a year after his death. What is his advice for dealing with our anger? Do you find it compelling?*

<p><b>Noam Elimelech on Parshat Tzav</b></p> <p>It is impossible for a person to break the qualities with which they were born from their mother's womb. Rather, they should raise them up to holiness. For example, someone with the quality of anger should leave behind external angers and be angry with the wicked. And so for all human qualities: “and place them beside the altar” (Lev. 6:3), meaning, bringing them to holiness.</p> <p>“He shall then take off his vestments and put on other vestments” (Lev. 6:4), meaning that afterwards they come to a greater level, which is to strip themselves entirely of every hint of those qualities, “and carry the ashes outside the camp to a clean place” (ibid.). This means that those qualities they were born with will never return except in great holiness.</p>	<p><b>נועם אלימלך על פרשת צו</b></p> <p>שזה בלתי אפשרי שישבר אדם כל מדותיו הנולדים עמו מבטן אמו רק שצריך להרים אותם אל הקדושה למשל מי שיש בו מדת כעס יסור מכעס החיצונית ויכעוס על הרשעים וכן בכל המידות ושמו אצל המזבח פירוש כנ"ל שישים המדה אל הקדושה ... ופשט את בגדיו ולבש בגדים אחרים ר"ל שאח"כ יבא אל מדרגה יותר עד שיופשט מכל וכל מכל המידות והוציא את הדשן מחוץ למחנה ר"ל שלא יבא לו בשום פעם מהמידות הנולדות עמו כי אם הכל בקדושה רבה</p>
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*Rebbe Nachman of Breslov (1772 – 1810) was the great-grandson of the Ba'al Shem Tov, and was born twelve years after the Besht's passing, in the western Ukrainian town of Medzebozh. He originally attracted a small but ardent following, and much hostility, but his followers are now a grass-roots mass-phenomenon with great influence across the Jewish world. His teachings, though sometimes controversial, are renowned for their unique creativity and and psychological insight.*

*R' Nathan Sternhartz of Nemirov (Ukraine, 1780 – 1844), also known as Reb Noson, was the foremost disciple and scribe of Rebbe Nachman, and led the Breslover movement after Rebbe Nachman's death. Likutei Eitzot is a collection of Rebbe Nachman's advice that he compiled and published after his master's death.*

**Likutei Eitzot – Anger**

1. You must break the force of your anger with compassion. If you feel yourself becoming angry, make sure you do nothing cruel because of your anger. On the contrary, you must make a special effort to be kind to the very person you are angry with. Sweeten your anger with compassion.

3. Anger and cruelty arise when a person's awareness is limited. The deeper their awareness, the more their anger disappears, and compassion, kindness and peace spread. This is why the study of Torah, which cultivates awareness, banishes anger and cultivates compassion and peace (See LM 1:56:6).

8. Anger damages one's livelihood, and through it one becomes distant from truth, and cannot pray. It also prevents one from completing or seeing through any task in the required manner.

11. When a person breaks their anger, the spirit of Messiah is drawn into the world. Then it will be considered as if the world and all that is in it was created and brought into being through this person. They will be worthy of sustenance and to pray solely to Hashem without any ulterior motives, G!d forbid!

And they will merit to fulfill all the mitzvot and other holy acts that the must accomplish (See LM 1:66:3).

12. Through the sanctity of the Land of Israel it is possible to completely break the force of anger, depression and laziness. Therefore one needs to request forcefully from the blessed G!d to come quickly to the Land of Israel (See LM 1:155).

**לקוטי עצות - כעס**

א. צריך לשבר את הכעס ברחמנות הינו כשפא לכלל כעס לא יפעל בכעסו שום אכזריות רק אדרבא יתגבר אז ברחמנות גדול על זה שרוצה לכעס וימתיק הכעס ברחמנות

ג. כעס ואכזריות הוא מחסרון הדעת וכל מה שמתרבה הדעת נתבטל הכעס ומתרבה הרחמנות והחסד והשלום על-כן על-ידי עסק התורה שעל-ידי זה נמשך דעת על ידי זה מתבטל הכעס ונמשך רחמנות ושלום

י. כעס מזיק לפרנסה כנ"ל ועל-ידי זה הוא רחוק מאמת ועל-ידי זה אינו יכול להתפלל גם אינו יכול לגמר ולהוציא מכח אל הפעל מה שצריך

יא. כשמתגבר ומשבר הכעס על-ידי זה נעשה ונמשך בחינת רוחו של משיח ונחשב כאלו על ידו נתהנה ונברא כל העולם ומלואו וזוכה לפרנסה ולהתפלל לה' לבדו בלי פניות בשביל בני אדם חס ושלום

וזוכה להוציא מכח אל הפעל כל המצוות וכל הדברים שבקדשה שצריך לעשות

יב. על-ידי קדשת ארץ ישראל זוכין לשבר בשלמות הכעס והעצבות והעצלות על-כן צריכין לבקש מאד מהשם יתברך שיזכה לבוא לארץ ישראל מהרה

*How does the above sit with our own lived experience of anger in ourselves and others? How do the various ways of dealing with our anger play out in the middle and long term? Consider these thoughts from R' Ami Silver, a contemporary teacher here in Jerusalem, based on the following verses:*

**Leviticus 19:17-18**

You shall not hate your kinsfolk in your heart. Reprove your kinsman but incur no guilt because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen. Love your fellow as yourself: I am the Eternal.

**ויקרא יט:יז-יח**

לֹא־תִשְׁנֵא אֶת־אָחִיךָ בְּלִבְבְּךָ  
הוֹכַח תּוֹכִיחַ אֶת־עַמִּיתְךָ  
וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא עָלָיו חָטָא  
לֹא־תִקֶּם וְלֹא־תִטּוֹר אֶת־בְּנֵי עַמְּךָ  
וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךְ אֲנִי יְקוֹק

**R' Ami Silver:**

According to Jewish law, a person should get angry whenever they feel angry [cites the above verses]... I was being a little tongue and cheek [in the previous sentence], but was trying to convey that being angry is not a sin nor is it forbidden in Jewish law. Yes, the Talmud contains statements that condemn anger in the strongest words and Maimonides famously does as well, but these are comments about ideal moral standards and are not law.

I think there are dangers in thinking that getting angry is forbidden when in fact it is both permitted and a natural emotion. So I brought the verses above to respond that the Torah asks us to express and share our emotions with each other, to not hold volatile emotions like hatred in our hearts, and in the same verse to love one another. In my mind these verses are part of a whole. If I suppress my anger or rebuke against you, my love can likewise not be fully transparent and authentic.

*Let's explore anger from a different perspective. All of the findings in the following article are based on several peer-reviewed studies. What can we learn from here about our relationship with anger?*

**Eric Barker, 3 Science-backed Ways to Manage your Anger**

Here's how to get rid of anger:

- Suppress rarely. They may not know you're angry but you'll feel worse inside and hurt the relationship.
- Don't vent. Communication is good but venting just increases anger. Distract yourself.
- Reappraisal is usually the best option. Think to yourself, "It's not about me. They must be having a bad day."

Sometimes someone gets under your skin and suppression is the only thing you can do to avoid a homicide charge. And sometimes reappraisal can cause you to tolerate bad situations you need to get out of.

But that said, telling yourself a more compassionate story about what's going on inside the other person's head is usually the best way to go.

And what's the final step in getting rid of that anger over the long haul so you can maintain good relationships?  
Forgive.

It's not for them, it's for you. Forgiveness makes you less angry and more healthy:

Trait forgiveness was significantly associated with fewer medications and less alcohol use, lower blood pressure and rate pressure product; state forgiveness was significantly associated with lower heart rate and fewer physical symptoms.

Neither of these sets of findings were the result of decreased levels of anger-out being associated with forgiveness. These findings have important theoretical implications regarding the forgiveness–health link, suggesting that the benefits of forgiveness extend beyond the dissipation of anger.

As the old saying goes: Holding onto anger is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.

So remember: “They’re just having a bad day.”