

## **ANGER IN JUDAISM**

by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel July 23, 2018

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Although anger is a universal human emotion, it is nevertheless a very unusual sensation and reaction to something that upsets us. There are many variables involved when people get angry, including how angry they get or how long they stay angry after experiencing a threatening, hurtful, or unexpected situation. The definition of anger is "a strong feeling of displeasure and belligerence aroused by a wrong." It is an emotion related to one's psychological interpretation of having been offended, wronged or denied something that was expected, and it is characterized by a tendency to react through retaliation. Anger as a normal emotion involves a strong uncomfortable and emotional response to a perceived provocation. The external expression of anger can be found in facial expressions, body language, physiological responses, and at times in acts of aggression.

Anger is unusual in that some people can control it while others cannot, and everyone expresses his or her anger differently. Sometimes it seems that anger only makes things worse. So why do people get angry? How much control over this emotion do we really have? Why do reactions vary so widely between people or even day to day within the same person? What are the benefits and drawbacks of expressing ourselves and being or getting angry? We will attempt to address some of these questions as we discover the Jewish attitude towards anger through the traditional sources, since the Torah and rabbis have much to say about anger.

### **SOME OF THE CHARACTERISTICS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS ANGER**

The Mishna recognizes that everyone can get angry at some point, but strongly advises that an individual should strive to be very slow to anger and not get angry often.<sup>1</sup> One of the commentaries specifically says<sup>2</sup> that this emotion is part of human nature, but it is a very bad trait and feelings. Therefore, a person should try to work on himself and only express this emotion rarely by letting it come to the surface. In the Talmud,<sup>3</sup> three different Rabbis show the negative effects of expressing anger. One Rabbi says that when an individual is angry, even God's presence would not have any impact on that person. Another opinion is that at the moment of anger an individual forgets whatever he or she has learned about proper behavior and acts like a fool. The third and harshest view is that anger proves to everyone that the angry person's sins are more numerous than his or her merits as a human being and as a Jew.

A different Talmudic passage<sup>4</sup> states that a person who acts upon his or her anger, such as tearing things or smashing objects, is equated with an idol worshipper. Why, asks the Talmud? Because this individual becomes a slave to his passion, his evil desires, and is no longer in control of himself. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato explains this<sup>5</sup> and says that when a person is so full of rage, his fury controls him and he would destroy the world at that moment if he could. His or her brain and good inclination become powerless to fight against the negative emotion. The Talmud itself explains<sup>6</sup> the comparison between anger and worshipping an idol, saying that when a person blindly follows his anger, he gives it power and thereby negates God's power, which is the very definition of idol worship. By falling prey to uncontrolled anger, a human being allows the evil inclination to triumph and gain power over his or her actions. Lest we think that this emotion and its

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<sup>1</sup> Mishna Avot 2:10

<sup>2</sup> Rabbeinu Yonah commentary on Mishna Avot 2:10

<sup>3</sup> Nedarim 22b

<sup>4</sup> Shabbat 105b

<sup>5</sup> Mesilat Yesharim

<sup>6</sup> Shabbat 105b

power to control a person's response to adversity is referring only to weak, immoral and unlearned people, the Talmud reminds us<sup>7</sup> that God intentionally installs a greater evil inclination in the greatest people: The higher the moral potential of a person, the greater is the capacity of his or her evil inclination and desire to do evil. Thus, an outstanding, ethical and learned individual has a greater potential for anger, not a lesser one, and has to work even harder than ordinary people to overcome this natural desire. The mystical Zohar says<sup>8</sup> that a person who acts upon his anger is intentionally ignoring his soul as he lets a "strange god" take possession of him. And just as one is supposed to shun an idol worshipper, one should shun an individual who is in a state of anger. Rabbi Yehuda HaChasid agrees with this approach and recommends or prohibits others from looking at or interacting with the angry person while he or she is angry.<sup>9</sup>

Maimonides summarizes various Talmudic passages<sup>10</sup> and shows all the deleterious effects of someone who displays his or her anger. He says that the angry person appears to be worshipping a different "god," loses his learning and wisdom at the moment of anger (if he is a prophet, he loses his prophecy), and loses his quality of life itself. Therefore, Maimonides strongly recommends that a person should constantly work on himself not to feel and not to react to those things that normally would generate anger. In this way, he becomes a righteous individual by accepting personal attacks without responding at all. In addition, he should strive to react to suffering with joy. Nevertheless, the Torah clearly says that a person should not hate another person in his heart, to which the commentaries (such as Nachmanides) explain<sup>11</sup> that if a person feels wronged and angry, he and/or she should not harbor that anger and hate in one's heart, but rather confront the person (in a courteous manner), asking the offender to explain his or her behavior and letting the person know why one feels wronged. This will ultimately engender more love, peace and understanding, and remove anger (see forthcoming chapter, "Hatred in Judaism" for an expanded discussion of this issue). Thus, in this case, we see that – if done in a civil manner – it is good for a person to express his or her feelings of anger to the one who is the object of that anger, and it is beneficial not to deny or hold these feelings inside of oneself. The Torah, then, understands that it is sometimes better to express one's angry feelings, but not in an angry way, if the goal is to dissipate them. That is why the Mishna, in describing four types of people, says<sup>12</sup> that the best kind of person is someone who takes a very long time to become angry but dissipates that anger quickly (and the worst is the opposite – someone who is very easily angered but it takes a very long time to calm this person down and make him forget his anger). Thus, in Judaism, a person is judged by his or her reaction to anger and how he displays or does not display it, and not by the feeling itself.

How can a person learn not to display feelings of anger? Maimonides says regarding all life's values and behaviors that to reach a desired character trait and right a flawed value, one needs to go to the opposite extreme for a period of time.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, in this case, a person should practice ultimate patience in all parts of life, and not react to any situation that would normally make him or her angry. This will train the individual not to display anger each time an incident arises that would normally make the person angry.

Rabbi Ilai said<sup>14</sup> that the true feelings of a person are revealed in three situations: when a money transaction is involved, when he is full of liquor and when he is angry. Therefore, one should strive to avoid these situations completely, but if this is not possible, he should at least not be in such a situation when others are present. A later Jewish philosopher writes<sup>15</sup> that anger causes a person to "paint himself into a corner" and never admit a mistake or the truth when he or she is wrong, even later on after the anger subsides. Another Talmudic passage is the source of Maimonides' statement quoted above about becoming

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<sup>7</sup> Sukkah 52a

<sup>8</sup> Zohar 2:182a

<sup>9</sup> Sefer Chasidim 1126

<sup>10</sup> Maimonides, Hilchot Deot 2:3

<sup>11</sup> Leviticus 19:17 with Nachmanides commentary

<sup>12</sup> Mishna Avot 5:11

<sup>13</sup> Maimonides, Introduction to "Shmoneh Perakim, chapter 4

<sup>14</sup> Eiruvin 65b

<sup>15</sup> Orchof Tzaddikim, Shaar 12, "Ka-as"

righteous by not reacting to anger.<sup>16</sup> A person should try to teach himself not to respond whenever he or she is insulted or humiliated, and certainly never insult or humiliate anyone. In addition, an individual should work on himself or herself to accept all situations of suffering with joy. If a person can do this, God calls this person a true hero/courageous (see chapter about “Heroes”) and beloved to God. The Talmud echoes this idea<sup>17</sup> when it says that anger that leads to strife is like a hole made by a rush or water that keeps getting wider and wider, or like the planks of a wooden bridge that grow stronger and harder with each passing day. In order not to let a small argument and minor anger between two people seethe and get much worse, a person should train himself to ignore one hundred negative statements that bother him or put him down.

The classic Jewish work that explains how to build up Jewish character and values, Mesilat Yesharim, describes the different types of anger.<sup>18</sup> All are bad for a person, but some are worse than others. The worst is the anger described above, when the emotions and actions completely take over a person. There is another kind of angry person – not as extreme – who does not let everything bother him or her, but when something does, this individual explodes with anger. A lesser degree of anger is found in the person who can ignore almost everything, but when he or she does get angry, he reacts strongly in a small way rather than loudly and boisterously. However, on the other hand, he or she also keeps this feeling inside for a long time. The least anger is the case of a person who rarely gets angry, and when he or she does, he displays anger for only a minute and then lets it go. Even a teacher and a parent who have to punish a child (more about these specific cases below) should never do so out of anger. In short, all anger, however small, is negative. In summing up not only Rabbi Luzzato but all that has been written above, Rabbi Yeshaya HaLevi Horowitz (1558-1630) simply says that all anger is bad for a person and there is no evil in the world as bad as this particular character trait.<sup>19</sup>

### **ANGER IN THE BIBLE**

The very first man to man sin in the world was the act of murder caused by anger. Both Cain and Able brought sacrifices to God. When God favored Abel’s over Cain’s, Cain became very angry,<sup>20</sup> so much so, that he killed his brother. This set the pattern for anger and angry reactions until today. Therefore, we see from the very beginning of history how pernicious this character trait is. It causes man to say and do things that are irrational and that he may later be sorry for but cannot undo. The Midrash states<sup>21</sup> that it was the anger between people in the time of Noah that caused bitter fighting between them, which led to the ever-present stealing that sealed the fate of all mankind and resulted in God’s destruction of the world (except for Noah’s family). Thus sometimes, like in Noah’s time, anger which starts small can grow into something very big and dangerous, with unimaginable negative consequences.

Yet we see that God gets angry several times in the Torah when the Jewish people sin, abrogate their promises, or complain needlessly. When the Jewish people worship the Golden Calf, God is so angry that He threatens to destroy the people and build another Jewish people with Moses alone as their forebear.<sup>22</sup> Moses prays to God and argues logically that he should not destroy the people, and God relents. How are we to understand God’s anger? Can we say that God “lost it” and should not have gotten angry, as we said about man above? The truth of the matter is precisely the opposite: Since God does not have any real “emotions,” God is by definition all good, and since the purpose of the Torah (as well as the very meaning of the word) is to teach the Jewish people, we can learn from this incident that it is indeed sometimes legitimate to get angry, as long as it is a detached anger and not overly emotional. Thus, just like God, who is referred to as a parent of the Jewish people<sup>23</sup> and legitimately gets angry with the Jewish people, so too, a parent may get angry at certain times and in certain situations with his or her own child. When they disobey Him by

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<sup>16</sup> Gittin 36b

<sup>17</sup> Sanhedrin 7a

<sup>18</sup> Mesilat Yesharim, Chapter 11

<sup>19</sup> Shelah Hakadosh, Gate of Letter 200

<sup>20</sup> Genesis 4:5

<sup>21</sup> Midrash Beraishit Rabbah 31:2

<sup>22</sup> Exodus 32:7-11

<sup>23</sup> Deuteronomy 14:1, Blessing before Shema, morning prayers

worshipping a golden statue a mere forty days after hearing God at Mount Sinai and committing their allegiance to Him, it is indeed the proper place to be angry. Moses apparently learns the lesson. Moses, the father figure and leader of the Jewish people, does not react when God tells him that the people sinned, but simply prays to save them.<sup>24</sup> But after hearing and seeing God get angry, Moses imitates God and becomes angry with the people for their sin when he descends the mountain and sees the Golden Calf.<sup>25</sup> Almost every time Moses gets angry with the Jewish people, the Torah seems to justify this anger for, as a leader, his anger is due to the immoral actions of the people. However, one Midrash castigates Moses for becoming angry in a situation when it is inappropriate to do so.<sup>26</sup> (Another time, when Moses got angry by hitting the rock to get water, according to Maimonides, Moses is punished by being denied entrance into the Land of Israel.<sup>27</sup>)

In speaking about a future time in which God predicts that the Jewish people will abrogate the Covenant and sin again and again, God uses the verb for anger in different forms three separate times in reference to expelling the Jews from the Land of Israel as punishment for idol worship and other sins.<sup>28</sup> Yet there are times when a leader (parent or teacher) should not get angry with the people (or child). Nevertheless, it is appropriate in certain situations for a leader, a parent or a teacher to become angry (exactly when and how will be discussed below).

### **CAN ANGER BE POSITIVE AND GOOD?**

Normally, we assume that anger is one of a human being's negative emotions, like hatred, sadness, depression or anxiety. The brain usually reflects the gamut of these emotions, with brain activity for positive emotions heightened on the right side of the brain, while for negative emotions brain activity is heightened on the left side. But recent studies have shown an anomaly. Anger, which is supposed to be a negative emotion, engenders more activity on the right side of the brain than the left, indicating that it is a positive emotion.<sup>29</sup> How can this be? Can anger be a positive emotion? After all the negative comments and sources about the Jewish view of anger, can Judaism also find a positive side to anger as well? This discussion about anger as positive or negative, believe it or not, took place long ago in Talmudic times.

On Shabbat, a Jew does not commit a Torah violation (as opposed to a rabbinically forbidden edict) unless the action is a constructive one. Therefore, someone who destroys something simply to destroy it is NOT guilty of a Torah prohibition, because nothing positive results. But if he destroys in order to build upon it or there is any other positive purpose about this action, it IS a Torah violation of Shabbat. The Mishna says<sup>30</sup> that a person who tears clothes out of anger or because he or she is so upset at hearing news that a loved one died, he has not violated the Shabbat. Since there is no constructive purpose by getting angry in this manner, tearing clothes out of anger (a violent reaction) is NOT a Torah prohibition on Shabbat and is permitted. However, the Talmud<sup>31</sup> cites a contradictory statement that violence (tearing) as a result of anger on Shabbat IS a transgression of the Torah (i.e., because it IS a constructive action). This opinion states, then, that anger is a positive reaction. The Talmud resolves this contradiction by stating three different principles.

One aspect about anger is that getting angry and a resultant violent action is actually positive because it calms down a person's feelings. An opposing view about anger, noted above, is that anger leads to idol worship because an angry person loses control – just like in the ecstasy of idol worship, a person may also lose control. Finally, the Talmud says that if a husband intentionally feigns anger and LOOKS angry in order to teach his family an important moral lesson, then this is indeed a positive act. But it is not permitted (in this view) to actually get angry. Thus, two reasons are cited as positive outcomes of getting angry. Maimonides cites all of these views in his writings.

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<sup>24</sup> Exodus 32:7-11

<sup>25</sup> Exodus 19-20

<sup>26</sup> Berachot 63b

<sup>27</sup> Maimonides, Introduction to Shmoneh Perakim, chapter 4

<sup>28</sup> Deuteronomy 29:23-27

<sup>29</sup> Time Magazine, December 15, 2010, "The Bright Side of Anger – It Motivates Others"

<sup>30</sup> Mishna Shabbat 13:3

<sup>31</sup> Shabbat 105b

Maimonides cites all three possibilities, and then writes as his final ruling in Jewish law – as the final Halacha – that a violent reaction due to anger IS a positive act, since it calms one’s feelings of anger, and is thus blameworthy according to the Torah on Shabbat (according to the argument explained above).<sup>32</sup> Rashi, on that same Talmudic passage, argues with Maimonides and says that anger can never have a positive outcome because getting angry then becomes habitual and overcomes a person’s desire to control it and do good actions.<sup>33</sup> Thus, we have an argument both in the Talmud and between Rashi and Maimonides whether there can be any constructive outcome from getting angry.

Maimonides also cites the second reason from the Talmud, and rules that another positive outcome of getting angry is when it is feigned in order to teach a lesson to one’s family,<sup>34</sup> much like God’s getting angry at the Jewish people in the Torah (more about this will be discussed below). Thus, we indeed can have positive aspects of getting angry. But let us not forget that it was Maimonides who also wrote (right before and after these comments about positive feigned anger with the family) that anger is a horrible trait to have, and is so bad that it may even be the exception to his golden mean rule of finding the middle ground with every character trait.<sup>35</sup> He also writes that an angry person is like an idol worshipper, loses his wisdom, etc. Therefore, it is clear that overall Maimonides does not advocate getting angry. But, nevertheless, he does find some positive aspects in the act of getting angry.

The question arises of why would getting angry at one’s family be permitted, even if it is feigned. Isn’t it equivalent to teaching the family that it is “good” to sometimes get angry? One answer comes from the passage that says<sup>36</sup> that if a person can prevent his home (i.e., family) from doing a sin and does nothing about it, then he is as guilty as if he himself actually did that sin. Therefore, if the only way to prevent something immoral or illegal from taking place within one’s family is to “fake” anger, then it is permitted. This sin of not doing something to prevent others from sinning is so severe that the Talmud says this was the only time in history when God reversed a positive decree for certain righteous people when the angels pointed out that these righteous people could have prevented wicked people from sinning and they did nothing.<sup>37</sup> God agreed with the angels and changed the reward of these righteous people to incur punishment. (A negative Heavenly decree can be reversed if the people it is directed against repent.)

The Zohar cites another instance when it is proper and positive to get angry.<sup>38</sup> When Torah scholars and Rabbis get angry over secular or personal matters, the Zohar says it is totally improper. But when the anger is for the purpose of defending the honor of the Torah and Judaism if it is being mocked or violated, then that anger is proper and constructive. That is why both God and Moses demonstrated anger in the Torah – to teach us that in instances such as these, it is indeed proper to get angry – not to respond to a personal insult, but to defend the Torah and the principles of Judaism. Of course, this “leniency” only applies to Torah scholars, as other Jews might use this “loophole” to become angry in many situations where it is improper to do so.

Another positive aspect of getting angry comes from the Torah itself, from a source previously cited. It is far better and more positive to let the anger out rather than to harbor it inside and let it seethe and fester. Thus, a Jew is not permitted to hate a person in his heart,<sup>39</sup> but should confront the person in as nice and non-angry fashion as possible, as discussed above.

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<sup>32</sup> Maimonides, Hilchot Shabbat 8:8

<sup>33</sup> Rashi, commentary to Shabbat 105b

<sup>34</sup> Maimonides, Hilchot Deot 2:3

<sup>35</sup> Maimonides, Hilchot Deot 2:3

<sup>36</sup> Shabbat 54b

<sup>37</sup> Shabbat 55a

<sup>38</sup> Zohar 2:182a

<sup>39</sup> Leviticus 19:17

Finally, Maimonides, who was careful and exact in every word he wrote, does write that sometimes – if the issue is a very grave and large one – it is proper to get angry,<sup>40</sup> but only once in a while, so that this emotion never becomes habitual.

#### **ADDITIONAL REASONS NOT TO GET ANGRY**

Besides all the damage getting angry can do one's personality and relationships cited above, there are several more specific rationales why a person should do everything possible to avoid getting angry.

Even though in rare instances we saw that it is proper to get angry at one's family when they are doing wrong, repeated anger by either parent will alienate one's family and that person's end will be either actual hell or his family will make his life seem like hell.<sup>41</sup> Thus, another passage recommends<sup>42</sup> that a parent or spouse should never get offended, no matter how angry the comments or actions may make this person feel or want to react. The Talmud gives an example of an observant family that got so upset with a father who continually got angry and made them cringe in his presence<sup>43</sup> that they wanted to feed him sinful food – namely, meat cut off from a live animal. Orchot Tzaddikim says<sup>44</sup> a parent who gets angry often and causes his or her family acute fear is responsible if they react and do something foolish, sinful or immoral (like feeding him improper meat).

Another person who should especially avoid getting angry is a teacher. The Mishna already says<sup>45</sup> that an angry person cannot be an effective teacher. Elijah the prophet said<sup>46</sup> that the Torah could not properly be explained by a teacher who is angry and that he, Elijah, would never appear to such a person. Orchot Tzaddikim explains why this is so.<sup>47</sup> He says that students who are afraid that their teacher will get angry will stop themselves from asking important questions. In addition, an angry teacher does not have the patience to repeat and explain something or explain an idea in the depth that may be required. Students will also not argue with an angry teacher, even when it is proper within the subject matter. But the Talmud does say<sup>48</sup> that a student who learns to be quiet (and not answer back) when a teacher gets angry will merit understanding the greatest intricacies in Judaism in the fields of the laws of money matters, and life and death.

Another benefit of not becoming angry has affected all of Jewish history and Jewish law, when it was decided that in arguments between the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai, Jewish law follows the House of Hillel and not the House of Shammai. This is not because they had greater intellectual arguments, but rather because the House of Hillel never became angry.<sup>49</sup> They followed the teachings of their leader, Hillel, who never showed anger, even when pesky non-Jews made outrageous demands. When they confronted Shammai, he threw them out, but Hillel accepted them.<sup>50</sup> Netivot Olam explains the connection between anger and Jewish law:<sup>51</sup> He says that since Shammai and his followers were more hot-tempered than Hillel and his followers, Jewish law should follow only rabbis who can maintain an even keel in life and in judgment.

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<sup>40</sup> Maimonides Hilchot Deot 1:4

<sup>41</sup> Derech Eretz Zuta, Chapter 3

<sup>42</sup> Kallah Rabbati, Chapter 5

<sup>43</sup> Gittin 7a

<sup>44</sup> Orchot Tzaddikim, 12, “*Ka-as*”

<sup>45</sup> Mishna Avot 2:5

<sup>46</sup> Kallah Rabbati, Chapter 5

<sup>47</sup> Orchot Tzaddikim, 12, “*Ka-as*”

<sup>48</sup> Berachot 63b

<sup>49</sup> Eiruvin 13b

<sup>50</sup> Shabbat 31a

<sup>51</sup> Netivot Olam, “*Ka-as*,” Chapter 1

There are many other reasons why individuals should try to suppress their anger as much as possible. A person who does not get angry will sin significantly less than someone who is prone to anger.<sup>52</sup> There are three groups of people who God especially favors and loves<sup>53</sup> – those who never get angry, those who never get drunk and those who are modest and do not show off their talents. God also loves three other groups of people (whose traits are much more difficult for us to achieve today)<sup>54</sup> – those who are insulted (but do not respond in anger) and never do the insulting, those who are humiliated but do not humiliate, and those who accept suffering in joy, not anger. One of the three groups of people whose life is not a real “life” (i.e., not worth living) is the group that is characterized by anger.<sup>55</sup> Angry people can never truly better themselves<sup>56</sup> since other people will not try to tell them how to improve (out of fear of inciting anger). Even if an angry person is admonished for poor or immoral behavior, he or she will simply get angry and not accept the words of advice that are meant to help, not hurt. Similarly, Orchot Tzaddikim says<sup>57</sup> that an angry person will argue more with his or her acquaintances than other individuals, which will eventually bring jealousy and hatred. Finally, an angry person will never be liked by others because the uncontrolled anger is a serious impediment to the development of any relationship,<sup>58</sup> and even if the easily angered person is observant, full of Torah and good deeds, no one will want to learn from this person or imitate him or her.

### **THE TORAH SCHOLAR AND ANGER**

There is a special relationship between the Torah scholar and the character trait of anger. We saw above that it is proper for the Torah scholar to get angry to protect and defend the Torah, though never for a personal reason.<sup>59</sup> But there are many times when a Torah scholar should go out of his way not to get angry.

King Solomon informed us<sup>60</sup> that the words and reproof of a Torah scholar will be heard and internalized better if they are said sweetly, without any anger. Maimonides reiterates this as a matter of Jewish law,<sup>61</sup> and says that a Torah scholar should never scream like an animal when he speaks or even raise his voice because such behavior (as opposed to quiet, sweet words) will only distance his audience. The Talmud<sup>62</sup> has sympathy and understanding for the Torah scholar who gets angry because of the Torah he learned and gives over. The Torah is indeed like fire and can make someone emotional. Nevertheless, the Torah scholar should still train himself to transmit the fiery words of Torah in a non-angry and gentle manner.

The first Lubavitcher Rebbe went even further and said that at the moment of anger, the Torah scholar actually loses his belief in God since a believer could not of his own free will choose to get so angry.<sup>63</sup> The Midrash says that because of anger, Moses forgot Jewish law on three separate occasions.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, because an angry person will forget his wisdom, Orchot Tzaddikim says<sup>65</sup> that someone who is prone to anger will never attain the status of a Torah scholar in the first place. Rabbi Chaim Vital, the best student of the Ari Z”L, explains<sup>66</sup> that because anger causes a scholar to lose some of his learning, his rebbe-teacher, the Ari was extremely careful never to get angry. He explained that some sins affect different parts of the body, but anger affects every part of the body. Since one’s entire spirituality actually exists within the body, all the previous spiritual development that a scholar has achieved until then will be lost and has to be “rebooted.”

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<sup>52</sup> Berachot 29b

<sup>53</sup> Pesachim 113b

<sup>54</sup> Shabbat 88b

<sup>55</sup> Pesachim 113b

<sup>56</sup> Orchot Tzaddikim, 12, “*Ka-as*”

<sup>57</sup> Orchot Tzaddikim, 12, “*Ka-as*”

<sup>58</sup> Orchot Tzaddikim, 12, “*Ka-as*”

<sup>59</sup> Zohar, 2:182a

<sup>60</sup> Ecclesiastes 9:16

<sup>61</sup> Maimonides, Hilchot Deot 5:7

<sup>62</sup> Taanit 4a and Rashi commentary

<sup>63</sup> Tanya, Igrot HaKodesh, chapter 25

<sup>64</sup> Midrash Sifri, Matot 5, Vayikra Rabbah 13

<sup>65</sup> Orchot Tzaddikim, 12, “*Ka-as*”

<sup>66</sup> Rabbi Chaim Vital, Shaar HaRuach 8b

Thus, a Torah scholar who gets angry, even if he is pious in all other areas, will destroy all the spirituality he has achieved.

Another reason that a Torah scholar should not get angry and thereby sin comes from the Talmud.<sup>67</sup> If his anger causes people to speak about him in a negative way, and to become ashamed of him because of his anger, then these actions cause a *Chilul Hashem*-desecration of God's name and not a *Kiddush Hashem*-sanctification of God's name. And even when this person is permitted to reprove another person who is sinning, it should be done in a warm and loving manner, without anger.<sup>68</sup> Perhaps now we can understand the response of one of the greatest Talmudic scholars of the last two centuries, Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, who lived until the age of 102 (and died in 2012). When asked the reason for his longevity, he repeatedly said that "in his entire life, he never once got angry." Those who knew him well attested to the veracity of this statement.

### **THE UNIQUENESS OF THE TRAIT OF ANGER**

After defining, discussing and analyzing the trait of anger, we find something surprising and unique about this trait. When the Mishna describes the trait of anger,<sup>69</sup> it enumerates four types of people: those easily angered and slowly pacified (the worst), those easily angered and easily pacified, those slowly angered but slowly pacified and those slowly angered but easily pacified (the best). The last person is called a *Chasid*, someone who goes beyond what is required. (See chapter entitled "Is Goodness the Most Important Thing?" for an expansion of this theme). The highest trait, the one that goes beyond normal expectations, is a person who is slowly angered. But there is no fifth category, the person who never gets angry at all (like the one-in-a-million Rabbi Elyashiv). That is because Judaism and the Mishna understand that it is virtually impossible for a person never to get angry. How one expresses that anger is a different matter. (Perhaps that is what Rabbi Elyashiv meant – that he never responded to provocation by showing anger he felt inside.) Unlike other feelings or values, this emotion will inevitably be present within every person. Knowing this, it is the job of every Jew to work on this nasty trait that will be experienced at various times in his or her life, and try to sublimate it or use it for positive purposes. Perhaps that is why Maimonides listed anger as one of the very few traits in a human being where it is not proper to find the Golden Mean, a path in the middle, but rather to keep it to one extreme side<sup>70</sup> – i.e., try to eradicate it completely. He understood how every person feels this emotion and that each person has to work on himself or herself not to react to or act on this emotion. As Rabbi Horowitz referred to it, anger is the worst of all the character traits in man.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Yoma 86a

<sup>68</sup> Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 338

<sup>69</sup> Mishna Avot 5:11

<sup>70</sup> Maimonides, Hilchot Deot 2:3

<sup>71</sup> Shela Hakadosh, Gate 200