

**ANGER AND KABBALAH:
CONFRONTING DIVINE
AND HUMAN RAGE
THROUGH THE ZOHAR**

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**If you're not angry,
you're either a stone or you're too sick to be angry. ...**

You must not be bitter.

Bitterness is like cancer. It eats upon the host.

So use that anger. You write it. You paint it. You dance it.

You march it. You vote it.

You do everything about it. You talk it.

Never stop talking it.

Rambam – “Anger is a Very Evil Attribute”

➤ **Mishneh Torah, Hilkhhot De’ot 2:3**

הכעס מדה רעה היא עד למאד וראוי לאדם שיתרחק ממנה עד הקצה האחר וילמד עצמו שלא יכעוס ואפילו על דבר שראוי לכעוס עליו

Anger is a very evil attribute.

And it is fitting that a person distance himself from it all the way to the other extreme.

And he should teach himself not to get angry even over something about which it is fitting to be angry

אם רצה להטיל אימה על בניו ובני ביתו או על הציבור אם היה פרנס ורצה לכעוס עליהן כדי שיחזרו למוטב יראה עצמו בפניהם שהוא כועס כדי לייסרם ותהיה דעתו מיושבת בינו לבין עצמו כאדם שהוא מדמה כועס בשעת כעסו והוא אינו כועס

And if he wishes to instill fear into his children and the members of his household, or into the public if he was a community leader, and wishes to be angry with them so that they will return to the good: he should show himself to them as if he were angry in order to distress them. But his mind should be calm within himself – like a person who appears to be an angry person in his anger, but he himself is not angry.

➤ Rambam, Hilkhot Yesodei Ha-Torah: 1:11

וכיון שנתברר שאינו גוף וגוייה יתברר שלא יארע לו אחד ממאורעות הגופות... ולא כעס ולא שחוק ולא שמחה ולא עצבות

**Since it is clear that He is Incorporeal, it clearly follows that
none of the corporeal changes happen to Him
...no anger and no laughter, no joy and no sadness**

➤ Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 105b – anger and idolatry

קרע בגדיו בחמתו והמשבר כליו בחמתו... יהא בעיניך כעובד עבודה זרה.... אמר רבי אבין מאי קרא "לא יהיה בך אל זר ולא תשתחוה לאל נכר"? איזהו אל זר שיש בגופו של אדם? הוי אומר זה יצר הרע

**He who rends his garments in his anger,
he who breaks his vessels in his anger...:
regard him as one engaged
in alien worship [*avodah zarah*]! ...**

Rabbi Abin said: What verse [proves this]?

“There shall be no alien god [*El Zar*] in thee; neither shalt thou worship any foreign god [*El Nekhar*]” [Psalms 81:10].

Who is the alien god [*El Zar*] that resides in a man’s body?

Say: this is the Evil Inclination.

Anger and Character

➤ Babylonian Talmud, *Eruvin* 65b

אמר רבי אילעאי בשלשה דברים אדם ניכר בכוסו ובכיסו ובכעסו

“Rabbi Elai said: A person be recognized through three things: his cup, his pocket, and his anger [*koso, kiso, ka’aso*].”

Good Anger?

➤ Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit 4a

ואמר רבא האי צורבא מרבנן דרתח אורייתא הוא דקא מרתחא ליה
שנאמר הלוא כה דברי כאש נאם ה'

And Rava said: this young Torah scholar

[literally, one who burned by the rabbis]

who is angry

[literally, who is boiling],

it is the Torah that makes him angry

[literally, “makes him boil”],

as is said, “Is not my word like fire, says YHVH” (Jer. 23:29)

➤ Zohar I, 184a

אֵית רוּגְזָא וְאֵית רוּגְזָא.
אֵית רוּגְזָא דְאִיהוּ מְבָרְכָא מְעִילָא וּמְתַתָּא
וְאֵית רוּגְזָא דְאִיהִי אֲתֵלְטִיא לְעִילָא וְתַתָּא

there is anger

and

there is anger;

there is anger

that is blessed from above and below . . .

and *there is anger*

that is cursed above and below

Anger as Demonic Possession of the Divine Image

➤ Zohar: II:182a-b (Daniel Matt translation, slightly modified)

פָּד בָּרָא קוֹדֶשׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא לְבַר נֶשׁ, עֶבֶד לִיה בְּדִיוֹקְנָא עֲלָאָה,

וּנְפַח בֵּיה רוּחָא קְדִישָׁא,

When the blessed Holy One

created the human being,

He fashioned him

in the supernal image,

And infused him with the Holy Spirit

...וְאִי הֵיָא נְשַׁמְתָּא קְדִישָׁא אֶעִיל לָהּ בְּפֹלְחָנָא אַחֲרָא, הָאִי אִיהוּ מְסַאִיב לָהּ,
וְנִפִּיק מִפֹּלְחָנָא דְמַאֲרִיָּה.

**If one conducts that holy Soul into alien worship,
he defiles her
and abandons the worship
of his Lord....**

וְאִי חֲזִינָן לְהַאי בֵּר נָשׁ...בְּמַאי אֲתִידַע לְקַרְבָּא בֵּר נָשׁ בְּהֵדִיָּה, אִו לְאַתְמַנְעָא מִנִּיה...
בְּרוּגְזִיָּה מִמֶּשׁ, יָדַע לִיה בֵּר נָשׁ, וְיִשְׁתַּמּוּדַע מֵאֵן אִיהוּ.

**If we see a person, ...how can we determine
whether to approach him or avoid him? By
his anger he is really known, and recognized
for who he is.**

אי הִיָּא נִשְׁמַתָּא קַדִּישָׁא נָטַר בְּשַׁעְתָּא דְּרוּגְזוּי, דְּלֹא יַעֲקֹר לָהּ מֵאַתְרָהּ,
בְּגִין לְמִשְׁרֵי תַּחֲוֹתָהּ הֵהוּא אֵל זֶר,
דָּא אִיהוּ בַר נָשׁ כְּדָקָא יְאוּת. דָּא אִיהוּ עֲבָדָא דְּמֵאֲרִיָּה, דָּא אִיהוּ גְבַר שְׁלִיָּם:

If, in a moment of anger, he maintains that holy Soul

– not uprooting her from her place

so as to supplant her with that ‘*Alien God*’ [Psalms 81:10]

– this is a fitting human being,

this is a servant of his Lord,

this is a consummate man.

וְאִי הֵהוּא בֵּר נֶשׁ לֹא נָטִיר לָהּ, וְאִיהוּ עֶקֶר קְדוּשָׁה דָּא עֲלָא מֵאַתְרֵיהּ, לְמִשְׁרֵי בְּאַתְרֵיהּ סִטְרָא אַחֲרָא. וְדֹאֵי דָּא
אִיהוּ בֵּר נֶשׁ דְּמָרִיד בְּמֵאֲרִיָּה, וְאָסִיר לְקִרְבָּא בְּהֵדִיָּה וּלְאַתְחֻבְרָא עִמֶיהָ,

**And if that person does not maintain [the Soul] –
uprooting this supernal holiness from its place in
order to supplant it with the Other Side –
this is surely a person who rebels against his Lord,
and it is forbidden to approach him
or associate with him.**

וְדָא אִיהוּ (אִיב יח) טָרַף נַפְשׁוֹ בְּאַפּוֹ. אִיהוּ טָרִיף וְעָקַר נַפְשִׁיהּ, בְּגִין רוּגְזִיהּ, וְאַשְׁרֵי
בְּגִייהּ אֵל זָר.

**This one is called ‘*he who tears his soul in his
anger*’ (Job 18:4) –**

tearing and uprooting his soul

on account of his anger,

and enabling an ‘*Alien God*’

to dwell within him....

וּמֵאן דְּאִתְחַבְר עִמֵּיהּ, וּמֵאן דְּאִשְׁתַּעֵי בְּהִדְיָהּ, כְּמֵאן דְּאִתְחַבְר בַּע"ז מִמֶּשׁ. מֵאֵי טַעְמָא.

בְּגִין דַּע"ז מִמֶּשׁ שְׂאֵרֵי בְּגוּיָהּ

Whoever joins with him or

speaks with him is like one who joins himself to

alien worship [*avodah zarah*]. Why? Because alien

worship tangibly dwells within him. ...

....דַּעֲקֵר קְדוּשָׁה עֲלֵאָה מֵאַתְרֵיהָ, וְשָׂאֲרֵי בְּאַתְרֵיהָ.... אֵל זָר. מֵה אֵל זָר כְּתִיב בִּיה (וִיקְרָא יֵט) אֵל תִּפְנוּ אֵל

הָאֱלִילִים, כְּגֹוֹנָא דָּא, אָסִיר לְאַסְתְּכֵלָא בְּאַנְפּוּי:

**For he has uprooted supernal holiness from its place
and supplanted it with ... *an 'Alien God' [El Zar].***

As it is written of an 'Alien God':

'Do not turn to [*lit: do not face*] the idols' (Leviticus 19:4),

In the same manner:

It is forbidden to look at his face....

**וְאִי תִימָא הָא רוּגְזָא דְרַבָּנָן. רוּגְזָא דְרַבָּנָן טָב אִיהוּ לְכָל סִטְרִין, דְּהָא תַּנִּינָן דְּאוּרֵייתָא אֶשָּׁא אִיהִי ... רוּגְזָא דְרַבָּנָן
בְּמִלֵּי דְאוּרֵייתָא. רוּגְזָא דְרַבָּנָן לְמִיָּהֵב יְקָרָא לְאוּרֵייתָא ,....**

**And if you say: what about the “anger of the
rabbis,” which is thoroughly good?**

For we have learned that the Torah is a fire...

The “anger of the rabbis”

concerns matters of Torah

and seeks to give honor to the Torah....

אָבֵל אִי בְּמִלִּין אַחֲרָנִין, לָאוּ פּוֹלְחָנָא דְקוּדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא הָאִי, בְּגִין דְּבְכָל חַטָּאִים דְּקָא עֲבִיד בַּר נֶשׁ, לָאוּ אִיהוּ.

עכו"ם ממש פהאי

**But in all other things,
anger is not for the service of the blessed Holy One,
for of all sins that a person might do,
none is more like idolatry than anger.**