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ANGER IN THE RABBINIC LITERATURE

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INTRODUCTION

The topic of this study is human and divine anger as understood by the rabbis. The rabbis are observers of human behavior. In their world, as in our own, people become angry. Their discussions are almost exclusively found in Talmudic aggadah and in midrash. There is no mention of anger in halacha,¹ since anger is not the sort of behavior which can be legislated. By its very nature it is uncontrolled and impulsive. With the rarest exceptions, anger is seen as a negative character trait, which people should avoid. Anger's results are always negative.²

According to the rabbis, God too becomes angry. The rabbis inherited this tradition from the Bible, and it fits in with their own theological view. In the Bible, there are many instances of God becoming angry. Theologically, the rabbis understand reality as being governed by a God who usually acts mercifully and kindly, but can sometimes explode into anger. So contained within this thesis is much more than a simple study of anger. Within the context of human anger, the rabbis discuss human nature, human interaction, and Jewish religious duty. Within the context of divine anger, the rabbis discuss the nature of God, reality and divine justice.

This study turned out to be more than I had expected. I had not originally chosen to do a study on anger per se. I had

intended to study the character of Moses, as portrayed in the aggadah. I was interested in the times when Moses seemed to lose his self control. In the Torah, Moses is human with the full array of emotions. Yet Moses tended to be idealized in the rabbinic literature. I was interested to see how the rabbis explained Moses' behavior when he seemingly lost his self control. Three instances immediately came to mind: when Moses beat the taskmasters to death; when he shattered the Tablets of the Law; and when he struck the rock at the waters of Meribah. I had originally intended to track Moses through the chapter-verse indices to the aggadic literature with the hope that I would arrive at a better understanding of Moses' violent and impulsive nature. I hoped to see the way in which the rabbis reconciled their idealization of Moses with his human character.

I chose to first study the beating of the taskmaster. But my eagerness quickly turned to panic. I was not finding anything. In the many days I spent in the library, I had found perhaps one aggadic tradition which I could use. I turned to the striking of the rock, and nothing of any significance was forthcoming. Instead, I found references to Moses' anger with regard to the pikudei chayyil (Numbers 31:14) and to Aaron not performing the sin offering (Leviticus 10:16)--issues that I had thought were rather insignificant, especially since Moses did not do anything out of anger.

Upon consulting with my advisor, I soon realized that the rabbis are quite literal when it comes to expounding the

Hebrew text. With the pikudei chayyil and the sin offering, the Biblical texts mention the fact that Moses became angry, even though he did not do anything to express his feelings. But with the beating of the taskmaster and the striking of the rock there was no mention of anger in connection with Moses' seemingly violent behavior in the Torah text. I had imputed anger to Moses because of his behavior, which seemed angry to me. The rabbis, on the other hand, did not see anger in Moses' violent behavior. I now assume that they assumed that if God wanted us to think that Moses was angry, He would have inserted a term for anger into the Torah text itself.³ Since there is no mention of Moses' anger, the rabbis did not read anger back into their text. They had inherited holy scripture which they assumed was the word of God, and they were literal in their interpretation. My original goal, to study the rabbinic perceptions of Moses' angry behavior was my own agenda. But apparently it was not the priority of the rabbis. I realized that if I desired to study anger, I would have to study it in its totality, and not in connection with a Biblical character. It has proved to be an immensely interesting and satisfying topic for me.

I have approached my topic with a clear synchronic bias. I was more interested in achieving an understanding of the rabbinic perceptions of anger than tracing the historical development of major themes. Not that a diachronic approach is without value, but I felt it more beneficial for me to get an overall view of anger in its many forms. The synchronic approach does imply some working assumptions which are probably

not true. I have lumped together approximately one thousand years of material as seen through the eyes of Jews primarily in Israel and Babylonia--but also influenced by Roman rule and Hellenism, Gnosticism, Christianity and Islam. There must of course be a chronological development within rabbinic theology, but that can be the concern of a different paper. The emphasis of this thesis is to gain an overall understanding of anger.

I used the citations found in Gross's Otsar HaAggadah to find the material for my study. I realize that this is not in and of itself an exhaustive index of the aggadic material on anger. But I did find that in Gross's four pages of citations on ka'as, there was quite enough to keep me occupied and to give me a full and mostly complete picture of the rabbis' thinking. Were I to expand this study, I would check cross-references and chapter-verse indices more completely, including references to anger in the mystical compilations, which are not included in this work.

As was mentioned above, the rabbis inherited a Biblical tradition of people and God becoming angry. The rabbis often used prooftexts from the Torah, the Latter Prophets, and Psalms. To a lesser extent they drew from the Former Prophets, the Five Megillot, and Proverbs. In the Bible, the major terms are af, charon af, ketsef, and cheima. Ka'as, za'af, za'am and 'evra are used less frequently. Biblically, af is the major term, and often appears in conjunction with the root אָפַק, אָפַק, אָפַק, having something to do with burning. Perhaps it means one's

nose flaring up, which is a physiological indication of anger. Charon af refers only to God's anger, and never to human anger. Cheima is also a heat related term. In English, we also refer to anger as flaring or burning within.

Za'af and za'am are storm related terms. In English we also refer to rage or fury to describe our stormy weather. Ketsef probably means to snap. One might snap a stick, and that same phenomenon happens when a person loses his self-control and becomes angry. 'Evra means to spill over or pour over, like "overflowing wrath". Ka'as means to vex or to annoy severely, and is most often found in the hif'il, the causative verbal construct. In the Bible, the nuances in these different terms for anger are sometimes present, and sometimes they are not. Sometimes the preference for one Biblical term is apparent, but other times there seems to be no reason why one term appears instead of another.⁴

In the rabbinic literature, the nuances found in the Biblical text are almost entirely lost. In my research, I have found 18 terms for anger: און, און, און, און, און, און, און, און, און, און, און, און, און, און, און, און, און, און. Six of the terms (און, און, און, און, און, און) do not appear at all in the Bible. But most significant is the rabbinic use of ka'as, which had become the major term for anger. In the Bible, ka'as appeared only 12% of the times when anger was used. But it is used overwhelmingly in the rabbinic literature. The other terms which appear in the Bible are used primarily in prooftexts. Sometimes the term in the prooftext is retained throughout the aggadah, and sometimes it appears only in the prooftext, and not in the aggadah itself.

A word should be said about the use of Biblical characters in the aggadah. For the rabbis, the Biblical characters are human beings. They are not gods or heroes in the Greek tradition. Sometimes they are presented as legendary in stature, but they are still human. The rabbis use Biblical characters to illustrate human strengths and weaknesses, to teach proper behavior through positive and negative example. With some of the major characters, particularly Moses, there is an ambivalence in the rabbis' presentation. Most of the time they are presented in a positive light, but sometimes they are shown to be weak and undeserving. Essentially, the rabbis treat the Biblical characters in much the same way that they treat other legendary characters from the rabbinic tradition, (i.e. Hillel, Rabbi Yochanan, Honi HaMa'agel, etc). They are meant to serve as human examples for human beings to teach proper human behavior.

Throughout the thesis, I have referred to God in masculine terms. In this introduction, I want to note that in no way do I consider God solely to be masculine in nature. I see God as transcending gender, but I felt that for two reasons I could not avoid addressing God in masculine terms. First, our English language is limited because it does not have a personal neuter. I feel uncomfortable thinking of a personal God in "it" terms. Second, the rabbis use masculine language to address God. In studying their literature, I could not avoid masculine terms and accurately convey their thought.

This thesis is divided into two main divisions, dealing separately with human and divine anger. I have attempted to maintain a symmetrical structure throughout the thesis. The reader may find the notes for each chapter at the end of the chapter.

NOTES

1. The one possible exception which comes to mind is T.B. Shabbat 105a, about one who has rent his clothes in anger while in mourning. There is a lengthy discussion about whether or not that rending fulfills the halacha. But it should be noted that the discussion quickly turns to aggadah.
2. The only exception to this is when a term for anger is used, but anger is not meant. Sometimes anger is used as a synonym for discipline. And for God, anger is sometimes a synonym for just punishment. These are exceptions though, and will be discussed in detail in the body of the paper.
3. . Throughout the rabbinic literature, the rabbis very rarely impute anger to a Biblical character or to God when a term for anger does not appear in a proof-text. One example of this rare usage is in T.B. Berachot 54b, where Rabbi Yochanan calls God angry when He destroys Sodom and Gemorrah, but no term appears in the Genesis text.
4. The same is true in English. We also have many terms for anger. A person can be enraged, in a fury, "teed off", or annoyed. He can snap, go off the deep end, blow up, or burn within. His anger can pour out, explode, thunder, or flare, etc. Sometimes we pick our terms judiciously, and sometimes one term is used instead of another for no apparent reason. See the Appendix.

CHAPTER I--THE NATURE OF HUMAN ANGER

The rabbis understood that when human beings become angry, they undergo physiological changes. There is a cause and effect relationship between the physical body and the emotions. The rabbis believed that the liver was the bodily organ that controlled anger, and to allay anger, it would produce a drop of gall.¹ Anger was also thought to have the physiological effect of shrinking the stomach by as much as a third. "Elijah said to R. Natan: 'Eat a third, drink a third, and leave a third so that when you become angry, you will withstand your being full.'"²

Anger was thought to be both a cause and a result of increased human strength. An angry person could perform acts of strength that he could not otherwise do were he to remain calm. Judah is a Biblical character associated with physical prowess, and the rabbis attribute an angry disposition to his character. When Judah became angry with Joseph in Pharaoh's palace, the hair on his chest pierced through his garments,⁴ and blood flowed from his eyes.⁵ Judah roared so loud that his voice was heard 400 parsah away (about 1600 miles).⁶ When Joseph was confronted with this awesome display of Judah's strength, he in turn kicked down a stone pillar and crushed it with his feet.⁷ Anger also gave Judah the ability to chew metal and grind it with his teeth into a fine powder. In one version of the story, Judah chewed on iron bars,⁸ while in another version he would carry around a purse of copper beans, which he would chew in order to increase his anger

and subsequently his strength.⁹ It must be noted that these stories told by the rabbis are hyperbolic, but they do reflect the rabbinic perception of anger: that it causes an increase in human strength and destructive power.

Emotionally, human anger is associated with passion and an intensity of feeling. It is therefore an unpredictable and an uncontrollable aspect of the human personality. The Hebrew word kin'ah (קִנְיָה) is often associated with anger. In a discussion about one who commits adultery with the wife of a chaver, it is written that he "sends discord among brothers." (Proverbs 6:16)

ה' " וּמַעֲלֵת מִחֲנֻיִּים בֵּין אֲחֵימִי אֵשׁ בָּאֵן הוּא אֱוִימִי " וְיַעֲרֵב
 עַל־יָדָיו קִנְיָה (מל"א 5:14) שְׂדֵהוּ כְּעֵס עַל הַנֶּאֱמָר וְעַל אֲרִי
 וְאֵין קִנְיָה אֵל עֲשׂוֹן כֵּס, כִּמְחֵר שֶׁאֵת אֱוִימִי : הֵם יִקְנְאוּ הֵם
 אֵל, כְּעֵסוֹ הַיְהוָה הֵם (עז' 23:20) וְאֵת " כִּי קִנְיָה חֲמֵת
 עֲנִי, וְעַל־חֲמֹל הַיּוֹם גִּקְוֶה " (מל"א 6:34) ¹⁰

So linguistically, jealousy and impassioned feeling (both of which are expressed in the word kin'ah) are important aspects of the emotional side of anger. They are not distinct from anger, but integral parts of the same sense of heightened emotion and unpredictability. This is also made evident in the following statement, which shows a parallelism between cheima and kin'ah.

הֵם עֲנִי חֲמֵת, כְּעֵסוֹ הַיְהוָה, אֵל קִנְיָה
 כְּעֵסוֹ הַיְהוָה... הֵם וְעַל קִנְיָה כְּעֵסוֹ הַיְהוָה, אֵל קִנְיָה
 כְּעֵסוֹ הַיְהוָה ¹¹

The term mitkan'in b'af¹² also appears, and is a fusion of the two terms kin'ah and af. This seems to mean heightened emotion and animosity, but there is not enough information to determine

precisely if mitkaneh b'af has any subtle nuance in meaning, or whether it is simply another way to express anger.

The rabbis understood that fear was another side of anger. When confronted with an angry person, one tends to be afraid. And when one is afraid, one might in turn exhibit that fear in angry behavior. Referring to the Judah and Joseph story mentioned above, both Judah and Joseph were filled with evrah when they encountered each other. They were each astonished (vayitmahu), frightened (nivhalu) and excited (nechpazu). The brothers were unable to answer Joseph, because they were frightened (nivhalu) of him, and trembling (ra'adah) seized them.¹³ It is clear in this passage that 'evrah, a term for anger, also connotes fear and excitement. These too seem to be aspects of human anger. Heightened emotion--passion, jealousy and fear, are all considered by the rabbis to be components of human anger.

The rabbis consider the issue of who generally feels the brunt of anger. They arrive at no consensus. One aggada about Moses' being angry at the pikudei chail (Nu. 31:14) teaches that "the offense rests only upon the important people."¹⁴ This would seem to indicate that it is generally not worth one's while to expend anger on an unimportant person, since they cannot do anything of any great significance which should warrant somebody to be angry with them. But in the Yalkut Shimoni, the opposite viewpoint is expressed. "'And the people quarreled with Moses.' They transgressed the normal rules of derech eretz. A person who is angry within his house only directs his

anger (noten einav) at the unimportant ones, but these people (Israel) directed their anger at the important one (Moses)."¹⁵ So according to this aggadah, the normal rule of behavior is to be angry at the insignificant people, and not at the important people. As it appears, there is no clear consensus whether anger should be vented on the important or the unimportant people.

In nearly all cases ¹⁶, the rabbis view anger as a negative force and an undesirable character trait. The rabbis stress the importance of self-control, balance and maintaining an even temper. They believe that anger leads to excess and sin, and if it cannot be controlled, it can be dangerous. There are four formulaic aphorisms preserved in the Babylonian Talmud which stress the importance of emotional moderation and an even temper:

- (1) א"ר אילעם, האלמא דנהר'ס אקם נ'כר: הכוס, גכיס, וגכס, ואמר' ע"ה אף השחקו!"
- (2) שלמה הקד"ה אזהרין: מי קאנו טעם, מי קאנו מתכר, מי קאנו מצחק ע"ה מקות'ו.
- (3) שלמה ח"ה איהם חיים: הרחמים, הרחמים ואני קדתי.
- (4) אמרנה יהודה את רב: ומבין ארבעים ושתים אותיות אין מוסרין אל א' ע"ה קלע וצני וצוחק נחב' יחיו ואינו מתכר ואינו מצחק ע"ה מקות'ו.

In analysing these formulae, one can see that the rabbinic view of the ideal personality type is one who can control his own life. The ideal person is not controlled by other people (harachmanim) or by outside influences such as alcohol or money. The ideal person is in charge of his own behavior and does not let the negative factors within his personality

(aninei hada'at, sachako) overcome him. He is flexible and does not demand everything to which he might be entitled (lo ma'amid al middotav), and he remains modest and humble (tsanu'a va'anav). Anger too is a part of all these categories. The ideal person should be able to control his anger and not let it overcome him.

In Chapter 5 of Pirkei Avot, the rabbis discuss their ideal personality type. Utilizing the same formula throughout the chapter, they discuss anger.

There are four types of temperments:

1. Easy to anger and easy to pacify--his reward is made null by his loss.
2. Difficult to anger and difficult to pacify--his loss is made null by his reward.
3. Difficult to anger and easy to pacify--he is chasid.²¹
4. Easy to anger and difficult to pacify--he is wicked.

Again, anger is seen by the rabbis as an undesirable character trait. Laudatory behavior means not becoming angry, which the rabbis understand as being difficult.

It is interesting to note however, that in the above aggada, there is no mention of the possibility of removing anger from one's personality. It is part of human nature, which can erupt at any time. In an idealized personality anger remains suppressed. But contrary to this apparent acceptance of the presence of the possibility of anger in all people, Rabina discusses how a talmid chacham must train his soul to be gentle, as it says, "Remove anger from your heart" (Ecc 11:10).²²

There seems to be no statement as to whether or not a person is able to totally remove anger from his personality, or whether there are always vestiges of anger in every human being.

But most of all, the rabbinic literature teaches that people should be taught to repress their angry instincts to keep them from harming others. "Moses would guard himself throughout the forty years not to become angry (lo l'hakpid) at them (Israel), because he feared the oaths that the Holy-One-Blessed-Be-He swore: 'Surely there shall not be one person among this evil generation which will see the Land'" (Dt. 1:35).²³ When someone becomes angry, their anger can have terrible consequences.

There are two aggadot which illustrate instances of repressed human anger. In both stories, the repression of anger is considered laudatory. One of the aggadot is the popular story about Hillel, about whom it is written:

ת"ר עשרים יהא אדם ענוותן כהנא ודא יהא קצין כחא²⁴

Two men have bet 400 zuz. One said that Hillel could not be made angry, while the other bet that he could cause Hillel to become enraged. On Erev Shabbat, Hillel was preparing himself when the man who bet that he could cause Hillel to be angry walked up and down the street shouting out loud, "Where is Hillel?" Hillel came outside. The fellow asked him if he could ask a question. Hillel told him to ask. The man asked why Babylonians have round heads. Hillel, who was a Babylonian, answered him patiently, and then went inside. The man repeated the same procedure twice, asking Hillel annoying questions. But each time Hillel answered patiently. Finally the man gave up. The story ends with the following:

כדי הלא הנא אבא בק ער יר' ז' מאת' 515 וק' מאת' 515 והנא
ל' הק' 31²⁵

Another, lesser known aggadah is about King David, who wanted to build the Temple, but was denied permission by God. Here too is an illustrative example of repressed anger.

There is no generation without its scoffers (leitsanim). What was the licentiousness of that generation? They would go by David's windows and say to him: "David, when will the Beit Mikdash be built. When shall we go to the House of the Lord?" But he would say, "Even though they intend to make me angry, may it be so that I rejoice in my heart! I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.'" (Ps. 120). So it will be when you have completed your days (2 Sam. 7).²⁶

Moses, Hillel and David were praised when they were able to repress the anger they might have felt. They are being used in the aggadot as models of righteous and praiseworthy behavior. For the rabbis, it is important that human beings not become angry, that they stay on an even keel and maintain a calm disposition.

NOTES

1. T.B. Berachot 61b--It is interesting to note that in English gall is associated with bitterness and rancor.
2. T.B. Gittin 70a
3. Genesis Rabbah 93:6, 93:7, Tanchuman Vayigash 3
4. Genesis Rabbah 93:7
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., 93:6
8. Tanchumah Vayigash 3
9. Numbers Rabbah 9:11
10. Genesis Rabbah 49:8
11. T.B. Ta'anit 8a
12. Genesis Rabbah 93:2
13. Sifrei Katot 147
14. Yalkut Shimoni B'shelach 262
15. The few instances of anger as a positive force will be discussed later.
16. T.B. Eruvin 65b
17. T.B. Pesachim 113b
18. Ibid.
19. T.B. Kiddushin 71a
20. Pirkei Avot 5:11
21. T.B. Ta'anit
22. Numbers Rabbah 19:9
23. T.B. Shabbat 30b
24. Ibid., 31a
25. T.J. Berachot 2:1

CHAPTER II--CAUSES OF HUMAN ANGER

There are many factors in the course of life which tend to precipitate human anger. As the rabbis see anger as an undesirable character trait, so too do they warn against those things which cause people to become angry. In analysing their statements, the student of rabbinic literature must be careful to distinguish between an accurate statement of the rabbinic world view, and those statements which could be considered pietistic warnings of attempts to sermonize against anger. The rabbis feel free to use hyperbole in their sermons to further emphasize the evils of anger. As might well be expected, the rabbis see a close connection between anger and the yetser hara, the evil inclination. The yetser hara can be the topic of a serious study in and of itself. In part it is the inclination inherent in all human beings for worldly desire. It prods the human being to produce, to acquire, and to strive for personal gain and benefit. But precisely because the yetser hara is so powerful, the rabbis warn against it. The yetser hara is one force which leads people to sin and to rebellious acts against God and His Torah. It is therefore, a predominantly negative force in human life, and is even associated with Satan and the Angel of Death.¹

Anger is aligned with the evil inclination, since both anger and the yetser hara can lead one to sin and rebellious acts. Apparently, anger can be indistinguishable at times from the yetser hara. In a discussion about God's greatness, the Talmud quotes: "This is the greatness of His greatness,

that He conquers His (evil) inclination, and gives erech apaim to the wicked." But in the Talmudic text, a note appears next to "yitsro" saying, "That is to say ka'aso, which appears in an alternate version."² Although both yitsro and ka'aso make sense in this passage, ka'aso seems to be the logical preference, since it is in direct opposition to erech apaim. But what is significant for this study is the close thematic link in the rabbinic literature between the evil inclination and anger.

Anger is seen as the handiwork of the yetser hara. Anger and the yetser hara together might lead someone to commit acts of idolatry, a most serious offense.

והתנא ר"ס הן אלעזר מן ח'לפא הן אבנא שאמר מן ר' יוחנן הן נזיר' המקדש בקד'ו התחלתו והחשתי כל'ו התחלתו והחשתי מצותיו התחלתו יוא בעיניך כעובד צדוקה צדוקה. שכן אומרתם של יצ"ה. ה' יום אומר לו עשה כק ולמחר אומר לו עשה כק עז לאמר לו עובד ע"ז, והלך ועזב. א"ר אבהו חס' הרואה "לא יהי הק אלא צד ולא תשתקוה לאם נכח. איצטו אלא צד י"ע המוכרם של אדם ה' אומר צד יצ"ה הרע.³

Like anger, the yetser hara is a force within which must be repressed. Anger in human beings can be the sign of an active yetser hara.

When discussing how to handle the yetser hara, the rabbis employ terms for anger.

עזולם ינב' אדם יצ"ה טוב על יצ"ה הרע, שנאמר: (דברים י"ג) ואל תחטאו. אם נכחו מוטב ואם לאו, יצטוק יתורה, שנאמר, "אמר המהבם (דברים י"ג: 4-5)"
 "... ועבד חסדי מאדוני" (דברים י"ג: 4-5) זה הוא עזולם יצ"ה
 מביט את יצ"ה, מצי' יצ"ה עזולם, שנאמר "עבד חסדי מאדוני".⁵

The use of yargiz and machis are significant here, because these passages seem to view the human being as a divided self. The way to spiritual well being is not to integrate the self, a tenet of modern psychology, but rather to subdue and repress the evil urges within. The use of terms for anger in the battle to subdue the yetser hara might indicate that anger can be seen as an active process, and not simply an emotional state of being. This is one of the few places where the process of human anger is seen as productive and beneficial to an individual's well being.

As was shown earlier, drunkenness was a phenomenon closely associated with anger.⁶ When a person is either drunk or angry, or both, he might do things that he would later regret when he became sober or even-tempered. But the rabbis also realize that alcohol can exacerbate anger, or even be the cause of it. In a playful aggadah about King Ahashuerus and Queen Vashti, the Queen taunted the King saying: "'You are my father's steward! For my father could drink a thousand chamra of wine and not get drunk, and this man (the King) becomes insane with wine immediately!' Immediately his anger burned within him." The King then wanted to put Vashti to death, but his advisors convinced him to wait until the following day.⁷ This way the King would have time to sober up and calm down. The rabbis are clearly warning people against acting impulsively when they are drunk or angry, since in both instances one might well do something that he would later regret.

Idolatry is a cause of human anger. When a righteous person sees idolatrous acts, he becomes angry. Referring to the Golden Calf incident, the rabbis teach us about Moses. "When Moses saw the good gift that they (Israel) possessed, and how they lost it, he too became angry with them. Why did he become angry?⁷ R. Yochanan said: One excommunicated by a rav is excommunicated by his student."⁸ This aggadah can be understood as a mashal. God is the rav, and the righteous are His students. So when they see idolatry, the God-fearing become angry, **just** as God, their teacher, has become angry.

The study of Torah and Jewish scholarship can also cause one to become excited. In one aggadah, a student of Torah becomes רַחֵן over his studies.⁹ In this case, ratach probably does not mean anger in the same way that it usually does. It would seem from the context that ratach here would mean agitated or excited, and not anger per se, since there is no mention of acting angrily or any interpersonal interaction at all. But as we saw with kinah there is a close connection between anger and emotional arousal. In another aggadah, two scholars in the same city who do not get along do bring anger into the world. Here scholarship can lead to personal enmity, which has negative results.¹⁰

Surprisingly, wisdom (חכמה) is considered a source of anger. The impetus for this idea is found in Ecclesiastes 1:18--Ki b'rov hochma, rov ka'as, v'yosif da'at, yosif machov.¹¹

The first part of the aggadah is an elaboration of the prooftext. כ' הרב חכמה דה בעס. כל שחן שאדם חכמה חכמה בעס וכל שחן שאדם חכמה נקדח, חכמה גיסורין. אחר שלמי, ע"י שחכמה חכמה חכמה בעס. וז"ל קורא חכמה נקדח חכמה גיסורין. דה אחר תלמוד אין צריך תבאג.

It is difficult to determine from this text whether one with chochma receives anger from either God or other human beings because of his wisdom; or whether chochma by itself accompanies anger, so that the wise person is by definition either an angry person, or more prone to anger.

The text then continues with three allegorical examples which allude to the opening of the midrash.

א"ל שמואל הר נחמן: כלי פשתן וזקן הגאון מה' יאן, איס נעכחמו אחז
 מהן הכחז דמין הוא ע"י. כלי פשתן דגסין דגאון מארעא איס פחמו אחז
 מהן מה בן ומה דמין? לא מה' ד? עשית פנכנסו עתות אחז איס פת קינז
 וק' לית, ואחז איס פת נק"י ומה שחן ומה י"ן יסן ומה' איס פת ויזא
 חושב. דין איס קליעין ואית נזק, וז'ן איס מ'עין חושן ואית נזק. כך באין
 מ'חזק חמוס עזית עזיו, גמל עזית עזיו? אלא איסן היסורין חזו"ן?
 גמל' אדם.

תנ' ר' יוחנן: עכוס גמלא שחנא.
 תנ' גמל ר' מאיר: עכ' שחנא חכמתו של נחש יוטר, כך הית
 מ'חזק עכ' חכמתו, שחנא, "והנחש הית עכוס מ'חזק חית קשקש.
 עכ' כך הוא ארור מ'חזק חכמתו ומה' חית קשקש.

From these illustrative examples, the midrash seems to be saying that the more precious, more delicate and valuable something might be, the more it is prone to damage, and the more its loss will be felt. So it is with the wise person who must suffer a world often overrun with stupidity. But *this* might also be a sermon which the rabbis are preaching concerning suffering: the suffering of the righteous in a wicked world, or perhaps the suffering of Jews in a Gentile world.

As the Jews or the righteous are most precious, so too is their suffering the most painful.

The rabbis see boastfulness as a cause of anger. The haughty person can bring anger into the world as R. Eliezer said, "Kol adam sheyesh bo chanufah mevi af l'olam."¹²

Insubordination can also cause anger. In a continuation of the commentary on the baraita in Shabbat 105b (see page 16), the Talmud cites four examples of Rabbis who expressed their anger at their servants, "d'ka aved l'mirma emta a'inshei beteh" Rabbi Yehudah snapped the thrums of his garments. R. Aha b. Ya'akov broke vessels which were already broken. R. Sheshet threw brine on his maidservants head. R. Aha broke a lid to a pot.¹³

In Rabbinic times, as well as our own day, family members could be a cause for anger. The rabbis recognized this too. For parents, children can be a source of anger.¹⁴ Ka'as banim is a distinct variety of anger which will be discussed in a later chapter. It is significant that there is no mention of ka'as horim, anger that children might have towards their parents. A wife can also cause anger to be present in her house. A woman who causes her husband to be so angry that he will consequently divorce her must wait a minimum of three months to remarry.¹⁵ Again, it should be noted that there is only one instance in the rabbinic literature of a wife exhibiting anger at her husband. The thrust of the tradition is that men become angry at women.¹⁶ Also siblings can be angry at each other. The rabbis use Jacob and Esau as an example of bitterness between brothers.¹⁷

A chaver, probably meaning a fellow citizen and not a friend in this context, can cause another chaver to be angry.¹⁸ Rabbis can often get angry at their students, which is their prerogative. This, of course, would cause students to exert care in the presence of their teachers.¹⁹ Anger might even be a pedagogical method. Bar Kapparah was teaching two students. He had with him a cabbage, plums and chicken. The first student **was** asked to make a blessing, which he did over the chicken. The second student laughed at this obvious mistake. Bar Kapparah first became angry with the second student for laughing, and then he became angry with the first student for making the mistake.²⁰

The rabbis became angry with each other in their academic settings. Some accounts of rabbinic ire have been preserved in the Talmud. A story is told about Rabbi Yochanan and his student Rabbi Eliezer, who had come from Babylonia. Rabbi Yochanan was angry with Rabbi Eliezer because Eliezer had not greeted him, and because he had quoted Yochanan without attributing his name to the shama'ta. It was explained to Yochanan that it was not the Babylonian custom for a student to hail his teacher. But Yochanan remained angry about Eliezer's second offense. Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi came in and told them about a story of two rabbis who fought so that they ripped a Torah scroll in their anger. The synagogue where the Torah was ripped was called a "synagogue of idolatry" (note the connection between idolatry and cheima). But Yochanan was not appeased by this.

Later, Rabbi Ya'akov b. Idi came by and told Yochanan that in the same way that Joshua would sit and expound the Torah, and everyone knew that Joshua's torah was in reality Moses' torah, so it is with Eliezer. Everyone knows that Eliezer's torah has originated with Yochanan. Then Yochanan said to all who were there, "Why is it that none of you know how to appease like bar Idi?" So not quoting one's teacher or making the proper attribution to an halachic tradition can be a serious cause for anger.²¹

Hillel and Shammai were arguing the Halachic issue of whether grapes or olives processed in a tamei vat are kosher. Shammai claimed that the vat is kosher for grapes but not for olives. "Hillel said to Shammai: Why is it kosher for olives, and not for grapes? Shammai replied, "If you get me angry (taknitani) I will decree that the olives also are not kosher! The Rabbi (Hillel) was detained in the beit midrash, and they said: "Those who will enter, let them come in. Those who want to leave shall not leave." On that day, Hillel was humbled and sat before Shammai as one of the students-- and it was as difficult a day for Israel as the day they erected the Golden Calf."²²

Another similar type of incident is told about R. Yehudah after R. Meir's death. R. Yehudah told his students not to permit R. Meir's students to enter into the beit midrash, "mipnei shekanternin v'lo lilmod hen ba'in ela l'kapchani b'halachot hen ba'in." Symmachus pushed his way in and argued with R. Yehudah.

נאם ר' יהודה ואמר עהין: לא בך יאמרת לכבד אלא יכבדו תלמידי נבי'
 מאן עבאן מרבי שקנתנאן. אמר יוסי, "יאמרו מיליך ענה,
 יהודה כס, יוסי שית, תורה מה תהא עליך?" 23

The stories above illustrate outbursts of genuine anger that rabbis might have for their colleagues at certain times. The rabbis are depicted as human beings, and were not above the pettiness that all people occasionally feel. But when the rabbis become angry at each other, the consequences are more serious than when ordinary people become angry. The anger described in all three instances had consequences that extended beyond the interpersonal relationships. In the first story, a sefer torah was ripped in two. This could well be an allegorical description of what might really have happened, that the community and its scholars were divided so that they could no longer live or study together. The episode when Hillel was humiliated ends with the words "V'hayah kasheh l'yisrael k'yom shene'asah bo ha'egel." And when there was discord between Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Meir's disciples, the aggadah ended with, "Torah, mah tehe ale'ha?" When the rabbis become angry with each other, the consequences are seen as serious for the entire Jewish people and its way of life.

NOTES

1. S. Schechter, Aspects of Rabbinic Theology, Schocken Books, NY, 1972, pp. 242-263--The discussion above is not intended to do anything except introduce the concept of the yetser harah to the reader. For a more complete understanding of the topic, one must read and study the yetsarot more fully. See also G.F. Moore, Judaism, Harvard University Press Cambridge, 1958, Vol. I, pp 474-496; and E. Urbach, The Sages, The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1975, pp 471-482.
2. T.B. Yoma 69b
3. T.B. Shabbat 105b
4. T.B. Berachot 5a
5. Ruth Rabbah 3:1
6. T.B. Eruvin 65b, Pesachim 113b, Kiddushin 71a--see also chapter I, p. above.
7. T.B. Megillah 12b
8. Exodus Rabbah 45:3
9. T.B. Ta'anit 4a
10. T.B. Ta'anit 8a
11. Genesis Rabbah 19:1, Ecclesiastes Rabba 1:18(1). These two references refer to the same basic aggadah. There are slight differences between the two renditions, but they are insignificant to the meaning of the aggadah. For our purposes, we will concentrate on Eccl. Rabba, which was put into writing some 500 years later than Genesis Rabba. The Eccl. Rabba version is a bit fuller and more elaborate.
12. T.B. Sotah 41b
13. T.B. Shabbat 105b
14. T.B. Ketubot 8b, Tanhuma Chaye Sarah 2, Yalkut Shimoni Ha'azinu 945
15. T.B. Ketubot 60b
16. T.B. Megillah 126 and Ketubot 60b, Genesis Rabba 71:7, Numbers Rabba 10:2
17. Genesis Rabba 78:7--It is not readily clear from this midrash that the rabbis are trying to illustrate anger between siblings. However, it is significant that the Biblical reference of the aggadah is to Jacob and Esau, so it is safe to assume that the rabbis understood this relationship to be full of anger.
18. Numbers Rabba 9:11
19. T.B. Kiddushin 31b
20. T.B. Berachot 39a
21. T.J. Shekalim 2:5
22. T.B. Shabbat 21a
23. T.B. Nazir 49a

CHAPTER III: THE EXPRESSION OF HUMAN ANGER

As was mentioned above, the rabbinic literature warns people against acting out of anger. Anger is dangerous because it easily gets out of control. It seems to envelop a person and cause him to behave in ways that he would otherwise not behave were he to remain calm. And the results of anger are bound to be regret and remorse, since it causes people to act against their better judgment. But the rabbis speak very little about how anger is expressed. This might be because the rabbis felt no need to discuss how anger is acted out. All human beings know what it is to be enraged and to act out of anger. It is a universal, age--old phenomenon. In part, being human means having strong primordial emotions, one of which is anger. So the rabbis felt it to be less important to discuss how anger is expressed. There was not much that they could teach that people did not know already. And the implications of anger are nearly always negative. There is simply very little of a redeeming quality in anger. Instead, as we have seen, the rabbis concentrate much more on defining the nature of human anger, its causes, its results, and how people should react in the face of anger.

Sometimes people can become angry without expressing their feelings at all. In the previous chapter we saw stories related about rabbis becoming angry at their students, but they did nothing physical or verbal which would reflect their anger.¹ Anger can be felt, but one need not express that anger. So at certain times, anger can be almost benign,

Anger can of course be expressed through physical action, which is destructive. It was shown in the previous chapter how four of the rabbis expressed their anger when faced with insubordinate servants. The action that each took was impulsive and spontaneous. One rabbi snapped the fringes of his garment. Two rabbis broke ceramic pieces, and one rabbi threw brine at his maid-servant. All of these actions seem to indicate uncontrolled, impulsive behavior. One might assume that were these rabbis not controlled by their anger, they would not have exhibited this type of violent behavior.⁴

The exaggerated, destructive physical power associated with anger is colorfully portrayed in Genesis Rabba.⁵ When Benjamin was seized by Joseph. Judah roared at such a high decibel level that everyone's teeth fell out. When the brothers heard Judah, they began to stamp their feet with such strength that their pounding caused furrows in the earth. So Joseph himself responded by kicking down a stone pillar and smashing it into small pieces. The rabbis are using hyperbole to illustrate that anger is often expressed physically, and that its results are overwhelmingly destructive.⁶ One must remain on guard not to act out of anger, because anger's power is great, and once unleashed it might not be controlled.

Anger is also expressed by fleeing from reality and attempting to escape one's responsibilities. Exodus 33:7-11 tells how the Tent of Meeting where God would communicate with Moses, was pitched outside the camp's boundaries. The Midrash plays with this concept. An aggadic tradition tells how

Moses, when he became angry at the children of Israel, would take the Tent and flee. God instructs Moses to come back to the camp. If not, Joshua will assume responsibility. "This is analagous to a high-class woman (matronah) who became angry with her husband and left the palace. There was a young orphan growing up in the King's palace. The Kings sent out for her (the Matronah) and said, 'Return to your place!' But she did not want to return. He said to her that if she would not come back, there is an orphan in the palace to take her place. So too it was with Moses" ⁷ Withdrawal and fleeing from one's obligations can be a product of anger and an indication of hostile feelings.

Angry feelings can be expressed in many different ways. Anger can be either spoken, or expressed through physical action. It can be shown as a destructive wish to harm other people or the environment. Or conversely, anger can be indicated through a withdrawal from one's environment. Actions resulting from anger are usually impulsive, but they can also be planned. And in nearly all cases, however anger might be expressed, it is meant to harm.

NOTES

1. T.E. Berachot 39a, T.B. Ta'anit 4a
2. Genesis Rabba 71:7
3. T.B. Berachot 7a
4. T.B. Shabbat 105b
5. See Chapter I
6. Genesis Rabba 93:7
7. Exodus Rabba 45:4

CHAPTER IV--THE RESULTS OF HUMAN ANGER

Once anger has been expressed, the angry person has nothing to show for his anger. All of the heightened emotion and passion lead only to a high level of futility. The anger one has will not yield anything productive, as Bar Kapparah warns:

'הַיָּדֵי שֶׁל אִישׁ כְּדֵי שֶׁיִּשְׁכַּח אֶת הַיָּדֵי שֶׁל אִישׁ כְּדֵי שֶׁיִּשְׁכַּח

Furthermore, actions taken while angry or words expressed in anger will bring feelings of regret. When discussing the bill of divorce, the Talmud informs us why one makes a fold in the document. "And what is the reason that our rabbis instituted the fold? They were in a place with many Priests (kohanei), and they would easily become angry (kapdai) and divorce their wives. So the rabbis established the institution (of the fold) so that in the meantime, they might calm down."² The example of a priest in this passage is instructive. Once divorced, other men were allowed to remarry their wives, providing that their former wife had not remarried someone else in the interim. But priests were unable to marry divorcees. Their hasty actions were irrevocable. So for an entire lifetime, one might well regret what has been done in a moment of anger.

The results of anger are unpredictable and negative for all concerned. Leviticus 19:17 mentions the responsibility of each Jew to reprove his neighbor if he sees him sinning (hocheach tochiach et amitecha). The rabbis discuss to what degree each Jew is obligated to reprove his fellow.³ Rav said: Until striking. Shmuel said: Until cursing.⁴ Rabbi Yochanan said: Until anger. It is difficult to determine

whether there is any type of logical progression from striking to cursing to anger. It is possible that these are simply three separate traditions tied together by a later redactor. But there does seem to be some type of common thread uniting striking, cursing and anger. Striking and cursing can both be expressions of anger.⁵ The passage may mean that one is obligated to reprove until (a) the person being reprovved becomes so angry that he strikes the one scolding him; (b) the person being reprovved becomes so angry that he curses the one who is scolding him; or (c) the person simply becomes angry--and when he does the one who has scolded has fulfilled his obligation. But most significant in this passage is the possible connection between anger and cursing and striking. All three are destructive, while cursing and striking stem from anger.

In one of the few aggadot which portray anger in a positive light, a father would do well to utilize his anger to discipline his child. If a child matures without any parental anger or discipline, the results can be disastrous.

[illegible]

As was seen in Chapter I, anger is associated with discipline. A little bit of anger at the proper time can save a person much anguish later on in life. Caution, discipline and fear of sin will prevent the divine Attribute of Justice from inflicting its punishment on human beings.

The rabbis discuss ka'as banim as a special type of anger which children cause their parents, by not paying heed to them as commanded in the Torah. Ka'as banim is set apart because of its unique consequences. R. Yohoshua b. Nachmani taught: "On account of four things does old age come quickly (kofetset el adam); from fear; from ka'as banim, from an evil woman, and from war . . . From ka'as banim--(we learn this) from Ely, as it is written, 'And Ely was very old when he heard everything that his sons were doing to all of Israel' (I Sam. 2:22) . . ."⁷ Not only will ka'as banim cause old age,

וְיָבֵשׁ הָיָה וְיָשָׁן מְאֹד וְיָבֵשׁ הָיָה וְיָשָׁן מְאֹד (דף 32:19) וְיָבֵשׁ הָיָה וְיָשָׁן מְאֹד
וְיָבֵשׁ הָיָה וְיָשָׁן מְאֹד וְיָבֵשׁ הָיָה וְיָשָׁן מְאֹד

It is impossible to determine whether this aggadah in fact reflects the rabbinic world view, or whether this is some type of moralistic admonition to people to respect their elders.⁹ But regardless, ka'as banim is somehow set apart from other types of anger because of its unique results.

In the world of halacha, error can be equivalent to sin. All Jews are supposed to know the Law and what is required for them to do. When one has made a mistake in halacha, he has not acted correctly. Even though the error was inadvertant, it can be counted against him as a sin. Reish Lakish said, "If someone becomes angry, if he is a sage, his wisdom departs from him . . ."¹⁰ Wisdom is seen as antithetical to Anger. Wisdom is controlled, while anger is impulsive. Wisdom leads one to freely perform the will of God, while anger turns one away from God.¹¹

Moses' anger is seen as a cause for some of his errors as the Israelite leader. It was shown above that Moses was rather quick to anger when he was challenged by Datan and Aviram. The rabbis attribute errors to Moses' halachah when he becomes angry. Below are two accounts of Moses' anger and his subsequent errors:

SIFREI MATOT 147

Rabbi Eliezer b. Azariah:

השם מקומוות בעם משה עבדו כעס הוא
עבדו טעות

1) ויקצץ עץ אלעזר ועל איתור בני
אהרן הנותרים ע אחר... (Numbers 16:10 ff)

2) ויאמר להם שמדו נא הימורם הון

הסעם הזה נזילא עכס מים מהו אומר

וירם את ידו ויק את הסעם בטחו

(Numbers 11:10)

3) ויקצץ משה עץ פקודי הדין שר השמים

(Numbers 31:14) ... עפי שגא עבדו כעס

הא עבדו טעות

LEVITICUS RABBA 13:1

Rav Huna:

השם מקומוות בעם משה ונתעלה
היה ממונה

1) וייתרו אנשים ממנו עז הקדש...

ויקצץ עץ להם משה (Leviticus 10:16 ff)

2) ויקצץ משה עץ פקודי הדין

(Numbers 31:14)

3) ויקצץ עץ אלעזר ועל איתור בני

אהרן הנותרים ע אחר...

(Leviticus 10:16 ff)

There seems to be a well established tradition that Moses committed errors when he became angry. This tradition is certainly in accord with the complex character of Moses as portrayed in the Pentateuchal narrative itself.¹² It also reflects the rabbinic view of anger and sin in an halachic system.¹³ This tradition of Moses' anger causing him to commit halachic errors appears to be independent of the examples cited in the aggadah. As was shown in Sifrei Matot and Leviticus Rabba, both aggadot have two examples in common (Lev. 10:16 and Num. 31:14), but each has a different third example (Sifrei Matot uses Num. 20:11 and Leviticus Rabba uses

Exodus 16:20). The incident with Elazar and Itamar also appears in Avot d'Rabbi Natan 37. The incident with pikudei hachayil appears in the Babylonian Talmud, Pesachim 66b and in Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 47; which ends "Ub'ka'aso nistalka ruach hakodesh mimenu. Mikan atah lomed shehakapdan me'abed chochmato." So any angry person--Moses, a rabbi, or an ordinary Jew, suffers from a loss of wisdom when they become angry, and they make halachic errors.

When one becomes angry, he will commit errors in halacha which will cause him to sin. As one must studiously avoid sin, so he must be on his guard not to become angry. "Elijah said to Rab Yehuda, brother of R. Sala Hasid: 'Do not become agitated (אִתְּבִיחַ) and you will not sin. Do not drink to excess and you will not sin.'"¹⁴ Human anger can also cause one to be idolatrous, a most terrible sin. Avot d'Rabbi Natan begins Chapter 3,¹⁵ "It is said, 'One who beats his bread into the ground and who scatters his money in anger is not released from this world until . . . he has become dependent (אֵין עֲלֵיכֶם עֲלֵי אֲדָמָה) on human beings. It is said that one who rends his clothes in anger and who breaks vessels in his anger, it shall come to pass that he will become an idol worshipper . . .'" And one who become an idol worshipper will undoubtedly be inflicted with God's own anger, since "Avodah zara meviah af al ha'adam."¹⁶

Anger can cause a person to lose sight of what is important. It can result in the loss of divine gifts. When a person becomes angry, his wisdom flees. This is what

And in Yalkut Shimoni, in an aggada focused in Deuteronomy 32:19-20 ("The LORD saw and spurned, from ka'as banav uvnotav, and He said, 'I will hide my face from them.'"), reference is made to the Shechina. God says, "Hareini m'salek schechinati mebeineichem."²³ One who becomes angry not only loses the Divine Presence, but he suffers the punishments of Gehenom. Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani quoted Rabbi Yonatan: "Kol hako'es kol minei gehenom sholtin bo."²⁴

It is possible that the above aggadot are not meant to be understood literally. They might be sermonic devices used by the rabbis to warn their listeners against anger, but more likely they do reflect the rabbinic world view. Gehenom and the Shechina were entities in and of themselves. For the rabbis, they were more concrete and less symbolic than they are for most Jews today. And the aggadot above correspond to reality as the rabbis observed it. The results of human anger are often a momentary loss of wisdom and discretion. If one is ever imbued with the Divine Presence, it certainly vanishes when he is overcome with angry emotion. And it is also common in western culture to speak of an angry person as "possessed" by his wrath.

When a person is inflicted with suffering by God he must be sure not to become angry. He must instead remain silent. In the rabbinic world, the suffering of the righteous is seen as a test which will cause them to merit a great reward in the world to come. Suffering was Job's test, and since he could not conquer his anger, he did not merit as great a reward as he could have merited.

ו'צדק אע"פ חסדו אמת; איז 'אדם שנגזר בו "סורג" ונגזר נעמו
 ועל קרא תגר אחר מצד גז'ן. אלא כ'ון שבא "סורג" על א'ו
 א'לו כגז נעמו ועל קרא תגר אחר מצד גז'ן - עמוגה עמוגה
 ומוגזרת ה' י' הא.²⁵

Furthermore, if Job would have been able lichbosh ka'aso, he would have been seen as a person of such stature that he would have been included in the Tefillah together with the Patriarchs.

When one has acted out of anger, its negative results will ultimately harm the angered person himself. To the extent that one has been angry, so will he have to bear its negative results. In an admonition about the consequences of anger, R. Yudin warns, "'Al t'vahal b'ruchecha lichos' (Eccl. 7:9) . . . As (tight) as the spinner has wound his wool on his distaff, so he will have to remove it from his distaff. When the kettle boils over (the boiling water) pours over onto its own side. Anyone who spits into the air, it will fall on his face."²⁶

A person's anger can have serious consequences. It can harm relationships among friends and family. Anger can cause Jews to sin, to commit errors in halacha, and to worship idols--all of which are offenses punishable by God. But anger can, in and of itself, also be sinful, and the angry person is subject to divine punishment on account of his anger alone. In the religious sphere of life, anger will result in a loss of divine gifts. Wisdom and prophecy will vanish, and Jews will make mistakes in fulfilling their religious duty. The Shechina will flee, and the angry person will suffer the punishments of Gehenom. Anger's most serious consequence is divine punishment, either indirectly or directly

In almost every instance, angry behavior will cause one to regret what he has done. It would appear that the fundamental argument opposing human anger is not that it harms inter-personal relationships, as we tend to believe today. But rather according to the rabbis, human anger will almost invariably have some negative consequence for the individual Jew with God.

NOTES

1. T.B. Kiddushin 41a
2. T.B. Baba Batra 160b
3. T. B. Arachin 16b--The passage also includes a midrash on I Samuel 20:30ff. The midrash is simply a series of prooftexts which do not add anything new to the discussion of anger. Also, the statements attributed to Rav. Shmuel and Rabbi Yochanan are also attributed to the following Tannaim: Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua and ben Azzai.
4. Notice the reference here to cursing. For a more elaborate discussion of the power of cursing, see Chapter III.
5. See Rashi to T.B. Arachin 16b and Chapter III
6. Ecclesiastes Rabba 7:3(1)--The aggadah continues with the same formula (better a little divine anger from the Attribute of Justice) about the generation of the flood and the Sodomites.
7. Tanchuma, Chaye Sarah 2
8. Yalkut Shimoni Ha'azinu 945, T.B. Ketubot 8b
9. In Mesekhet Smachot 3:9 there is the statement, "Hamet l'yom alef mitah shel za'af", so this may in fact accurately portray the rabbinic world view, See Chapter VI.
10. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter VI.
11. T.B. Pesachim 66b
12. It should be noted here that Moses' portrayal in the Torah and later in the aggadah is not simply one-sided. At times he is depicted as a "hot-head," and at other times he is shown to be the active intercessor for Israel. Moses is not one-sided, but a complex character, as are human beings.
13. It can be assumed that if the system were not halachic, but rather ethical for example, that the result of anger would not be an halachic error, but rather an ethical violation. Indeed, there are some difficulties in discussing the ethics of anger in the rabbinic world view, when their world view is primarily halachic, and only secondarily ethical.

NOTES

14. T.B. Berachot 29b
15. This chapter presents parallel material found in Shabbat 105a. See Chapter II.
16. Numbers Rabba 10:2
17. Ecclesiastes Rabba 7:7(2)--The following is a discussion of Exodus 5:19-6:2.
18. "May the LORD look upon you and punish you for making us loathsome to Pharaoh and his courtiers--putting a sword in their hands to slay us." (New Jewish Publication Society Translation--NJPS)
19. "Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has dealt worse with this people; and still You have not delivered Your people." (NJPS)
20. "You shall soon see what I will do to Pharaoh: he shall drive them from his land." (NJPS)
21. In Psalm 10:14, the Jewish Publication Society translates appo as "his countenance". Raba bar Huna seems to understand appo as meaning anger.
22. T.B. Nedarim 22b
23. Yalkut Shimoni Ha'azinu 945
24. T.B. Nedarim 22a.
25. Pesikta Rabati 47:3
26. Ecclesiastes Rabba 7:9(1)

CHAPTER V: HUMAN ATTEMPTS TO APPEASE ANGER

The final chapter discussing human anger will focus on how one is supposed to react when confronted with an angry person. To the rabbis, anger is an abnormal emotional state. Normally, people should be calm and even-tempered. But when someone becomes angry, he is no longer himself. Whether anger comes from within or is an external force, it seems to possess the individual. Once he flares up, it is important for an angry person to have his anger dissipate so that he can become himself again. And since anger is usually expressed through human interaction, someone confronted with an angry person will have to deal with emotions that are not his own. The rabbis, therefore, discuss how one should go about appeasing his fellow when he becomes angry. They see anger and appeasement as two facets of the same process.

The way that one becomes appeased reveals as much about an individual as the way he becomes angry. "Difficult to anger and easy to appease--he is a chasid. Easy to anger and difficult to appease, he is wicked."¹ Furthermore, while one is at the height of his anger, it is impossible for him to be appeased. The anger must run its own course. It is a natural emotional state which is temporary. Thus it will, in time, correct itself. R. Shimon b. Elazar said: "Do not appease your friend while he is angry (b'sha'at ka'aso); do not comfort him while his dead lay before him; do not ask him (why) while he makes a vow; and do not attempt to see him

while he is disgraced."² There are appropriate times to leave someone alone, when one's attempts to help might only excacerbate an already unfortunate situation.

But when one is confronted by an angry person, he cannot avoid dealing with that person's anger. At that time, it is impossible to step aside and let the anger dissipate of its own accord. The rabbis teach that it is unwise to battle an angry person directly. Rather, one would fare better by setting him off guard. The Tanchuma version of the confrontation between Judah and Joseph provides a colorful illustration of how one should react to an angry person. "When Joseph saw that Judah's cheima was increasing he said, 'Now all of Egypt will be lost.' Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: This is analagous to two prize fighters who were wrestling with each other. When one of them felt that his opponent was about to win, he said, 'Now he is going to beat me and I will be embarrassed in front of everyone.' What did he do? He kissed his opponents hand, and the cheima of the larger prizefighter abated. So it was with Joseph. When he felt Judah's anger was increasing, he feared that he would be embarrassed in the presence of the Egyptians. Immediately he said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph your brother', and they were unable to answer him."³

Another effective way to appease an angry person is to appeal to that person's self-image. This was bar Idi's tactic, which was successful in molifying Rabbi Yochanan when Rabbi Eliezer had made him angry. (See Chapter II, page 21). And when Aaron was faced with Moses' anger for not making the sin

offering, (Leviticus 10:16ff) he dealt with Moses by letting his anger run its course. "He remained quiet until Moses finished speaking, and he didn't interrupt him. Afterwards he said to Moses, 'Today, should we sacrifice, for we are onanim?' In another tradition, Aaron takes Moses outside

the camp and says,
 אהרן אומר, ומה מעשר היום אסור לאכול
 מהו חטאת חמור לא כן שכן שבת אסור לאכול? א"ר
 הוצה לו שאלה, "ו' יתעצבון אליו", ו' י' 4

So Aaron was able to appease Moses most effectively by letting him express his anger, and then talking to him reasonably. Instead of engaging an angry person in an argument, appealing to his rational side may have a more positive effect.

The rabbis discuss who is responsible for appeasing anger. In the example above, bar Idi was able to appease Yochanan even though Eliezer had made him angry. But Aaron himself appeased Moses when he had become angry. In a separate aggadah, the rabbis teach that each person must pacify the angered one himself. No one can do it for him. When Jacob was about to be reconciled with Esau his brother, he separated his family so that each could pacify Esau himself. Genesis Rabba illustrates their situation. A lion was angry at all the animals. The animals looked around for someone to go to the lion to pacify him. A fox volunteered, since he knew 300 fables by which to appease the lion. On the way there he first forgot 100 fables, and then another 100, but each time the animals continued to urge him on, since he remembered at least

one hundred. But when the fox finally arrived, he had forgotten all the fables. For that reason Jacob split up his family.⁵ In the case of Rabbi Yochanan, it would seem that everybody has the responsibility to try to appease one who is angry. In the aggadot about Aaron and the lion and the fox, only the person who has instigated the anger can appease the one who has become angry. But as will be shown below, the overwhelming thrust of the tradition is that any and all anger has negative consequences, so anyone who can appease anger has the obligation to do so, whether or not he himself has been the apparent cause of the anger.

Moses intercedes on Aaron's behalf against God's anger. In Numbers 20, both Moses and Aaron were held responsible for not affirming God's sanctity at the Waters of Meribah, even though it was only Moses who actually struck the rock. "This is analogous to one who was owed a debt. He came to take the borrower's granery and took both it and his neighbor's. The debtor said, 'If I am indebted, what has my neighbor done wrong?' So Moses said, 'Master I became angry--Aaron what was his sin?' Therefore scripture praises him (Aaron) . . ."⁶ Honi the circle-maker also interceded on behalf of Israel when they were suffering from a severe drought, which was seen as a manifestation of divine anger. His students came to him and asked him to pray for rain, which he reluctantly did. God listened to his prayers, and caused it to rain so heavily that it began to flood. Again his students asked Honi to intercede. Honi spoke to God.

"I did not ask for this. Rather, I asked for gishmei ratson, bracha, v'nidavah . . . Master of the universe, Your people Israel whom You brought out of Egypt cannot bear too much good or too much calamity. If You are angry at them, they cannot withstand it. If you shower upon them (too much) good, they are unable to withstand it."⁷

The prophet Isaiah also interceded on Israel's behalf, but indirectly. In discussing why the Book of Isaiah begins first with the scolding of Israel and later with words of comfort, the rabbis make the following mashal: A king was angry at his son, so he went to the scribe (Isaiah) to ask him to write up a document severing their relationship. The scribe did so, but he did not have it witnessed or signed. Later, the King and his son were reconciled. The king returned to the scribe, who asked him if he had brought witnesses to sign the document. The king said, "Perhaps I said in my anger that I will deny (him). But chas li! For do I have anyone else in this world except him? I will not deny my son. Perhaps the person who came to you was someone who looked like me?"⁸ So it was with God and Israel. When God was angry, he denied Israel. But later they were able to reconcile, since the prophet neglected to have the document witnessed and signed properly. Therefore it could be regarded as invalid.

Moses is portrayed as an active intercessor for Israel when God becomes angry with them, particularly at the time of the Golden Calf. There is a string of midrashim on Exodus 32:7-10, where God threatens to destroy Israel because they worshipped the Golden Calf.

Rabbi Eliezer said: "The-Holy-One-Blessed-Be-He said to Moses: 'Moses, get down from your greatness. I have only made you great for the sake of Israel. Now that Israel has sinned, what are you to Me?' Moses immediately became weak and did not have the strength to speak. But when He said: 'Leave me be so that I can destroy them!' Moses said, 'This matter depends on me.' Immediately he stood up and prayed vigorously for mercy. This is analagous to a king who was angry at his son and struck him severely. But he (the king) had a friend sitting next to him, who was too scared to say anything. The king said, 'Were it not for my friend that is sitting before me I would kill you!' He (the friend) said, 'This matter depends on me!' And he stood up to rescus him."⁹

Moses was willing to risk God's wrath to protect and defend Israel.

Moses cajoled God in an attempt to appease His anger.

אמר לו ה' וקראו "נז"ל" אמר לו "למה?" "למה?" אמר לו "אמר לו משה:
זכור אתה קורא אותם עמי, ואני אלא עמך. שוב וחרון אפך
והרחם על הרעה לעמך. אמר רבי שמעון בן יוחאי. לוי צדק
ויעלה עד סקראו הקדש עמו, ולאמר: ויחם ה' את הרעה
אמר רבי לעזר לרבי אבהו.¹⁰

Not only did Moses pray for mercy, but he physically interceded for Israel as well. In a remarkable midrash commenting on

Exodus 32:10. (ועתה הנה לי ויתר אבי היות ואכלם ואכלם אלוהים)

(Rabbi Abayhu said: "Were it not written in the Scripture, it would be impossible to say such a thing. This teaches that Moses took hold of God as he would take hold of a person by his clothes and he said to him: Master of the Universe, I will not let you go until you forgive and pardon them."¹¹

Moses also is willing to give up God's promise that he alone will become a great nation, while Israel is destroyed.

Rabbi Elazar said: Moses said to the Holy-One-Blessed-Be-He that is a stool of three legs (the Patriarchs) cannot withstand Your ka'as, how much the more so for one leg (Moses). I am embarrassed that my ancestors

should not say: Look at this leader that has been set over them. He asks for greatness for himself, but he does not ask for mercy for them.¹²

It is clear that Moses' role as an intercessor with God is cast in a very positive light. He is shown to be selfless and willing to risk his own future for the sake of his people. Most certainly, the rabbis are using Moses as an example of unparalleled dedication to the Jewish people, and his laudatory behavior in the midrash serves as a model for how all human beings are supposed to act.

There is a tradition that appears quite often in the rabbinic literature of a band of angels who come to harm and destroy. Most often in these aggadot, Moses is the one who ultimately defeats them. In the six midrashim which will be discussed, the angels of destruction appear five times (once as punishment for Moses' failure to circumcize his son (T.B. Nedarim 32 a). Below is a list of the destroying angel's names as they appear in the literature:

T.B. Shabbat 55a (6 angels) *אשר, אהרן, אהרן, אהרן, אהרן, אהרן*
 T.B. Nedarim 32a (2 angels) *אשר, אהרן*
 Exodus Rabbah 41:7 (5 angels) *אשר, אהרן, אהרן, אהרן, אהרן*
 Deuteronomy Rabbah 3:11 (5 angels) *אשר, אהרן, אהרן, אהרן, אהרן*
 Tanchuma Tissa 30 (5 angels are mentioned, but they go unnamed.)
 Pirkei d'Rebbi Eliezer 45 (5 angels) *אשר, אהרן, אהרן, אהרן, אהרן*

Af and Cheima appear in all of the above midrashim. Ketsef and Mashchit appear in all the midrashim which mentions more than two angels. M'chaleh appears twice. Charon, Hashmed, and M'shabber appear only once. The evidence above again shows the close connection between anger and destruction. In fact, in these midrashim, anger is destruction.

This fascinating midrash shows the Patriarchs, Moses and even God Himself to intercede against divine anger and extreme punishment. Israel is expected to sin occasionally, and so punishment is also expected. The fact that Israel was not utterly destroyed time and time again shows proof of active intercession in the heavenly realm. Again the model holds true. Human beings are to intercede; on Israel's behalf when God becomes angry at them, and when people become angry at each other. Everyone ought to be concerned about anger. Anger is portrayed in the last aggadah as angels--as independent forces from without which tend to invade the world wreaking destruction in their wake. It can also be assumed that the same outside forces can invade the human self and cause one to become angry and destructive. Moses knew best how to deal with these malevolent forces. He dug a hole in the ground and buried Charon within. When Charon would lift up its head, Moses was ever-vigilant to push it back, deep into the earth. This is a clear picture of how the rabbis instruct their listeners to cope with their anger of which they can never rid themselves entirely--which is to push it in, keep it covered, and do not let it show. In modern terms we should repress it.

NOTES

1. T.B. Avot 5:11--See also Chapter I
2. T.B. Avot 4:18
3. Tanchuma Vayigash 3--It should be noted that here is another example of the direct association in the Rabbinic world view between cheima, physical strength, and destructive power.
4. Avot de Rabbi Natan 37
5. Genesis Rabbah 78:7
6. Numbers Rabbah 19:9
7. T.B. Ta'anit 23a
8. Yalkut Shimoni Isaiah 385
9. T.B. Berachot 32a
10. Exodus Rabbah 41:7
11. T.B. Berachot 32a
12. Ibid.
13. Pirkei d'Rebbi Eliezer is the latest of the midrashim mentioned in connection with the angels of destruction. It is a narrative midrash and the most embellished account of the Golden Calf. An interesting study would be a comparison of these various midrashic traditions, but that is not within the purview of this paper.
14. The following tradition of Moses turning back Charon from his grave is unique to Pirkei d'Rebbi Eliezer.

CHAPTER VI--THE NATURE OF DIVINE ANGER

Studying divine anger has its particular problems, since anger is primarily a human emotion. The rabbis projected this emotional facet of human existence on God. For the rabbis, God is of course an entity in and of Himself, but is understood in human terms. In the rabbinic and the Biblical literature, God is anthropomorphized. God is given a gender, even though it is understood by the rabbis that God is beyond sexual identification. A body is attributed to God even though it is understood that God is incorporeal. God is described as acting in much the same way that people do. But although these concerns bother the philosophers, they are of almost no interest to the rabbis. For the most part, the rabbis simply push these anthropomorphisms into the background. They are not often bothered by whether or not God actually speaks like a human being or whether His nostrils really flare up when He becomes angry. Theologically, the rabbis, by and large, are linguistic utilitarians. They have placed themselves under little constraint in describing God in human terms so that human beings can best picture their message.

For the rabbis, God does have emotions. This is an extension of Biblical theology. God commands and is desirous of correct behavior. God is happy when people have behaved properly, and He rewards them justly. God is displeased when people have behaved improperly, and they are punished accordingly. So God does have an emotional aspect to His being. But it is difficult to determine what is intrinsic to God Himself, and what is not. The question arises--to what extent is the emotional side of God's being inherent in God's own nature; and to what extent are the emotions attributed to God

only projections of human emotions? This fundamental question is really unanswerable, but it will underly any discussion of divine emotions. God is a real being, but He is conceptualized by human beings. God does have emotions, but it is impossible to determine where in fact the reality of God ends and where the projection of human models begins.

God is both different from human beings, and similar to human beings. The rabbis certainly believe that God is capable of anger. They had inherited the Bible and Biblical notions of divine wrath. But God's anger is always directly observable in the same way that human anger is observable. As the rabbis were discussing human anger, they were discussing universal behavior that they could observe and identify, since they too were human beings who lived among human beings. But God's anger is a combination of both divine reality and human theory. God cannot be observed directly. For the student of rabbinic literature, every aspect of God's emotional being reflects the reality of the divine emotion as colored by each rabbi's understanding of the divine at that moment. In addition, some of the aggadot reflect the rabbis' understanding of God's anger, and some are sermonic, as was seen with human anger. But in discussing God, the distinction between the sermon and reality is much more blurred. That is why there will be a much wider variety of views when discussing divine anger. Moreover, there is a dialectical tension present throughout the discussion of God's anger. Divine anger is both terrible and not so terrible. God is quick to anger, but God is also patient. God rules the world with both middat hadin and middat harachamim. When angry, God can

be both cruel and capricious, yet God is just.

God's anger clearly frightened the rabbis. They observed that when human beings become angry, they would lose their self-control and do things that they would later come to regret. If the same emotional process holds true for God, it can be horrible, since God's power is limitless. The rabbis do not mind just suffering for sins that have been committed. Justice is predictable and has its limits. But anger has no limits, as is seen in the following midrashim.

"ה' אל הקצב תוכיחתי ובהמתך תיסגרי" (Ps. 38:2) "גדל שאת הכותה" יסגרי
 "ה' אל המסע" (Jer. 10:24) במסע אין כותה כאן אלא אק במסע. יסגרי
 "היסודות טובים. וכן הוא אמר: "יסר הנק כי יס תקור" (Prov. 19:18)
 "יסרו אנה לא עמתי. הצור אל תמיתנו, ואם תמית אל תס נכס. אמר דוד
 "אל הקצב תוכיחתי" (למה היא תוכיחתי, וכן הוא אמר, "כי את סור אלה
 "ה' יוכיח (Jer. 10:24) אלהס לא הקצב. עבך נאמר, "אל הקצב
 תוכיחתי."

"Do not rebuke me in Your anger, and do not chastize me with Your wrath. (Ps. 6:2)" This is what is meant by scripture: Do not withhold correction from a lad. For when you strike him with a rod he shall not die. (Prov. 23:13) Therefore scripture says: You shall strike him with a rod and save his soul from Sheol. (Prov. 23:14)

The punishment that is not in anger is beneficial, as Jeremiah says: Make me suffer LORD, but in justice, not in anger. (Jer. 10:24). . . Af and Cheima are two executioners, therefore scripture says, "The wrath of a king are the angels of death (Prov. 16:14)" . . . And so Moses said: I was frightened of Af and Cheima (Deut. 9:19) . . . Good are the yisurim, for I do not possess the strength for Af or Cheima."

Divine anger is like two torturers, or the angel of death. It comes quickly, without warning, and one is powerless to stop it.

Nothing can be worse than divine anger, which can lead to death.

... the weaver, when he weaves he knows that his loom can withstand it and he makes it tighter. And when he knows that it cannot withstand it, he does not tighten it. We are the warp, and you are the weaver. We do not have the strength for Your ketsef or Your cheima, therefore it says, "Be gracious to me, for I am wretched (Ps. 6:3)", and when You are with me in cheima and in ketsef, immediately I die.³

Furthermore, God's anger can be eternal, while a human being might only be angry for a few moments. God is the King of Kings, and there is nothing that a puny person can do when confronted with this awesome might. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai wept on his deathbed fearfully explaining to his students:

If I were being brought before a human king, who is here today and tomorrow is in the grave-- if he is angry at me, his ka'as is not eternal anger. If he imprisons me, his imprisonment is not eternal, and if he puts me to death, my death is not eternal. And I am able to placate him with words and bribe him with money--even in such a case I would weep. And now they are bringing me before the King of Kings, the Holy-One-Blessed-Be-He who lives forever and ever. If He is angry with me, His anger is eternal; and if He imprisons me, His imprisonment is eternal; and if He puts me to death, it is eternal death. And I am unable to placate Him with words, nor bribe Him with money . . . Should I not weep?⁴

Since the rabbis also see anger as overwhelmingly negative for both human beings and God, they therefore try to mitigate the effects of God's anger. In the above aggadah, God's anger is eternal. But God's anger is also described as lasting for only the briefest of moments--a reg'a, or 1/50,888 of an hour. Also, people can withstand a moment of divine anger, and enjoy its benefits, "ki reg'a appo chaim birtsono".⁵ And God's wrath can even be a precursor of redemption, as Ezekiel prophesied, "... for with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and with an outpouring of cheima I shall rule over you. (Ez. 20:33)." Rav. Nahman said: "Let God be angry (חַיִּי אֵלֶיךָ) with us, but

he will then redeem us."⁶

The rabbis go further to assure their fellow Jews that God's wrath, while not pleasant by any means can even be a sign of His favor. In an ingenious midrash, the meaning of ka'as banim is shown to be a sign of God's care and special relationship with the Jewish people. R. Yehudah said,

"כִּאֲסָא בָנִים (Deut 32:19). That which pleases Him causes Him to be vexed." R. Meir said, "From ka'as banav uv'notav--and behold, these things are kal v'chomer. That when they make Him angry (mach'isin) they are called banim, were they not to make him angry, how much the more so?"⁷

God is portrayed as being supremely patient when faced with all of the provocation He receives moment by moment. God usually can control Himself and His anger, but can only do so for so long. God's anger becomes all the more terrible when He finally loses patience and expresses it. "There are ten generations from Adam to Noah, to show how great is God's patience (עֲשָׂרָה דְּוָרִים). For all of the generations would increasingly provoke God, until he brought upon them the flood waters."⁸ But God is almost always in control of His temper. When Moses, in his fury, shattered the tablets, God told him to carve himself a new pair. God asked him rhetorically, "Moses, you vented your anger on the tablets of the covenant? Do you want me to expend My anger, so you shall see that the world will not endure for a moment!"⁹

God rules the world by two standards, the Attribute of Justice (middat hadin) and the Attribute of Mercy (middat harachamin). Both middot are connected to divine anger.

Justice in and of itself is not anger. But when justice is delayed, God might well become angry, and the ensuing punishments can lead to anger and excess. There seems to be a circular pattern involving middat hadin, human suffering (visurin), and human anger. The attribute of Justice inflicts suffering on human beings, always as a punishment for their sins. The suffering can well cause human beings to become angry, and then sin again. This new sin will cause the middat hadin to again inflict punishment, and the cycle escalates. It is then necessary for a person to break the cycle (לכבוש) to end his sinning and his suffering.¹⁰ This is what is meant by tov ka'as mischok. A little bit of human anger at the proper time will prevent middat hadin from inflicting its severe punishment and initiating the cycle of punishment, suffering and anger.¹¹

God too can break the cycle by turning His Attribute of Justice into the Attribute of Mercy (middat harachamim). This was how Moses was spared when he spoke out against God.¹²

באותו שעה נקסו מידת הדין לטובתו, זכתי, וידבר אל'הים (Ex. 6)
ואין אל'הים מאלה מידת הדין. ואלה: ואלה אל'הים. אלה, אלה
היה וקם, לא יוכלת לטובת אלהים (את צדק ואהבה), אלה ה' געם
הרבהים במקומו אלהים...

Anger is juxtaposed to mercy. The prayer of the righteous is like a pitchfork which overturns the produce. The prayer of the righteous overturns God's attributes from middat rachamim.¹³ And mercy will usually follow divine anger. God is seen as taking out His anger from His store-house to inflict Israel until He is moved to mercy.¹⁴

God Himself prefers His mercy to His anger. In a Talmudic discussion it was decided that God too prays. When discussing what God says, "R. Zutra b. Tobi said in the name of Rav: 'May it be by My will that My mercy should conquer My Anger and My Mercy will prevail over My other attributes, and I will deal with My children according to the attribute of Mercy, and on their behalf stop short of the limit of justice.'" ¹⁵ Rabbi Ishmael b. Elisha related a visionary experience he had while lighting incense in the inner sanctuary of the Temple. R. Ishmael saw the Crown of God seated on a throne, God asked Ishmael for a blessing. Ishmael replied, "

יְהוָה רַבֵּן אֱלֹהֵינוּ יִכְבְּדֵנוּ כְּחֹמֶק אֶת כְּסֶדְךָ וְאֵלֹהֵינוּ כְּחֹמֶק אֶת חֲסִידֶיךָ וְתַנְחֵם עַל הַנֶּקֶם בְּחֵזֶק הַדִּינִים וְתַכְנֵם עַל הַסְּפִיגִים אֲשֶׁר עָלֵינוּ

And God nodded His head in agreement. ¹⁶

Justice and Mercy are two faces of the one God. But anger fits in someplace within God's nature. Anger may be another term of Justice, or a separate entity in and of itself, yet akin to Justice. But both middat hadin and anger serve the same functions--to punish those who have sinned and to open

the gates of mercy. Rabbi Eliezer said: הַשֵּׁם בְּכֹסֶם הַדִּין וְהַחֶסֶד בְּכֹסֶם הַחֶסֶד (Hos. 1:6) זְכוֹר אֶת הַדִּינִים, שְׂמַחְךָ: כִּי לֹא אִוִּסִּיף עוֹד אֶרְחֹם אֶת בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל

Rabbi Yosi b. Hanina added the end of the verse, כִּי נֶלֶם אֲשֶׁר עָלֵינוּ, --For what they have borne, I shall bear for them. ¹⁷

The dichotomy in the rabbinic view of anger comes into clearest focus when the rabbis discuss whether God can be capricious, or whether He is always just. Often, the rabbis view God's anger as they do human anger. It is impulsive and uncontrollable. Yet God is different from human beings because His ways are just. In the overall picture, one must balance these two divergent views--divine anger as cruel and

capricious, and as always just. "Hamet l'yom alef mitah shel za'af",¹⁸ is a powerful statement. Here God's anger is cruel and unjust. It strikes newborn infants who have committed no sin. Like human anger, God's wrath is undiscrening. Also, God has difficulty modulating His anger. As Honi the circle-maker said, "Your people Israel . . . are unable to bear too much good or too much calamity."¹⁹ God's anger wreaks destruction on the righteous as well as the wicked.

Rabbi Yehoshua bar Nachmayah said: The anger that You bring to Your world, You consume therein the righteous with the wicked. And it is not enough for You that You hang the wicked for the righteous, but rather you consume the righteous with the wicked. . . . Rabbi Levi said, "This is like a she-bear that destroys (אכלה) the animals, and if she does not find an animal to destroy, she destroys her young." Rabbi Simon said, "This is like a scythe which cut the thorns. And if it is uncompleted, (it cuts down) the rose . . ."²⁰

There is also a capricious, uncontrollable aspect of divine anger. Like human beings, sometimes God will seem to be angry at the slightest provocation, and sometimes He will seem to refuse to be angry at all. And there is nothing that anyone can do about that anger. God Himself is not in control of His anger. "In a Mishna it is taught (about Satan):

יכבד ומשער ועולם ומחצית נולד ראית ונולד נשמה.²¹

God can indeed be two-faced--kind and gracious one minute and enraged the next.

"אך ה' פניו אליו יחונק" ייחיד בן בנים
מאירות ולא בנים צעומות.²²

But this view of God as cruel, capricious and uncontrolled when angry is balanced by a view of God as always just. The righteous get their just reward, and the wicked are inflicted with the punishment they deserve. According to this view,

God, unlike human beings, does not lose control. Of course God becomes angry, but He is always correct in doing so. God destroyed the Generation of the Flood and the cities of Sodom and Gemorrah, but "hayu machisim l'hakadoshbaruch hu b'ma' asayhem hara'im gam balilah lishkav libo."²³ Also, God will only become angry when He knows the offense to be true." 'God became angry at them (Aaron and Miriam when they spoke against Moses--Numbers 12) and departed (from them)' only after their offense was made known to him. After that he decreed that they should be banished."²⁴

Death is considered a just punishment against the wicked, for as long as the wicked die, they cease to anger God, and hence they are no longer wicked.²⁵ Simply put, divine anger is determined by human behavior, for "as long as the wicked are in the world, divine wrath is in the world. If the wicked would perish from this world, divine wrath would depart from this world."²⁶

This view of divine anger is not the same type of anger that human beings have. It is synonymous for just punishment. Only those who deserve to be punished actually are punished. But as has been shown above, the expression of anger almost invariably leads to feelings of regret and remorse. This is true of a rabbi who throws brine at his maidservant, or of Jacob who snapped at Rachel. This is also true of God who sends forth His **angel** of destruction; who permits Satan to seduce human beings and then punishes them for their sins; and who like a she-bear has the potential to maul her own young. But the just infliction of punishment is qualitatively in a different realm. There, the wicked receive what they in

fact deserve. So when applied to God, the terms for anger can describe two different, albeit closely related, phenomena. Sometimes anger, in reference to God, can mean true anger, loss of control, and regret. And sometimes it can mean the just infliction of severe punishment upon those who do, in fact, deserve it.

NOTES

1. Midrash Tehillim 38:1
2. Ibid., 6:7
3. Ibid., 38:1
4. T.B. Berachot 28b--The aggadah ends with Rabbi Yochanan's students asking him for a blessing. He responds, "May it be (God's) will that the fear of Heaven be upon you, like the fear of human beings." This aggadah is most probably a sermon warning the people to have yirat shamaim, but it also does reflect reality as the rabbis saw it.
5. T.B. Berachot 7a
6. T.B. Rosh Hashannah 32b
7. Yalkut Shimoni Ha'azin 945
8. T.B. Avot 5:2
9. Deuteronomy Rabbah 150
10. See Chapter IV--The midrash about Job from Pesikta Rabati 47:3 is quoted in full. The cycle of visurin, ka'as and middat hadin can be seen here.
11. See Chapter IV--Parts from Ecclesiastes Rabba 7:3(1) are quoted.
12. See Chapter IV--Quoted in this chapter is the continuation of Ecclesiastes Rabba 7:7(2).
13. T.B. Yevamot 64a
14. T.J. Ta'anit 2:1
15. T.B. Berachot 7a
16. Ibid.
17. T.B. Pesachim 87b
18. Masechot Smachot 3:9
19. T.B. Ta'anit 23a--See Chapter V.
20. Genesis Rabbah 49:8--Rabbi Simon's comment is apparently incomplete
21. T.B. Baba Batra 16a

CHAPTER VII--CAUSES OF DIVINE ANGER

In the rabbinic literature, only people cause God to become angry. God is never described as becoming angry at nature or at animals. Although he was punished, even the serpent in the Garden of Eden did not suffer God's anger. Only human beings can cause God to become angry, because human beings alone are commanded by God, and they alone have the power to refuse God's commands. Essentially, God becomes angry at people for only one reason--they in some way deny His sovereignty. People can deny God's sovereignty in three basic ways: (a) by denying God's very existence; (b) by denying God's ability to punish; or (c) by violating God's commandments, inadvertently or by design.

Out of ignorance, one might deny God. This is the main reason why gentiles are punished. The gentiles are unable to recognize God's presence in the world and His sovereignty. It was taught in the name of Rabbi Meir: "When the sun rises, all of the kings of the east and the west put their crown on and bow down to the sun. The Holy-One-Blessed-Be-He is immediately angry."¹ Also, the generations of Enosh and the Flood, the cities of Sodom and Gemorrah, and the Egyptians who had enslaved Israel also suffered God's anger, since they continued with their evil deeds seemingly oblivious to their impending doom.

"And the Lord saw that man's evil had multiplied throughout the Land-(Gen. 6:5)." "For all day long they would cause him pain, and anger was his concern. Even at night his heart did not rest. This too is futile (Eccl. 2:23)." "For all day long they would cause Him pain - This is the generation of Enosh and the Flood, who would pain the Holy-One-Blessed-Be-He with their evil deeds. And anger was his concern--that they would make him angry with their

evil deeds, so that even at night he could rest from their sins. (The same formula repeats with the Sodomites and with the Egyptians).²

And of course, those who know that God exists, yet deny his power to punish, will certainly cause Him to become angry. God shows His displeasure when His creatures treat His power without respect. A philosopher questioned Rabban Gamliel about the verse (Deut. 4:24). "For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, an impassioned God." Gamliel told a parable about a king who had given his son a dog. The son deliberately insulted him by naming the dog after his father, the king. And when the son would swear an oath, he would swear it on the name of his father, the dog.³ This is what happens when Israel, who has known the great power of God, foolishly denies Him and worships idols. God will become impassioned and a "consuming fire". Deliberately denying God is one feature which distinguishes the wicked from the righteous.

What is the difference between the righteous and the wicked? The wicked know who they are making angry (lifnei mi hen macheesin): and the righteous know for whom they are toiling. . . . The wicked sit in this world at ease, and they deny God and make Him angry. And the righteous suffer in this world, and die for the sake of their creator's Name.⁴

The Kings of Israel deliberately provoked God, thus bringing upon themselves their own demise. Ahab was singled out as being particularly aggravating to God, based on the verse, "And Ahab made the Asherah (an idol of the fertility goddess), and Ahab continued to anger the LORD, the God of Israel, more than any of the Kings of Israel who had preceded him. (I Kings 16:33)" Rabbi Yochanan said that Ahab's offense was that, "he wrote on the doors of Samaria, 'Ahab denies the God of Israel.'"⁵

Denying God means not only denying His existence or His power, but it also means denying the goodness of God's gifts. "The generation of the flood became haughty only because of the abundance that God bestowed upon them. . . .(They said) 'Do we need Him only for a drop of rain? We have rivers and springs that supply us with our needs.' God said, 'With the good that I have bestowed upon them they anger Me, and with it I shall punish⁶ them.'"⁷ Israel too suffered a similar type of punishment because they had worshipped the Golden Calf. Previously, they were elevated by God to the status of the attending angels. They had no need to perform the normal human bodily functions, and they were not subject to the Angel of Death. The cycle of sin, anger, and punishment is again operative in the above midrashim.

כ"ן נאמר בנח ובראשית ובראשית
 ע"י ה' ה' קדוש ברוך הוא ואמר להם: סבור ה' ש' עתה ע"י כוונתו ה' יאמר:
 "אין אמת אלהים אמר ויהי ע"י כ"כ (פ"ב 826) וכן כ"כ
 תלמוד (פ"ב 827) 8

Jews need to be more watchful than the gentiles not to cause God to be angry. Because Jews have so many more commandments than gentiles, so too do they have a greater opportunity to violate those commandments and bring upon themselves divine wrath. When Jews inadvertantly neglect their ritual commandments, they provoke divine anger. "Rabbi Yochanan said: 'When the Holy-One-Blessed-Be-He comes to the synagogue and does not find ten men (for a minyan), He immediately ko'es . . .'"⁹ And when Moses was lax in circumcizing his son, as was commanded, Af and Cheima came upon him (See Chapter V). They swallowed him up so that only his legs were left. When Tsipporah took the flint and cut off her son's foreskin,

they then left Moses alone.¹⁰

But sometimes Jews in their folly willfully violate the divine commandments, thus insulting the Master of the Universe. The rabbis see this as the ultimate stupidity. When a generation of fathers spurn or blaspheme (m'na'atsim) against God, God will become angry and their sons and daughters will die when they are young.¹¹ The willful transgression of God's commandments will bring anger and harsh punishment. King Amon, Manesseh's son was accused on purposefully angering God, based on the verse (II Chronicles 33:23), "And he did not submit to the LORD as did his father Menassah. And this same Amon increased¹² guilt upon himself." R. Yochanan said that Amon burnt the Torah. R. Eliezer said that Amon slept with his mother. "She said to him: Can you have any pleasure in the place from whence you have come? He replied: Chlum ani oseh ela l'hachees et bor'ee."¹³

Adultery will also cause divine anger. A woman who is adulterous, m'kan'ah¹⁴ l'hakadosh baruch hu u'l'ba'alah.¹⁵ God lies in wait (k'chotef ta'arov) ready to harm the adulterers as quickly as He can.

ל'א / וק'ה' מ'אכ'יק' מ'נ'אכ'ים' ע'ר'ב'ם' מ'ה'ם',
וכ' / ה'א' א'מ'ר' : "ו'ג'י'ת' ע'ר' מ'מ'ר' ה'מ'כ'ס'ים' ו'מ'נ'אכ'ים' (Mal. 3:5)¹⁶

The rabbis do not have any examples of God becoming angry at people because they have treated their fellow human beings in a shabby, abusive, or disrespectful way. Although it was not considered at all to be laudatory when the four rabbis acted out their anger at their servants (T.E. Shabbat 105b), God Himself did not become angry at them. When Jacob

snapped at Rachel (Genesis Rabba 71:7), God intervened by scolding him. But God did not become angry at him. When Rabbi Yochanan became angry at Rabbi Eliezer (T.J. Shekalim 2:5) or when Shammai became angry at Hillel (T.B. Shabbat 21a), there is no mention of any anger on God's part. And when Moses became angry at Datan and Aviram (Ecclesiastes Rabba 7:7(2)), God became angry at Moses only after he started to blaspheme. Human anger can cause the Shechina to flee, or it can cause one to lose one's wisdom or prophetic ability, but it will not cause God to become angry.

God becomes angry only for reasons pertaining directly to His sovereignty. He becomes angry when His existence is denied, even though this might have nothing to do with interpersonal behavior. God becomes angry when people dismiss His awesome power, and when they deliberately offend Him by worshipping idols. God becomes angry when people violate His commandments, knowingly or not. The reason that God became angry at King Amon is not because he had violated his mother, but because he had violated God's Law. The reason that God becomes angry at adulterers is not because they have violated social norms or been deceitful to their respective spouses, but because they have violated God's commandment. God is not pleased when people mistreat others, and He metes out His punishment according to His justice. But divine anger is reserved for those who have transgressed divine commandments.

NOTES

1. T.B. Berachot 7a
2. Genesis Rabbah 27:2
3. T.B. Avodah Zarah 54b
4. Midrash Tehillim 17:14
5. T.B. Sanhedrin 102b
6. The word in the Hebrew is שׁוֹפֵט, which here has the force of punishment, as opposed to "judge".
7. T.B. Sanhedrin 108a
8. Pirkei d'Rebbi Eliezer 47
9. T.B. Berachot 6b
10. T.B. Nedarim 32a
11. T.B. Ketubot 8b
12. There may be a word play here. The word used is וְיָרָא and so R. Eliezer might have used this to mean procreation.
13. T.B. Sanhedrin 103b
14. For the linguistic and thematic connection between anger and kinnah see Chapter I.
15. Numbers Rabbah 9:12
16. Ibid., 10:2

CHAPTER VIII--EXPRESSION OF DIVINE ANGER

The rabbis expend little energy discussing how divine anger expresses itself. They are quite concerned with the nature of divine anger, its causes and its results. But the way that God expresses His anger is only a secondary concern. This may be because there is little that human beings can do once God has become angry. And as was seen with human anger, the rabbis are primarily observers of divine anger. They observe what they believe to be manifestations of God's anger. But there is little that one can do to alter anger, divine or human, once it has been expressed.

Even though God becomes angry, He need not always express His emotional feelings. When God comes to a synagogue and sees less than a minyan,¹ He becomes angry. But His anger is unexpressed. And when the kings of the east and the west worship the sun, He again becomes angry, but does not do anything.² There might well be an implied ultimate punishment in store for these foolish kings or these errant Jews, but this punishment is not explicit. There is nothing in the discussion itself which would cause one to imply the punishment is forthcoming.

God has the entire universe available to Him as a vehicle to express His anger. God can use human beings to punish others when He is angry. When God was angry at King Ahaz because he had worshipped idols, He delivered him into the hands of the kings of Damascus.³ And in the same way the God delivered Ahaz, so too does He subjugate the wicked.

Also as master of life and death, God uses illness and death as His instrument to express His anger. When Rabbi Eliezer took ill, his students came to visit him. Eliezer believed his illness to be a result of divine wrath, as he told them, "cheima 'azah yesh ba'olam."⁵ Infant mortality is another sign of divine anger.⁶ And children might die at an early age because God was angry at their parents.⁷ Divine anger is identified as the Angel of Death (cheimat melech mal'achei mavet--Prov. 16:14), and as torturers, who bring a slow and painful death (shnai kustarnin shel mavet).⁸

As creator of the universe, God is able to use natural phenomena to express His anger. God could, if he were to unleash His anger, destroy the entire world in a brief moment.⁹ But God's anger when expressed in nature is often expressed in water related punishments, either a drought or a flood. This motif stems back into the Torah itself. The first destruction was of course the flood in Noah's generation. And the flood is an expression of divine wrath at the sins of that generation.¹⁰ In Deuteronomy 11:17, God promises to become angry at Israel if they worship other gods. He will "close up the heavens, and there shall be no dew, and the earth will not give forth its yield, and (you) will quickly perish from the good land which the Lord gives you." In Ketubot 106a, כחן is itself utilized as a euphemism for famine.¹¹ And when Honi Hama'agel prayed for rain, he prayed

first for mercy because of the drought,¹² and then for an end to the overabundant rain, which yardu b'za'af.¹³

God does not always express His anger immediately. Often, God stores up His anger waiting for individual judgment in the world to come, and universal judgment in the end of days. Then God can let the individuals and the entire world feel the full brunt of His wrath. This was what what Rabbi Yochanan feared on this deathbed. He did not know whether he would be able to withstand God's judgment, since it is eternal.¹⁴ Furthermore, God can summon anyone to judgment whenever He so desires. Yochanan ben Zakkai compared God to a king, who had invited his servants to a banquet. But the king did not specify a time when the banquet would be held. The smart servants adorned themselves for the feast saying, "nothing can be lacking in the king's house." But the stupid ones did not bother to prepare themselves. They said, "Can there be a banquet without preparation?" Suddenly, all were summoned. The smart servants were dressed nicely and the King was happy to greet them. They sat and feasted. The stupid servants entered disheveled, and the king was angry with them. He did not permit them to feast. Instead they stood and were frightened.¹⁵ God is the king, and human beings are His servants. By performing commandments, one prepares in this life for the banquet in the world to come. If the king is happy with the preparation, the servant is invited in. But if the king is angry, the servant will not be let in to the world to come.

There will also be a final judgment in the end of days, when God will vent His accumulated anger once and for all on the entire world. It will be greater than any previous expression of divine anger. God judged the generation of the flood while sitting, and the Egyptians while passing through. But in the future, God will judge the world while standing up, as it says:

וְיָשָׁן ה' בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וְיָקִים ה' אֶת הָאָדָם... (Zeph. 3:8)
 וְיָשָׁן ה' בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וְיָקִים ה' אֶת הָאָדָם... (Zeph. 3:8)

When God becomes angry, He often swears oaths promising to destroy the objects of His anger. But just as human beings often regret their actions when angry, so too does God regret His vows to destroy. The rabbis discuss whether or not God is bound by His word to keep the vow He made when angry. Some say that the oaths God made when angry are retractable since He was angry at that time. Anger causes one to do rash things, and the same is true for God.

Rabbi Yehoshua cited the verse, "Asher nishba'ti b'api (Ps. 95:11). B'api nishba'ti v'chazarti bi."¹⁷ And when God was angry at Israel, he had the Prophet Isaiah denounce Israel on His behalf. But when they later reconciled, God renounced His threats to punish Israel.¹⁸

Like human beings, God does regret the vows He made in anger. Chanina bar Papa discussed the two verses וְיָשָׁן ה' בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא (Is. 27:4) and וְיָקִים ה' אֶת הָאָדָם (Babum 1:2). God says, I have no anger, "for I have already sworn. Would that I had not sworn (mi yitnenu shelo nishbati)."¹⁹ R. Hema quoted his father-in-law R. Tachalifa: "God said, 'To them it looks like anger, but to me it is not anger. As I have sworn in my wrath; In my wrath I have sworn, and

so I retract (my statement).²⁰ But when God does swear and keeps his oath, He can fulfill it in such a way as to obviate its negative results.

Rabbi Elazar tells a story about a king who was angry at his son and swore that he would strike him in the head with an Indian sword. Later when he calmed down, he said, "If I strike him he will die and no one will inherit my kingdom. But I cannot annul my decree." So he put a sheath over the sword and struck his son. The son was saved and the decree was fulfilled. R. Hanina told the same story about a king who swore that he would throw a big stone at his son. Later, he broke the rock up into little bits and threw it at him, thus saving his son and fulfilling his decree. R. Shimon b. Lakish tells the story about a big rope. The king swore that he would lash his son one hundred times. Instead, he split the rope into 100 parts and lashed him once.

המלך הזיל מלכותו וקרא את בנו וקרא לו חסדא

When God becomes angry, anything can happen. At times, He does not express His anger at all. But other times, in anger God can bring sickness, death, flood and famine, and harsh judgment. God might swear an oath in anger which He may be obligated to fulfill. But as terrible as God's anger is, there is the hope that even when angry, God will remember the righteous;²² even in anger God will remember His mercy.²³ Rav Hasida quoted Mar Ukba's prayer:

השם שאתה מרחם על עמך ישראל, יי' ר' חסדא
 אמר לך שאתה מרחם על עמך ישראל, יי' ר' חסדא
 אמר לך שאתה מרחם על עמך ישראל, יי' ר' חסדא

NOTES

1. T.B. Berachot 6b--See Chapter VII
2. Ibid., 7a--See Chapter VII
3. T.B. Sanhedrin 103a
4. Yalkut Shimoni Ha'azinu 945
5. T.B. Sanhedrin 101a
6. Masechet S'machot 3:9
7. Yalkut Shimoni Ha'azinu 945
8. Midrash Tehillim 38:1--See Chapter VI
9. Deuteronomy Rabba 3:14--See Chapter VI
10. T.B. Sanhedrin 108a and Genesis Rabbah 27:2
11. T.B. Katubot 106a--See Roshi's comment
12. For further discussion of sin, anger and drought,
see T.B. Ta'anit 22b-23a
13. T.B. Ta'anit 23a
14. T.B. Berachot 28b
15. T.B. Shabbat 153a
16. Exodus Rabbah 17:4
17. T.B. Hagigah 10a
18. Yalkut Shimon; Isaiah 385--See Chapter V
19. T.B. Avodah Zarah 4a
20. Leviticus Rabba 32:2
21. Midrash Tehillim 6:3
22. T.B. Berachot 54b
23. T.B. Pesachim 87b
24. T.B. Berachot 29b

CHAPTER IX--RESULTS OF DIVINE ANGER

The rabbis are divided over how to evaluate God's anger. Sometimes they present it as the most terrible of divine qualities, and at other times they tend to downplay its consequences. The rabbis' portrayal of divine anger should be understood in terms of how it was meant to function among Jews. The threat of an unpredictable, uncontrollable, overwhelmingly limitless destructive power in the world served to help keep Jews in line with halacha. The threat of punishment was certainly a powerful force which helped to keep Jews loyal in their adherence to rabbinic Judaism. But divine anger itself could be so terrible and frightening to Jews that the rabbis also had to mitigate its awful effects. It is difficult to function with the threat of divine wrath at every sin or error, major or minor. Also the reality of the world is such that it is not always seen as fair or just. Most of the time, reality is seen as good, and the rabbis understand God to be essentially beneficent. But sometimes our world does not appear to be fair. The righteous and the innocent appear to suffer unjustly, while the wicked are permitted to prosper without apparent punishment. These are the underlying reasons for the dialectical tension. God's anger is terrible, so terrible that anything can happen to someone who makes Him angry. Yet God is a caring and loving Being who will not utterly destroy--who will make His punishment bearable.

The results of God's anger were discussed in part in

the previous chapter, since it is nearly impossible to separate anger's results from its expression. God's anger results in human suffering, namely; slavery, flood, famine, illness and death. The rabbis tend to leave much of the expression of divine anger to the human imagination. They do not spell out in a graphic way what happens when God does become angry. This might be because the rabbis have never observed God becoming angry directly, as they have human beings. Rather they have only seen results. This chapter will discuss the results of divine anger, but by and large its emphasis will be upon whom divine anger is expressed, and what type of results are in store for each different group.

The results of divine anger are always permanent, leaving some lasting effect on the world (ne'emar bo roshem).¹ And Rabban Yochanan b. Zakkai acknowledged that the punishment which is a result of divine anger is eternal, as opposed to the punishment which results from human anger.² God's anger is also indiscriminating, leaving in its wake a wide path of destruction--destroying both the good and the bad, the righteous and the wicked.³ But counterbalancing this view of a rampaging God is the view of a merciful God, who will make His anger and punishment bearable for the righteous and for the Jewish people.⁴ The result of God's anger will ultimately be mercy, since anger activates God's middat harachamim.⁵

The wicked, of course, cause their own anger and their own punishment. As long as they are wicked, God will be angry at them.⁶ God is pictured as taking pleasure in the wicked's

downfall. Rabbi Ishmael said, "Yesh simcha lifnei hakadosh baruch hu k'she'yay'abdu macheesin min ha'olam."⁷ Knowing their impending doom, God laughs at the wicked. "Tov ka'as mischok"--better is divine anger in this world than the laughter which God laughs with the wicked in this world. "Lischok amarti m'holal"--God laughs with the righteous in the world to come. "V'shibachti ani et hasimcha"--this is the joy of fulfilling one's commandments. "Ul'simcha mah zeh oseh"-- this is the joy that is not connected to the commandments."⁸ So God enjoys the anger He has toward the wicked. He throws their wickedness back at them and laughs while they suffer. They have spent their lives provoking Him and He justly anticipates their time of judgment. The rabbis warn:

וְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל מִיָּדָיו
 הִבְטִיחַ אֱלֹהִים וְהִנֵּה אֵין רִשְׁוֹן וְהִנֵּה אֵין חֶסֶד⁹

It is important to note here that the wicked are seen as those who violate God's commandments. The righteous, on the other hand, serve God with joy. The halachic system is all-pervasive for the rabbis, subsuming any ethical system under it. Under this halachic system, even normally righteous people can suffer if they inadvertantly transgress a divine commandment. This was shown to be true with Moses when he neglected to circumcise his son, and also with the children of Israel when they in a lapse of faith worshipped the Golden Calf that they made. So normally righteous people do commit sins, and they can become momentarily wicked. Therefore, God is erech apaim, patient and long-suffering towards the

and appealing. And if it could not be expressed politically or militarily, it could more safely be expressed in aggadah. Theologically, the Jews believed themselves to be chosen by God. They alone worshipped God, observed commandments, and owed Him their loyalty. But they were subjugated to the earthly rule of idol worshippers and people who did not recognize God's sovereignty. Therefore, there was the promise of a great punishment in store for the gentile nations--God's expression of all the centuries of accumulated anger. This fusion of the theological and the human desire to see divine anger expressed at the gentiles is captured in these two simple aggadot:

ר' ח'יה, "ח'יה א'ל (Is. 27:4) וכתב, "נוקם ה' ויהי ח'יה
(ג' מ'מ'א) 'על ק'ל. כאן ב' שאלו וכן באו האומות העולם¹³

אחרת היום הבא: "אזק ה' כי אנהג ה', 'על אפק ותנחמני'
(Is. 12:1) 'אם אפק האומות העולם ותנחמני מהם.¹⁴

Because the gentile nations have themselves inflicted Israel with af and cheima, they will have to suffer the full force of God's wrath. "'Then He shall speak to them in His wrath (Ps. 2:5)'. But it is written, 'LORD, LORD, merciful and gracious God (Ex. 34:6)'--He is only gracious to Israel. And to the gentile nations who have terrified Israel with af and cheima, as it says "Hinei yom Adonai ba achzari ba'evra v'charon af (Is. 13:19). . ."¹⁵ Israel will receive grace from God, but the gentile nations will suffer God's wrath. When the Day of Judgment does come to the world, Israel will not be totally spared. But the brunt of the anger will fall

on the gentiles. Israel will also be brought to judgment. But Israel will be judged first before the divine wrath really becomes fierce.¹⁶

If anger is intrinsic to God's nature, than the gentile nations serve as useful objects for His wrath. Although Israel might be suffering for the moment, its suffering is minimal compared to what the gentiles will suffer over the long run.

Rabbi Yochanan said: "... a king ... had two terrible tortures. And every nation that he would be angry at, he would subjugate that nation to them. Once, his own nation rebelled against him, and he would call his torturers to castigate them. They began to scream out to the king: Our Lord the King, we entreat you, everything that you want to do to castigate us, do it, except for these." So Israel said before the Holy-One-Blessed-Be-He: Master of the universe, do not rebuke me with Your Anger and do not inflict me with Your Wrath." The Holy-One-Blessed-Be-He said to them, "If so, for what purpose is Anger and Wrath?" They said to Him, "You have others to inflict ...". And so the Holy-One-Blessed-Be-He consented to their suggestion ...¹⁷

Because Israel has a closer relationship to God, Israel is seen as different from the gentile nations. For the gentiles, divine anger is a sign of rejection. But for Jews, divine anger can be seen in a sort of positive light. For Israel, anger is a sign of the covenant. Since Israel alone received the Torah, Israel alone suffers for its violation of Torah's commandments. Israel was given the Torah and the prophets because of God's anger and Israel's sin.¹⁸ Furthermore, divine anger is a sign for Jews that God cares about them in a special way. It would be worse if God were to reject them altogether. Rabbi Shimon b. Lakish commented on

the last verse (5:22) of Lamentations ("For you cannot have totally rejected us, and still be angry at us"): "If it is rejection there is no hope. But if it is anger there is hope--for everyone who becomes angry will ultimately be appeased."¹⁹

The special relationship between God and Israel is metaphorically described in two images: as a king and his nation, and as a father and his son. In both images, God as king or as father has absolute power. But God is in a very real way dependent upon the Jewish people to make His greatness known. Therefore, God might ultimately destroy the gentile nations, but He will never destroy the Jewish people. If a king were to destroy his nation, he would no longer have subjects to rule. And if a father were to destroy his son, there would be no one to carry on after him. God as king or as father might chastise, but He will never destroy the Jewish people.

God is pictured as minimizing His punishment against the Jews. This is analagous to a king whose nation has sinned against him. If he makes little of their offense, his kingly retinue will remain. If he makes much of their offense, it will no longer remain.²⁰ Jews get special treatment under this type of relationship. Rabbi Levi defined erech apaim as rachik ragiz, giving Jews the opportunity to perform teshuvah before they would be punished. He made the following analogy:

(A king) had two harsh legions who live with me in the land. Now the inhabitants are making

me angry and they (the legions) are standing over them. So let me send them out on the long way. For if they (the inhabitants) anger me, by the time I send out after them, the inhabitants would pacify me. And I would accept their making peace. So it was with the Holy-One-Blessed-He. Af and Cheima are the angels of destruction. I send them out the long way--when Israel angers me. But before they get there, Israel brings me teshuvah and I accept their teshuvah.²¹

The father-son relationship is different from the relationship of a master and a slave. Akiba was asked about the poor. He gave the mashal of a king who was angry at his servant and threw him in jail and commanded that no one feed him or give him drink.²² If someone comes along and feeds him and gives him drink, the king will be angry. But if instead the king becomes angry with his son and decrees the same punishment upon him, if someone were to save the son, the king would send him a gift.²³ The midrash about a king who decrees the death of his son, yet mitigates the punishment to save him, preaches the same message--the relationship between God and Israel is different from the relationship between God and the gentiles.²⁴

God is described as rewarding Israel when they are good and punishing them when they are bad, as a father would reward or punish his own son. The mashal was made:

A king had a son whom he loved too much, so he planted an orchard for him. When the son was obedient, the king would search throughout the world for a beautiful sapling and plant it within his orchard. But when he (the son) would get him angry, the king would cut down his plants. So it is when Israel is obedient to God. God searches throughout the world for the righteous gentiles and puts them in Israel's midst--like Jethro and Rahab. And when Israel angers God, he removes the righteous among them.²⁵

Because of the unique relationship between God and Israel, God sometimes refrains from punishing Israel, even though it remains His prerogative. God refuses to become angry at Israel while they are at war since they would then be utterly destroyed.²⁶ But the best example of God refusing to destroy Israel is the Golden Calf incident. Israel sinned and God threatened to destroy them. But ultimately He did not. This is a sign of God's greatness. "An earthly king bestows gifts on his subjects when they are loyal to him. But when they are no longer loyal, when they rebel, he cuts them off. Not so with God. Rather they (Israel) were busy below making Him angry, and He was busy above giving them His Torah."²⁷ "To You, Adonai, is righteousness (Daniel 9:7)." Rabbi Levi said:

יְהוָה יוֹשֵׁב עַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְהוֹרֵק אֶת הַיָּדָיו מֵעַל הַיָּדָיו
 לְמַעַן יִשְׁפֹּט בְּיָמָיו וְיִשְׁפֹּט בְּיָמָיו
 וְיִשְׁפֹּט בְּיָמָיו וְיִשְׁפֹּט בְּיָמָיו

God's anger is borne by all. It is borne by the wicked and by the righteous, by the gentiles and by Israel. But the results are different for each group, depending upon the relationship they have with God. God enjoys punishing the wicked, who are the cause of His anger. He laughs with them now so that they will be punished later. The righteous are remembered by God, even when He is angry. They are promised a reward in the world to come. The gentiles exist to be the brunt of divine anger, to suffer greatly at the final judgment.

19. Lamentations Rabbah 5:22
20. T.B. Zevachim 41b
21. T.J. Ta'anit 2:1
22. Here poverty is portrayed as a result of divine anger.
23. T.B. Baba Batra 10a--Here God too is pictured as regretting what He does in anger.
24. Midrash Tehillim 6:3--See Chapter VIII
25. T.J. Berachot 2:8
26. T.B. Berachot 7a--The incident discussed here is with Bila'am, Numbers 23:8
27. Exodus Rabbah 41:4
28. Ibid., 41:1

CHAPTER X--GOD'S ATTEMPTS TO APPEASE ANGER

The way in which human beings are to appease human and divine anger was a major topic of discussion for the rabbis (see Chapter V). The way that God appeases human anger and His own wrath is not as central a theme in the rabbinic discussion of God's anger. God is, after all, the master of the universe. Unlike human beings, God has the ultimate power to become angry, to inflict punishment, and to be merciful. Where human beings would fear the destructive expression of anger, human or divine, God certainly does not. But God does take a role in interceding against human anger and against His own anger. God does so because He chooses to do so, as opposed to human beings, who intercede against anger because they must do so. God is seen by the rabbis as interceding on behalf of human beings and on behalf of Israel. Therefore, because ultimately, like human beings, God dislikes His anger, God is essentially loving and just. This is lost when He becomes angry. God takes an active role against human anger, and also against the expression of His own divine anger.

God can thwart the human expression of anger. In the story about Rabbi Yehoshua b. Levi,¹ God prevented Yehoshua from cursing his Saducean neighbor who was making him angry over scriptural interpretation. Yehoshua had set up a rooster, so that he would awake him at dawn. Then Yehoshua would curse him. But both the rooster and Yehoshua remained asleep through the dawn. This was seen as God's doing, as the two prooftexts show: "v'rachamav al kol ma'asav" and "gam'enosh l'tsadiq² lo tov."

God can also use human anger as a tool to achieve His own ends, as He did in Esther 2:21: "In those days, as Mordecai sat in the King's gate, Bigthan and Teresh became angry (. . . and they wanted to lay their hands on King Ahasuerus)". Rav Chiyya bar Aba quoted Rabbi Yochanan, "God, Master over all His servants, caused anger in order to perform a miracle for the righteous, in this case Mordecai."³

In Chapter V, Moses was described as interceding on Israel's behalf against divine wrath. Moses saved Israel from divine destruction. But the rabbis feel free to reverse the roles. When Moses is portrayed as an angry leader, wishing the destruction of Israel, God intercedes on Israel's behalf to threaten, cajole, or appease Moses.

It was Moses' custom to pitch the Tent of Meeting outside the Israelite camp, and those who would request something of God would leave the camp and approach the Tent of Meeting (Exodus 33:7). The aggadah changes the story and describes Moses, in his anger at Israel because of the Golden Calf, as taking the tent of meeting outside the camp. "When Moses saw the good gift that they had in their hands and how they lost it, he too became angry at them . . . Shimon b. Lakish made the following analogy: A king had a legion who rebelled. So the commander of the legion took the ensign and fled."⁴ God intercedes on Israel's behalf and threatens to depose Moses. "The Holy-One-Blessed-Be-He said to Moses: 'Now they will say, The Master is angry, the student is angry--Israel, what shall become of them. If you return the tent to its place, well and good.

And if not Yehoshua ben Nun your student will serve in your stead."⁵

The rabbis depict God and Moses in a mutual pact. If one becomes angry, the other should pacify him, and vice versa. They base their aggadah on the verse, "And God spoke to Moses face to face (Exodus 33:11)."

לא בן התגירי עמך, כשיהיו פניך בצוואת יי' פני מלכות את פניך
וכשיהיו פני בצוואת יי' פניך מלכות את פני. נסר נק ובעד עמך.
... שית הפנים מוצאת רחמים? לא בן אחרת כלאהיה בעצם יעבא
אתה מלכה את, כשתהיה בעצם, את מלך.⁶

God is also seen as interceding against His own anger. God Himself becomes angry, and God appeases Himself. This is what happened in the midrash on Isaiah.⁷ עמך בוכר אני
ועין? שכן הכעיס אותי ... אחר זמן בקר יסאל מן הקהילה וקבלה.
And in the aggadot on the angels of destruction (See Chapter V), God is portrayed as interceding against His own anger. Moses seeks God's intercession: "Amod atah b'echad v'ani b'echad. Minayin? Shene'emar: 'Kumah Adonai b'apecta' (Ps. 7:7) Harei she'amad Hakadosh Baruch Hu b'af."⁸

God's anger will not last forever. Ultimately, it will subside. But like human beings, God must express His anger before He can be appeased. "R. Yochanan said in the name of R. Yosi: 'How is it known that one does not placate someone while he is angry? As it is written: 'My countenance will go with you, and I will give you rest (Exodus 33:14).' God said to Moses: wait until My countenance of wrath shall pass over and I will give you rest. And is anger an attribute of the Holy-One-Blessed-Be-He? Yes, as it is taught: V'eil zo'em b'chol yom (Ps. 7:12)."⁹ And Shimon ben Lakish said about anger, "d'chol m'an d'cha'ees sofei lit'ratsay"¹⁰. All anger

eventually will be appeased.

But God is also described as different from human beings because He can appease Himself. Human anger must first subside before there can be appeasement. But God can appease Himself even while He is angry. "It is an attribute of a human being that when one is angry, he is not concilliatory; and when one is concilliatory, he is not angry. But when the Holy-One-Blessed-Be-He is angry, from within his anger He becomes concilliatory."¹¹ Because this is so, the world can endure God's anger.

Anger is an attribute of God. As it is with human beings, God's anger must also express itself. The rabbis discuss what divine anger is, its causes, its expression, and its results. Human beings can intercede against God's anger, and God Himself can intercede against His own anger. But fundamental to the entire discussion of God's anger is the rabbis' belief in a God who desires proper behavior and might become angry when that behavior is not realized. Anger is intrinsic to God's very nature. But it ultimately depends upon human shortcomings. Simply put, God will become angry only when human beings sin. If human beings were to stop sinning, God would not become angry. The human cycle of sin, punishment and suffering, and human anger has its counterpart in the divine realm. That same cycle, viewed from God's perspective, can be seen as divine patience, divine anger and punishment, and appeasement. While human beings sin, God is patient. Then suddenly God can lose His patience, becomes angry and inflict His punishment upon the sinners. The human beings who are punished suffer their visurin. For human beings, the

aftermath of this suffering can be renewed human anger. This anger must be repressed because human anger can lead to sin, and sin might bring on more punishment. For God, the aftermath of divine anger is appeasement and renewed patience. God too, hopes that the time will come when there will be more sin and no more anger.

"וְעַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מְחַיֶּה מֵתִים (Job 3:17) וְעַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מְחַיֶּה מֵתִים" 12

NOTES

1. T.B. Berachot 7a--See Chapter III.
2. The use of the second proof text may hinge on the word tsadik, referring to tsadukim, Saducees.
3. T.B. Megillah 13b
4. Exodus Rabbah 45:3
5. T.B. Berachot 63b--This aggadah is also told with a different mashal about a matronah who left her palace, and the King threatened to replace her with an orphan (Exodus Rabbah 45:4). See Chapter III.
6. Exodus Rabba 45:2
7. Yalkut Shimoni Isaiah 385--See Chapters V and VIII
8. Deuteronomy Rabbah 3:11
9. T.B. Berachot 7a
10. Lamentations Rabbah 5:22
11. Midrash Tehillim 2:17
12. Genesis Rabbah 9:5

CONCLUSION

Overwhelmingly, the rabbis see anger as a negative force in both human beings and in God. When people become angry, they become destructive. Their physical strength increases commensurate with their anger. Anger brings not only heightened strength, but heightened emotion as well. Thematically and linguistically, anger is closely connected to passion. The rabbis understand that when one is angry, his true character is revealed. In modern terms, anger removes one's ego defenses, and the true self emerges for all to see. In the rabbinic world as in our own, patience is a virtue. Like Hillel, we are told to be on our guard against anger and not lose control.

For the rabbis, anger is associated with the yetser hara and drunkenness, external things which also cause human beings to lose their self control. The yetser hara and drunkenness can exacerbate an already angry disposition. Idolatry too can bring anger into the world. The idol worshipper will incur God's wrath, and he will also cause indignation among the righteous and God-fearing. On the other hand, things that are highly esteemed, that are held dear, can also cause anger. Because they are so close, one's family members, a spouse, a sibling or a child can make someone very angry, since each has a stake in the welfare of the other. Scholarship and wisdom are also held in high esteem, and they too can cause anger. The Talmud preserves a number of passages relating to internicine bitterness and anger among rabbinic colleagues, often over what seems to be trivial in retrospect.

Human anger need not always be expressed. One might harbor feelings of anger inside. The virtuous person is able to suppress his angry feelings and not let them get the best of him. But sometimes anger is expressed through words and through action. When anger does escape, it can be uncontrollable. When anger is expressed, it can bring more harm to both the person who is angry and to the one who bears the brunt of that anger, than the situation itself would actually warrant.

For the rabbis, the results of angry actions and words are most often regretted. Anger can lead to error. It can **cause** someone to violate the halacha, even inadvertently. When someone becomes angry, he loses his reason, his wisdom and the Divine Presence. Without these divine gifts, a Jew might commit sins that he would later regret. The rabbis understand the world to be ruled by an active God who has given commandments. When someone has violated a divine commandment, when he has sinned, he is liable to be punished by God. Unlike our modern concern with anger in interpersonal relations, the rabbis seem to be primarily concerned with the religious consequences of anger for the individual and the Jewish people.

The rabbis view human and divine anger as a universal concern. All people should try to appease anger whenever they can. But this cannot always be done. When a person is angry, it is impossible for him to be appeased. His anger must expend itself. Only then **can he**, of his own accord, be ready to be appeased. But this is different with God. The consequences of divine anger can be so terrible that each person is obligated to intercede and allay God's wrath, even at his own personal peril. Behind God's anger is unlimited power, which

if it were to become destructive, could destroy the entire universe.

The rabbis are not psychologists, and neither should that be expected of them. Today, psychology is taken very seriously. As twentieth century Jews, we tend to read back into our Jewish tradition our own concerns for psychological well-being. A good example of this eisegesis is our attitude toward the Jewish mourning rituals. As modern Jews, we see in these traditions a concern for psychology, since they do give psychological comfort to the bereaved. But psychology as a discipline is not yet a century old. Throughout the centuries, Jews kept the mourning rituals because they were the community standards believed to be commanded by God. This was the law by which Jewish people lived and guided their lives. The fact that in our own day these rituals appear psychologically helpful is only incidental. Many other examples of halacha (i.e., the laws of family purity, shatnez, and the prohibition against leavening on Passover etc.), have nothing to do with psychological well being, as traditional Judaism saw them.

The rabbis' view of human anger tends to run counter to modern psychological notions. For them, there is no such thing as healthy anger or a healthy venting of pent up feelings. Instead, anger is bad, since it leads to sin and punishment. There also seems to be an unspoken rule throughout the rabbinic literature that people in a higher status do have the right to become angry at someone in a lower status. People in a

higher status should not lose their self control. But when they do they are partially justified since they were provoked by underlings. But in the aggadah, people in a lower status never become angry at people in a higher status. For example, parents become angry at children. Children never becomes angry at parents. Teachers become angry at students. Students never become angry at teachers. Kings become angry at their subjects. Subjects never become angry at their kings. God becomes angry at the Jewish people. But the Jews never become angry at God.

The rabbis instruct the Jews of their day to repress their anger, to bury it within. The importance of self control is to perform commandments properly and not sin. The rabbis do not teach us psychology. Instead they teach religion. For them religion was much wider than it is for us today. Nearly every facet of life was contained within the rebric of religion. Underlying the rabbi's religious teaching is their idea that God cares about human behavior, and that all Jews should fulfill their religious duties and live according to their religious obligations.

The rabbis understand God to be patient and kind most of the time. God has to endure the wicked, gentiles, and errant Jews who provoke Him each moment. Sometimes this provocation can actually get the best of God, and He loses His control. God then becomes angry. This is the basis for the dialectical tension in the rabbinic discussions of God's anger. **Precipitating** God's anger is the most terrible of all possible situations. His punishment might then be infinitely severe, since His power is limitless. Yet God is caring and kind **almost** all of the time. God's anger is momentary. Even when God is angry, the rabbis

believe that He will revert back to His patient self.

God only becomes angry at human beings since only human beings are given the free will to choose to obey God or to ignore Him. For the rabbis, sin is a willful or inadvertent violation of God's commandments, and it will lead to punishment. But the wicked are those who willfully violate God's commandments, who mock God, and who deny God's existence and power. They are sure to suffer worse than the Jew who by mistake violated a commandment. The rabbis see justice meted out in this world, or in the world to come according to a person's acts. But divine anger goes beyond divine justice. When God becomes angry, He inflicts the objects of His anger with more punishment than they deserve.

Divine anger is expressed in many different ways. For the rabbis, God's power as master of the universe is limitless. God can bring death, illness, and **subjugation upon** individuals or entire nations. God can mobilize the power of nature to inflict flood or famine upon the world as punishment when He is angry. The results of divine anger are terrible. Those who have been provoking God all along are promised a terrible wrath if they have not yet received it. The gentiles and the wicked who deny God have a great fury in store for them. But for the Jews, even God's present anger can be a sign of God's concern for His chosen. It means that later they will be spared a harsher judgment, which will be meted out upon the nations.

The rabbis portray God as one who appeases anger. God dislikes anger in human beings because it leads them to sin.

God also dislikes anger within Himself. He prays that He will not become angry. God intercedes against human anger and His own wrath. But God's natural state is not anger. Rather the world endures only because God is essentially just, patient and forgiving. It is when human beings provoke God overly much that He can no longer restrain His anger. Anger is then unleashed upon the world, destroying anything in its wake. But God's anger is not eternal. He eventually is appeased, and returns to His patient and forgiving self.

The rabbis maintain two basic assumptions which enable them to expound their views on divine anger. God has a will, and God acts in our world. These two theological tenets have been seriously downplayed by most people in the modern age. For the rabbis, God can bring illness and healing, famine and prosperity. God is the ultimate ruler of the universe, controlling individual fortune and nations' destinies. And God desires proper behavior. He has a will to which human beings are duty bound to conform. The rabbis were warning their people to be careful not to provoke God's anger. They should faithfully keep God's commandments, because if God does become angry, the consequences are terrible.

The rabbis did not operate in a vacuum. They saw themselves as links in a chain of tradition going back to Moses. They had inherited a rich Biblical theology. It is not surprising then that the theology of the Bible is not very different from rabbinic theology. In both, God gives commandments and becomes angry over people's sins. God has a will and God acts. But

the God of the Bible is more removed from human beings. He is not as easily affected by human pleas for mercy. There is the sense in the Bible that God's justice is more automatic in its dispensation, and hence God's anger is less of a force. When God destroys the cities of Sodom and Gemorrah, or the generation of the flood, no terms for anger appear. In the Biblical view, this destruction is justice and not anger. God maintains His self control and is erech apaim, slow to anger. In the Bible, there is a greater distance between God and human beings.

The Jews who took aggadah seriously could almost picture God as a person. God was not an abstraction. In many of the same ways that people became angry, God was pictured as becoming angry. Like people, God has feelings and emotions. And though it would be better for both God and the world if He would not become angry, divine anger is always a result of human provocation. People sin and people provoke God, and so people share the responsibility for God's anger. Like human anger, God's anger is by its very nature excessive. It is not just or a fair punishment. But God has feelings, and if He over-reacts, it is because people have provoked Him. The rabbis believe that human beings share the blame for God's anger.

The ultimate issue behind the rabbinic discussion of God's anger is theodicy. In the rabbis' world, as in our own, the righteous often suffered while the wicked would go unpunished. The same dilemma was perceived in terms of the Jewish people.

The Jews were subjugated to the gentile nations, who had shown no loyalty or obedience to the universal God of Israel. And in the year 70 CE, the Temple itself was razed. This was an event has reverberated throughout Jewish history, but was most painfully felt by Jews in the years following the destruction. Indirectly, the rabbis addressed the question that all Jews have asked: if God is all-powerful and good, how could this have happened to us?

Their message unfolds in the aggadah. God is indeed all-powerful and good. But like human beings, God has conflicts within Himself. God is provoked constantly, but He is usually able to constrain His feelings. But this is not always the case. Sometimes, like people, God loses His self-control. Then the good suffer, Israel is brought low, and the Temple is destroyed. But God is still essentially good and all-powerful. The only thing that God cannot do is control Himself all the time. Unlike human beings, God can do anything and Jews should stand in awe of His power. The Bible warns people not to violate God's commandments. In so doing, they will bring His wrath upon themselves. But the rabbis temper this Biblical view of anger. Fear of punishment is still operative. But God is more human. A person can appeal to Him. Through the aggadah, it is possible for Jews to feel the very emotions that God Himself feels. They can understand the dynamics of divine anger, since they are similar to the dynamics of human anger. This is comforting. The Jews who read and heard aggadah could understand God's anger. They

could be comforted by their knowledge that whenever people become angry, they are ultimately appeased. So even when God becomes angry, He will ultimately be appeased. The disfavor and the suffering they might now experience will not be eternal.

As can be expected, I found that my studying anger in the rabbinic literature caused me to reflect much more on the nature of anger. Personally, I have tried to blend my twentieth century concerns for ethics and psychological well being with some of the rabbinic views of anger discussed in this thesis. Universal to human nature in both the twentieth century and in rabbinic times is the idea that human anger can be uncontrollable when unleashed. Words unspoken or actions taken in anger will invariably lead to regret. As the rabbis warn, one must always be on guard against acting out of anger. Patience is indeed a virtue. One does best psychologically, ethically and religiously when he waits for his anger to subside before taking action. The rabbis instruct the Jews of their day to repress their anger.

For the most part, their ideas hold true today. One should be vigilant not to act out of anger, because it can be uncontrollable. Because of our modern psychological concerns, people today have been sensitized to their emotions and feelings. The whole-scale repression of anger advocated by the rabbis is not considered emotionally healthy today. I believe that people should acknowledge their anger so that they can understand their feelings. But people should repress their instinct

to act or to lash out when angry, since they will regret the harm that they will do to themselves or to others when angry.

I learned most from the rabbinic discussion of divine anger. In a very real way, I found the aggadah to be comforting. In the aggadah, God cares about people in much the same way that people care about each other. God is affected by what people do, and He is not removed from humanity. God can then be understood more directly. God is not simply an intellectual abstraction, but a being with some human-like dimensions - a being that can come close to others. God is not removed from human life, but is an integral partner in the human experience.

The rabbis are fairly sure about what is required of Jews. The individual Jew should try to structure his life according to the divine commandments which the rabbis understand to be halacha. Violations of the halacha might provoke God's anger. I am not an halachic Jew, and I do not see the halacha as binding. The problem for me and for the vast majority of twentieth century Jews is that we are not sure what provokes God's anger. We have substituted for halacha a vogue mix of universalized ethical concerns and individually defined Jewish obligation. Without halacha, there is no one standard by which all people can be measured. Personally, I feel a general sense of command in my life, but the specific divine commandments elude me. They are changing. As a non-halachic Jew, I am not sure exactly what I should be doing each day as my obligations to God and my religion are in constant flux.

Therefore, the idea that God can become angry is different for me than it was for the rabbis. The rabbis felt that they knew what makes God angry. I am not sure.

The idea of a God who becomes angry is both frightening and comforting for me, as I believe it also was for the rabbis. In both modern and rabbinic times, the perception of human life has not changed considerably. As long as life proceeds as planned, we have a general sense of order and logic in our lives. But sometimes things happen for no apparent reason. Accidents may occur. People suddenly become ill. Nature does not behave as we would expect. Suddenly we can feel that there is no control in our lives. The rabbis believe that God acts in our world. So when people suffer unduly, the rabbis often explain human sufferings in terms of God's anger. God is usually in control of life. But sometimes in anger God loses His own self-control.

For me, this theodicy does not work quite so well. I do not think of God as directly involving Himself in human life in the same active constant way that the rabbis do. But I do believe that God cares, and that He does sometimes involve Himself in human affairs. But for me, God's hand in history is not as mighty as it was for the rabbis. I believe that God can do anything, but He surely does not do everything. Therefore, I cannot explain my problem of unjust suffering as completely as the rabbis do. For them God becomes angry. For me, God can become angry, or people can make mistakes, or things might simply happen without rhyme or reason. I simply do not know.

This rabbinic theodicy is not without its problems however, A God who can lose His self-control and run rampant in anger is indeed frightening. But I share with the rabbis their hope that no matter how unjust life may seem, and no matter how angry God can become, the end process will be renewed patience, mercy and justice. Our world no matter how unfair and cruel it can at times appear to be, is ultimately a fair, just and merciful place. As history unfolds itself, I believe as the rabbis do, that there will be no more anger and no more sin - that everything will become alright.

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