

Vayechi 5772

Rabbi Aharon Ziegler

“Anger Control”

Every human emotion has merit and purpose; even anger

Anger could be dangerous and destructive, but it could be useful and constructive, if properly controlled. Just as fire could be harmful and deadly, but if harnessed and controlled it is a most useful element in daily living, for cooking and warmth.

The Rambam writes that excessive anger must be avoided at all costs, but a little anger is necessary. A person without any feeling, or emotions of anger at all times- is not a living entity, he is *ke'meit* [Dei'ot 1:4]. Also Shlomo HaMelech states in Kohelet, “There is a time for everything *Lakol Zeman, VeEt l'chol Cheifetz Tachat HaShamayim*” [3:1] The right way, says Rambam, is the Derech HaYeshara- the middle trait. Anger is an emotion and an emotion cannot be controlled-but the action resulting from anger can and must be controlled.

Ya'akov Avinu in our parsha recognizes the strengths and weaknesses of each of his sons. When he addresses Shimon and Levi he focuses on their emotions of anger. He cries, “In their rage they murdered people [of Shechem] and in their whim they maimed an ox [the livestock and cattle of Shechem, {Ramban}]. Cursed is their rage for it is intense, and their wrath for it is harsh” [49:6,7] Note that even when Ya'akov was criticizing them he did not curse *them*, but their *rage*. (a good lesson for all parents and teachers, when a child does something improper, say to the child, “What you *did* was bad”, but not that *you* are bad).

Once Ya'akov points out the faults of Shimon and Levi, the next step is to help them, in a constructive way, to control their anger. First, he says, “*A'chal'keim BeYa'akov*” I will separate them within Ya'akov. They cannot be together. The force of their anger is so intense and potent that being together as a team would wreak havoc, as each feeds off the other's rage, creating an explosive environment. So Shevet Shimon will be teachers of Torah to children of Israel [Rashi], and Shevet Levi will be confined to the Mikdash area. The 42 cities that the Levi'im will occupy will be designated as “*Arei Miklat*” cities of refuge to protect people who killed someone inadvertently, and now need protection from the enraged next of kin of the victim they killed.

Furthermore, says Ya'akov, “I will disperse the them in Israel”, to which Akeidat Yitzchak [R' Yitzchak Arama] comments, that anger and temper, though undesirable traits, may sometimes prove useful in arousing the heroics in men...It was therefore advisable that the qualities of anger and passion that had been concentrated in Shimon and

Levi should be dispersed among all the tribes of Israel...A little spread everywhere would prove useful, constructive and productive, but if concentrated in one place would be dangerous and destructive.

Ya'akov Avinu was not only a great parent but a great teacher for all Klal Yisrael.
[Part of this I heard from Rabbi A. Weiss]