

# THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 11:14

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

There are degrees of anger to be sure, but all of them -- from the slightest touch of it to the most terrible extent -- are wrongful. And yet, "human nature is easily incited to anger", so we'd need to know what to watch out for to avoid it. (At bottom it seems that anger is so wrongful because it's little more than a quick, arrogant, malevolent assertion of self, and a harsh denial of another's worth.)

Certain people become furious when they get angry. Someone like that "gets angry at everything done against his will" and can turn so furious that "he becomes heartless and his sensibilities deaden". A megalomaniacal character like that "would destroy the world if he could", he's that irrational and cruel. And as Ramchal depicts it, there are real spiritual and ethical dangers to being that angry since, "it's very easy to commit all sorts of sins once rage has brought you to this state, as there's nothing but your anger to control you and you (come to think that you) have no choice but to go where it leads you" since you've essentially lost all self-control.

Another sort of angry person "isn't as easily brought to fury if something ... isn't done exactly as he'd like it". Yet still and all, "when he does get angry, he gets very angry, and "many harmful, ruinous things can come out of it that can't be undone", which makes him and his anger so dangerous.

There's a less serious degree of it "which is exemplified by someone who doesn't easily anger" and when he does "he just gets a little angry". He "doesn't lose his wits" but what he does do, though, is "seethe in his anger" -- chews and re-chews the dish that set his anger off in the first place. And while such a one "does less harm than the above, he nonetheless hasn't reached the trait of innocence", which is the trait we're striving for now. In fact, Ramchal warns us, such a person "hasn't even acquired caution" the very first trait we discussed. "For, as long as anger leaves something of an impression in a person" Ramchal proclaims, he's still said to have an anger problem.

In point of fact, "there's a degree (of anger) that's even lighter than this. It's the sort exhibited by those rare souls "who find it hard to get angry". And if he would, in fact, "his anger would be short-lived and not (at all) the destructive or annihilating type" and it would last for "a moment, and no longer". As the "very moment anger would start to appear in him, his sensibilities would take over, and that would be it.

Now, some might claim that what's referred to as "righteous indignation" (which Ramchal terms an instance of "getting angry for reasons of a mitzvah") is sometimes called for -- as when we'd seemingly be doing the other person a favor by expressing anger at him to teach him a lesson. But

that too is harmful, Ramchal cautions.

"Our sages ... warned teachers not to get angry with their students" for example, "or parents with a child", even when that might seem reasonable. "They didn't say that one isn't to reprimand (whatsoever)" Ramchal adds parenthetically, "because oftentimes you simply have to". The point is that you're to "reprimand without anger, and for the express purpose of setting (the student or child) on the right path", and you should only "appear to be angry on the surface" while not actually feeling angry.

Indeed, we'd all need to be the sort of person who can keep his anger in tow if we're to achieve spiritual excellence.

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