

Elul 2022

Week 5 Primary Source Text

Tomer Devorah ch. 1

הה' - לא החזיק לעד אפו - זו מדה אחרת שאפילו שהאדם מחזיק בחטא אין הקדוש ברוך הוא מחזיק אף, ואם מחזיק לא לעד אלא יבטל כעסו אפילו שלא ישוב האדם, כמו שמצינו בימי ירבעם בן יואש שהחזיר הקדוש ברוך הוא גבול ישראל והם היו עובדים עגלים ורחם עליהם ולא שבו אם כן למה רחם, בשביל מדה זו שלא החזיק לעד אפו אדרבא מחליש אפו עם היות שעדין החטא קיים אינו מעניש אלא מצפה ומרחם אולי ישובו, והינו כי לא לנצח אריב ולא לעולם אטור אלא הקדוש ברוך הוא מתנהג ברכות ובקשות הכל לטובת ישראל.

וזו מדה ראויה לאדם להתנהג בה על חבירו אפילו שהוא רשאי להוכיח ב'סורים את חבירו או את בניו והם מת'סרים לא מפני זה ירבה תוכחתו ולא יחזיק כעסו אפילו שפעם אלא יבטלנו ולא יחזיק לעד אפו, גם אם אף הוא המתר לאדם כעין שפרשו כי תראה חמור שנאך וגו' ופרשו מה היא השנאה הזאת שראה אותו עובר עברה והוא יחיד אינו יכול להעיד ושנא אותו על דבר עברה ואפילו הכי אמרה תורה עזב תעזב עמו שבוק ית דבלבך אלא מצוה לקרב אותו באהבה אולי יועיל בדרך זו והינו ממש מדה זו לא החזיק לעד אפו.

The fifth - "God does not hold on to fury forever" - this is a different trait [than the third and fourth traits, about repair after repentance or forgiving past wrongs]: that even if a person holds on to their sin (i.e., continues to sin), the Holy Blessed One does not hold on to His "Anger." And if God does hold on to it, not forever. Rather, God nullifies His anger, even if the person does not repent. As we found in the days of Yeravam the son of Yoash, that the Holy Blessed One restored the boundary of Israel [after enemy occupation] while they were [still] worshipping calves - God had mercy upon them, but they had not repented. If so, why did God have mercy? For the sake of this trait, that God "does not hold on to anger forever." Just the opposite, God's anger weakens - even as the sin is still in existence, God does not punish, but rather anticipates and shows compassion for perhaps they will repent. And this is [the meaning of] "[God] will not contend forever or begrudge for all time" (Psalms 103:9). Rather, the Holy Blessed One acts with softness and harshness, all for the good of Israel.

And this is a trait that is fitting for a person to practice with one's peers. Even if one is permitted to rebuke his/her peers or their offspring with harsh discipline and they [the transgressor] accept [the harsh rebuke], one should not increase one's rebuke on account of this. [Rather,] one [should] not hold on to their anger – even if one did get angry – one should nullify it and not hold on to his/her anger forever. Even if it is an anger that is permitted to a person, similar to that which is explained [in the verse]:

"When you see the donkey of your enemy, etc." (Exodus 23:5¹); and they (Tosafot²) explained: [Who is the "enemy" that you are permitted to hate and] display anger? That one saw the other transgressing a sin, but [the one seeing] is [alone, such that] he may not testify,³ and [so] he hates the transgressor [and is angry] for the matter of the sin. And even so, the Torah states, "you shall surely help raise it (i.e., help the person)" – "leave that which is in your heart;" rather it is a commandment to bring the transgressor close with love. [As] perhaps it will be beneficial [to act] in this way. And this is exactly the trait of, "God does not hold on to His anger forever."

Study Questions:

1. How do we let go of the anger caused by the wrong without forgiving? What does that even look like?
2. When is this *middah*, not staying angry forever, a more appropriate response than forgiving? When is it more appropriate to forgive?
 - a. Is it always appropriate to either forgive or let go of a wrong?
3. How can rebuke (or constructive feedback) help us get past our anger? Wouldn't it just add to the tension of the exchange? What might be required to ensure a positive outcome?

¹ When you see the donkey of your enemy lying under its burden and would refrain from helping, you must surely help raise it.

² Commenting on Talmud Pesachim 113b, sv. "shere'a bo devar erva – that one saw in them an inappropriate matter."

³ Only two witnesses are permitted to testify in Jewish law and so the person has no legal recourse to rectify the sinner's behavior. Alternatively, since only one person witnessed the transgression, only that person is permitted to hate.