

Week 5, Resentment and Compassion: Letting Go of Anger and Hurt

Supplemental Study Texts

I. Babylonian Talmud, *Rosh Hashana* 17a

Rava said: “One who passes over his/her *middot*, [the heavenly tribunal] passes over all the person’s wrongdoings. As it is stated ‘God pardons/carries transgression and overlooks sin.’ Whose transgression does God pardon? One who overlooks sins [committed against them].”

Rashi explains: “Passes over his/her *middot*” - means that the [offended person] is not careful to calculate the measure [of retribution] that those who caused pain [deserve], rather the person “leaves” their *middot* and [drops the matter] and goes on their way.

רבא אמר כל המעביר על מדותיו מעבירין לו על כל פשעיו שנאמר נושא עון ועובר על פשע למי נושא עון למי שעובר על פשע. **ופירש רשי**: המעביר על מדותיו - שאינו מדקדק למדוד מדה למצעים אותו ומניח מדותיו והולך לו

Rebbetzin Dina Schoonmaker suggested a more literal reading of Rashi’s comment than the simply understood meaning. Rather than the offended person “is not careful to calculate the measure of retribution...,” she suggested Rashi means, “one should pass over their ‘measuring stick’ and drop the matter...” In other words, stop all the measuring!

Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe comments on the Talmud’s teaching:

This is a wonderfully hopeful opening for the Day of Judgment (Rosh HaShanah), for what would we do with our many sins if God would act towards us with strict justice?! The Rabbis reveal that this (our judgment), too¹, depends on our actions, because God deals with our judgment the way in which we deal with others; if we are *ma’avir* (pass over) on our *middot*, and do not act strictly with others who cause us pain - [God, too,] will not be strict in judging us. This demands an enormous amount of vigilance in our *middot* as we prepare for the Day of Judgment and during the Days of Judgment themselves. We must practice vigilance from anger and resentment (*hakpada*) during these days. If we mention [in our prayers to Yom Kippur], *For You are a forgiver of Israel and the Pardoner of the tribes of Jeshurun*² then the person who utters such a prayer must also be a “forgiver” and a “pardoner!” (*Alei Shur* vol. 2, pp. 430-1)

¹ I.e., not only does God *act* toward us the way we act toward others, but God also *judges our sins* the way that we judge others.

² This name refers to Israel in its most lofty state, as the word *yashar* denotes , “upright/straight.”

II. Vayikra / Leviticus 19:17-18 with Chizkuni commentary

לֹא־תִשָּׂא אֶת־אָחִיךָ בְּלִבְבְּךָ
הוֹכַח תּוֹכִיחַ אֶת־עַמִּיתְךָ
וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא עָלָיו חֵטָא:

לֹא־תִקֹּם וְלֹא־תִטּוֹר אֶת־בְּנֵי עַמְךָ
וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ אֲנִי ה':

You shall not hate your kin in your heart;
you shall certainly rebuke your friend,
and you shall not bear a sin on their account.

You shall not take revenge or bear a grudge against the children of your people;
you shall love your fellow [Jew] as yourself, I am HaShem.

Chizkuni (Rabbi Chezekiah ben Manoach, France c. 1220- c. 1260) ad loc:

“- **לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת אָחִיךָ בְּלִבְבְּךָ** -” If it came to your attention that a Jew made negative comments about you, falsely accused you behind your back of wrongdoing, do not bottle your resentment up in your heart by hating them. You should rather, **הוֹכַח תּוֹכִיחַ אֶת עַמִּיתְךָ** “remonstrate with your colleague about having wrongly accused you,” asking them what prompted them to badmouth you. Perhaps, once matters are in the open, you can demonstrate to your colleague that he/she completely misinterpreted one of your actions. Alternately, you will become aware that what had been reported to you as having been said by this person about you was misrepresented, and not meant detrimentally at all. (*Bechor Shor*) You are to act in this manner even if you are convinced that your remonstrations will not help at all. In fact, your failure to make an attempt at reconciliation will be held against you by the heavenly tribunal. This is why the verse concludes with the words: “- **לֹא תִשָּׂא עָלָיו חֵטָא** -” so that you not bear a sin on their account.”

...

“**לֹא תִקֹּם** - **do not take revenge...**” Rashi gives provides an illustration to explain this. [Imagine] if someone had asked a neighbor to lend them their sickle, and had been refused. On the day after that refusal [that neighbor] is asked to borrow a spade to dig with. Now that person not only refuses [to lend] but adds that it is because they were refused the loan of the first person’s sickle. This is an example of revenge, i.e. **לֹא תִקֹּם**. What then is the meaning of **לֹא תִטּוֹר**, “do not bear a grudge?” Answer: if the second person does lend their spade to the one who had refused them their sickle, but added when giving their spade: “I am not like you who refused me his sickle just yesterday.” The person in the second [case] still feels vengeful even though he/she did not act vengefully. If you ask why it is that the Torah did not specifically forbid the first person to refuse to lend the second person his sickle, but

referred with obvious displeasure to the second person who did lend his tool as having committed a violation of a commandment? Surely the Torah should have criticized the first person for being so miserly as not to lend their tool to their neighbor?

We must give the first person the benefit of the doubt for refusing to lend their tool because they may have been afraid that their neighbor would treat the sickle, which he treasured greatly, carelessly, and that would explain the refusal. The Torah does not command us to lend our tools against our better judgment to one we lack trust. On the other hand, the second person made it clear that they bore the first person ill will for their refusal and wanted to impress themselves as being a better person than their neighbor. Therefore, the Torah commanded us to allow our goodwill towards our neighbor to outweigh our disappointment over their having refused us without giving an adequate explanation which would have been acceptable and which would have avoided any ill feeling between these two people. By practicing this kind of goodwill we would have contributed to making this a more peaceful world.

III. Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, *Alei Shur* vol. 238-239³

We have made *Hakpadah*/Resentment a series [of *va'adim*] in itself, even though it seems like a branch of Anger. Anger involves outbursts in fury, yet [this outburst] doesn't [necessarily] leave an impression on the heart of the angry person. Perhaps the person feels regret after exploding in anger. This is not the case with *Hakpadah*: It is held well within the heart and it may not even be recognized from the outside. But it gnaws at the heart more and more, and over time it can turn into real hatred, which can then manifest in horrible language and behavior. One immediate result occasionally occurs – one stops talking to the person about whom they are resentful. Yet the *mishnah* in *Sanhedrin* (chapter 3) establishes: “[The definition of] one who is hated – when you don't speak with someone for three straight days out of hatred.” We find that not speaking to someone because of loathing – this is already defined as actual hatred!

Anger is something we are both capable of and which we must conquer. One [who merits being] called an “*Adam*” (a human being) conquers his/her anger. Regarding *Hakpada* one must crumble [every last bit] until it is removed from the heart, and this is much more difficult. Removing resentment from one's heart is among the most difficult of the *Avodot* (forms of divine Service, or Mussar practice) we can perform in [one's own inner] sanctuary.

This will be the subject of the coming *Va'adim*, with God's help.

³ Translated by Rabbi's Eric Gurvis and Avi Fertig.

First Va'ad

A person who does not pay attention to oneself will not feel their own resentments at all. These feelings are so natural and obvious that one will find it hard to determine that they are resentful of another. Only by paying careful attention will we become aware of our resentments. However, [once we do pay attention] it will be proven to us that we might harbor resentment tens of times each day. Therefore, this [paying attention] is the beginning of our *hitlamdut*,⁴ to set for ourselves a few minutes each day in which we will examine whether resentments were awakened/aroused within us during the course of the day. This fixed practice time can come as a part of our regular Mussar study session,⁵ or it can precede it. It is possible that during the first week (of such focus) we may not find any resentments; only over time will we come to recognize that indeed, we harbored resentments multiple times during the day, mostly over minor matters. [Such as] someone is sitting in my regular seat; or someone who arrived after me jumps on the bus ahead of me; or someone does not respond politely to a question I have asked; etc. And sometimes it happens that someone gives me a “sting” during a friendly conversation – this already brings deeper resentment.

Should you say, why do I need this trouble of *searching* within for resentments and becoming aware of them – it would be better that I not feel (notice) them at all! However, Maimonides has already instructed us in the fourth chapter of *Shemonah Perakim* (the *Eight Chapters*, Maimonides' introduction to his commentary on *Pirkei Avot*, 4:3) that, “the absence of feelings of insult and scorn (as well as pleasure⁶) is bad, [and will cause] us to [mistakenly] say about one who is [actually] lacking spiritual sensitivity that they are tolerant (lit., able to bear a burden), and that one who is lazy is content (lit., happy with their lot), and one who lacks feelings of pleasure due to their coarse nature, that they are careful [not to sin], in other words that they possess fear of sin [*yirah*],” see there.⁷ A *bar da'at* / thinking person⁸ cannot be contented with these errors [in judgment]. [Rather] one [who is a *bar da'at*] must recognize their resentments and not delude themselves that they haven't felt [the insult] or that they lack any resentment – because this only testifies to their “coarse nature” and does not reflect a positive *middah*. Therefore, let us [make the effort to] clearly recognize our resentments over [the period] of enough time until we come to recognize them and how all-encompassing they are [in our lives].

Second Va'ad

[By now] it has become clear that our days are strewn with small resentments every step of the way, and (if we have been doing the work) we have come to appreciate that these resentments poison our relationships with other people. These [recurring

⁴ *Hitlamdut* means to teach oneself and is the term Rabbi Wolbe uses for the learning process achieved through the practical/active work in *middot*.

⁵ Rabbi Wolbe refers to a fixed time to study Mussar, aside from this specific *kabbalah* practice.

⁶ This parenthesis appears in the original Hebrew text.

⁷ In other words, Rabbi Wolbe is suggesting that the reader see the Rambam's actual text.

⁸ In Mussar parlance this refers to a self-aware individual who is spiritually elevated.

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Tzelem Elokim - The Likeness of God

resentments] accustom us to think that they [i.e., those who have caused us resentment] are always guilty, and that we are [always] right.

We are speaking of (i.e., dealing with) small [matters causing] resentment. Let us learn to disintegrate these bits [of resentment] immediately so that they not leave any impression in our hearts. [Let us accomplish this by] immediately activating our thoughts [in the following way, for example]: – “Why did he push his way onto the bus ahead of me? Surely, he is having a difficult day, and he wishes to board the bus so he can sit for a few minutes in peace – swallow it⁹ for him!” [Or] – “Why did she take my usual seat? She must have forgotten, or she did not know that this was my seat, or perhaps she thought I would not be coming today since I was late.” Or – “Why did the secretary not answer me politely when I asked my question? This poor soul - there must have been some quarrel at home earlier today or with her supervisor at work. Perhaps she is worried about finances, and she does not sleep [well] at night?”

And when we hear (or feel) the sting (or bite) of our friend we should immediately consider: maybe she is correct, and perhaps I deserve this stinging remark? We must weigh carefully whether there is a speck of truth in what she is saying.

This is a delicate [exercise in] *hitlamdut*, however, through it we will teach ourselves a practical lesson in loving (God's) creatures: We will accustom ourselves to have a positive outlook, with compassion and forgiveness for other people. These bits of resentment are things people tend to trod over (i.e., do not consider with seriousness), yet we already know that it is specifically these things (i.e., the way we deal with resentment) which determine whether a person is judged as good or the opposite.

⁹ The Hebrew here is *yivula lo* / יבולע לו which can either mean, “[would it be] harmful to him” or “swallow for him.” The text has an exclamation point rather than a question mark, and so we have translated it as a directive to “swallow it,” meaning, swallow the resentment by appreciating his situation.

וקובעת ההקפדה לעצמה מדור מיוחד אף שהיא לכאורה מענפי הכעס. הכעס היא התפרצות בזעם, אך היא אינה משאירה רושם בלב הכעסן, ואולי הוא מתחרט אחר כך על ההתפרצות. לא כן ההקפדה: היא שמורה היטב בלב ואולי בכלל אינה ניכרת בחוץ. אבל היא מכרסמת בלב יותר ויותר, ובמשך הזמן היא עלולה ליהפך לשנאה ממש, ואז בכחה לגרום דיבורים ומעשים נוראים. תוצאה מידית אחת יש לה לפעמים: מפסיקים לדבר עם זה שמקפידים עליו. אך המשנה בסנהדרין פ"ג קובעת: «שונא – כל שלא דבר עמו ג' ימים באיבה». הרי לא לדבר מחמת איבה – היא כבר שנאה ממש!

והנה כעס צריכים ויכולים לכבוש. מי שהוא «אדם», כובש כעסו. הקפדה צריכים לפורר עד שהיא סרה מן הלב, וזה הרבה יותר קשה. להסיר קפידא מהלב היא מהעבודות הקשות שבמקדש. זה יהיה נושא הועדים הבאים בע"ה.

ועד ראשון

מי שאינו שם לב לעצמו אינו מרגיש כלל בקפידות שלו. הן כה טבעיות ופשוטות אצלו שהוא מתקשה לקבוע כי אמנם הוא מקפיד על מישוהו. רק על ידי שימת לב נעמוד על הקפידות שלנו, אבל אז ניווכח לראות כי ייתכן שעשרות פעמים ביום נוצרת בנו קפידא. אי לזאת, זוהי התחלת ההתלמדות, שנקבע

רלט

מערכת העבודה המוסרית

לעצמנו זמן של דקות מספר בכל יום שבו נעיין אם אמנם נתעוררו לנו קפידות במשך היום. קביעות זאת יכולה להיות בקשר עם סדר מוסר או בהתחלתו. יכול להיות שבשבוע הראשון לא נמצא כל קפידא; רק במשך הזמן נרגיש כי אמנם כן הקפדנו כמה פעמים ביום, לרוב על דברים קטנים: מישהו תפס מקומי הקבוע, מי שבא אחרי זינק לפני לאוטובוס, מישהו לא ענה לי באדיבות על שאלתי וכדומה. ופעמים קורה שמישהו נתן לי "עקיצה" בתוך שיחת רעים – זוהי כבר קפידא יותר עמוקה.

אם תאמר מה לי לצרה זאת לחפש בקרבי קפידות ולהיות מודע להן – מוטב שלא ארגיש בהן כלל! אך כבר לימד אותנו הרמב"ם ברביעי מהשמונה פרקים, כי "העדר ההרגשה בחרפה ובוז (וכן בהנאות) הוא רע, וזהו מהטעויות במידות: פעמים יחשבו הקצה האחרון שהוא טוב, ויאמרו על פחות הנפש שהוא סבלן, ועל העצל שהוא שמח בחלקו, ועל נעדר הרגש ההנאות לעובי טבעיו שהוא נזהר, כלומר ירא חטא", עיי"ש. בר דעת אינו יכול להשלים עם טעויות כאלו. הוא צריך להכיר את הקפידות שלו ולא יתימר לחשוב שאינו מרגיש בהם או שבכלל אינו מקפיד – כי זה היה מעיד רק על "עובי טבעו" ולא על מידה טובה. נתלמד, איפוא, לעמוד בבירור על הקפידות שלנו, וזאת במשך זמן מספיק עד שנעמוד עליהן ועל ההיקף שלהן.

ועד שני

נוכחנו לראות, כי ימינו זרועים קפידות קטנות על כל צעד, וגם שמנו לב כי קפידות אלו מרעילות את יחסינו עם בני אדם: הן מרגילות אותנו בדיעה כי תמיד הם אשמים ואנחנו צודקים.

בקפידות קטנות הדברים אמורים כאן. וננסה להתלמד לפורר אותן תיכף עד שלא יישאר כל רושם מהן בלבנו. ונפעיל מחשבתנו מיד: "למה הוא דחף עצמו לתוך האוטובוס לפני? הוא בודאי קשה-יום, ורוצה לכה"פ באוטובוס לשבת כמה דקות במנוחה – יבולע לו!" "למה הלה תפס מקומי הקבוע? מסתמא שכח, או לא ידע שזהו מקומי, או שחשב כי לא אבוא היום כי הרי איחרתי". "למה לא ענה לי פקיד זה באדיבות? מסכן הוא – בודאי היתה לו קטטה בתוך ביתו או עם המנהל שלו, ואולי יש לו דאגות של פרנסה ולא ישן בלילה". ובשמענו "עקיצה" מאת חברנו נחשוב מיד: אולי הוא צדק, והגיעה לי העקיצה? ונשקול היטב אם לא היה קורטוב של אמת בהערתו.

התלמוד דקה היא זו, אבל על ידה נתלמד למעשה פרק באהבת הבריות: אנו מתרגלים במבט טוב וברחמנות וסלחנות על בני האדם. הן קפידות אלו הם דברים שאדם דש בעקיביו, אך הגנו יודעים כבר כי דווקא דברים אלה חותכים את הדין על האדם לטוב ולמוטב.