



Just Calm Down! Conquering Frustration

SOURCE SHEET AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Are you the sort who is likely to say “I don’t have an anger problem”, but spends a *lot of time being annoyed and frustrated with much of daily life*?

Sometimes repressed anger masquerades as persistent feelings of frustration or annoyance robbing us of joy in life.

Q: What do you think is at the root of being easily frustrated, annoyed and/or angry?

Most would say that in one form or another persistent frustration and annoyance comes from the outside world -- life, people and circumstances that bothers me. In truth however, frustration is an “inside job” stemming more from our own expectations and beliefs about life not being met.

Consider the following source:

SOURCE 1: *The Cat and the Vase*

Mom has been yelling at Johnny for the last 10 minutes trying to get him to stop playing ball in the house, afraid that one of her antique vases may be broken. As she takes the ball away, a cat darts through an open window, scurries across the dining room table knocking her vase to the floor with a crash. Mom is so sad she starts to cry as she picks up the pieces of her vase. Jonny is incredulous that even though mom yelled at him for bouncing the ball, she didn’t yell at the cat once for breaking the vase. “I wish I was a cat”, he blurted out. Then he thought for a moment and said, “no I don’t.”

Expectations are decisive when it comes to causing anger. Change your expectations, erase your anger.

We often set expectations for those we feel “should know better”. Perhaps we need to reconsider this approach?

SOURCE 2: *Talmud Shabbat 105b Anger Compared to Idol Worship*

“A person who tears his clothes in **anger**, or breaks his possessions or scatters his money in **rage**, is considered as though he **worships idols....**”

What Torah verse alludes to this? “There shall be no foreign gods in you, nor shall you bow down to them” (psalms 81:10) What is the foreign god inside of man? This is the (self-destructive) **negative inclination** within.

Q: Anger is for sure a bad trait, but why do you suppose it is linked to idol worship? And how do we relate to that today?

SOURCE 3: *The Roots of the Negative Inclination based upon Talmud Bracot 12b*

A famous verse in the Shema warns us : “Don’t be pulled after your heart and after your eyes”. The Talmud teaches “Your heart” refers to **ego** and “your eyes” **physical desires**.

Q: How do you see ego and desires contributing to getting frustrated and angry in life?

SOURCE 4: *Rabbi Reuven Leuchter Sums up how this process works.*

A person's wants and desires, or *ratzon* (will in Hebrew) are at the core of who a person is and his greatest drive. The reason why anger is so difficult to control is that one is angered by a situation that goes directly against one's *ratzon* or desires. The anger is triggered because the situation is going against "Me".

Let's take a deeper look at what underlies the reaction of anger:

SOURCE 5: *Moses Hitting Rock Parshat Chuchas (20:10)*

He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, **Listen, you rebels**, must we bring you water out of this rock? Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank.

But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, Because you did not **Believe** in Me to sanctify Me in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give to them.

The famous sage Maimonides tells us that this great mistake, which barred Moses from entering the promised land, was due to the anger which he showed to the people when he said, "Listen you rebels" and proceeded to strike the rock.

Q: If his mistake was anger, why does G-d accusing him of "not believing in Me to sanctify Me" in front of the people? Is belief in G-d somehow related to anger? What do you think is the relationship and what can it teach us about getting angry?

SOURCE 6: *The Dog and the Stick*

A dog was repeatedly being hit by a stick and in response retaliated by biting the stick, not realizing that his beating was at the hand of the one holding the stick. The stick was just the messenger.

We often get angry at the various messengers that G-d sends us in our lives instead of getting the message. This doesn't mean that people who may hurt us aren't responsible for their actions. However, it's all according to a divine plan.

Always remembering that G-d is intimately involved with the details of our lives, to ultimately benefit us, should help us remain calm when things don't go our way.

SOURCE 7: *The Iron Chef Competition that is Life*

Recently, Project Inspire hosted an Iron Chef competition asking teams to create the best dish out of a strange mix of ingredients. Even though the ingredients were no doubt oddly paired, no one became frustrated nor complained that this wasn't what they were expecting. Actually, the teams had fun with it and it allowed them to become really creative in what they served up. The team that did the most with the ingredients that they were given won.

Q: Reflecting on this experience, isn't life a little bit like this competition? In what way?

If we approach life in this way, we do all we can to accomplish while gaining the resilience to "roll with the punches" that G-d lovingly throws our way. All with the goal of making us the greatest people we can be.