

# עדת אש קודש

## Adass Aish Kodesh



### WHICH BRANCH DO YOU BELONG TO?

*Avos 5.11*

**HARAV Y. R. RUBIN**

In my back garden are a few huge trees, they must be over a hundred years old, and most probably have witnessed history that precedes all my imagination. They were once part of a large forest, and at some time or another many of their cohorts were chopped down to make room for what in time became my humble abode. These trees are gnarled, yet regal, and I have become something of a friend to them. Whenever I am perplexed, or conjuring with a difficult problem, I go out, and weather permitting, sit under the bough of my favourite one and ask it what it thinks. You think me mad, well I can't disagree, yet, somehow those old branches seem to give me answers to many a knotty question.

Take yesterday, for instance. I was learning this particular Mishna and something struck me immediately....let me share the content, and then my problem.

"There are four types of temperament: One who is angered easily and pacified easily, his gain is offset by his loss; One who is hard to anger and hard to pacify, his loss is offset by his gain; One who is hard to anger and pacified easily is pious; One who is angered easily and hard to pacify is wicked."

Now what bothered me firstly was that the Mishna takes it for granted that being angry is a trait we all have, and that it is only how we handle it that is important. One would imagine that a better position would be if one never grew angry at all, and that such a person would truly be the pious soul. Is it then impossible to be a gentle sweet person that never has a tinge of anger? Well, the Mishna speaks to us humans, and well, yes, all of us have anger within us.

Rabbi Abraham Twersky in his work on Avos, 'Visions of the Fathers,' explains that anger comes in three parts: the first is "The emotion that occurs when a person is provoked. This is virtually a reflex action which is not within a person's voluntary control." He goes on to explain that the next two parts are how we react to this emotion, and how long we retain this feeling and hold a grudge.

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Armed with this new understanding I could now understand that the Mishna has started off with the given that we all feel anger. In truth it may be that anger is a mechanism that allows us to grow, because when we are provoked we can sometimes use such energy in a positive way by creating new ideas and thoughts. If one has no reactions to things that happen, then maybe he is just a corpse and not really alive. Obviously the Mishna wants us to understand that we must learn to measure our reactions, for as the Zohar says, "One who is angry is as though he worshipped idols." The idol worshipped is the ego that gets dented when it is so overblown that anger stems from self aggrandisement. So, like much in life, one must see anger and dissect it. Is my anger an impulse that serves as a warning, or is it another indication that I am so insecure that anything that impinges on how I see things is a personal attack? Can I see beyond the normal spark of anger and weigh it for what it is, or is every little thing going to become a major stumbling block? There is nothing worse than living a life full of anger. You become totally embroiled in others' actions and see everything in hues of bleak darkness. No laughter is real, and the anger grows, until it is all you are, and its totality is the idol you live for.

So what has this all to do with my trees? Well, wondering about all this led me to sit on my thinking chair under the branches...and as I looked at the long branches I realised that every turn that those gnarled tendrils took over the ages were caused by some external force. Each branch seeks light, and sometimes it has to grow in a way that may not seem straight, but in the end it takes it to its source of illumination. If the tree insists on going in only one direction it is doomed to die. There are many saplings on the forest floor, but only few grow to be towering trees. Those that survive learn to work with the elements and grow accordingly. Anger is one of our elements, and if we can learn to grow with it, we can truly see the light and flourish. As I thought about this and watched how my trees have actually performed this elaborate trick of survival, my heart was filled with a sense of wellbeing. Looking back in life, I must admit that there were often moments of anger, and if I care to admit it, much of what I now see as light is such because I somehow learnt to get through those moments. The Nesivas Sholom of Slonim writes:

"The struggles a person finds himself struggling with most in life are an indication of what his particular Neshomah was sent down to the world to fix, and the path that his soul is meant to use to come close to Hashem. Never think of any particular struggle as a problem that we 'unfortunately' have to deal with. Just the opposite! It was given to us by Hashem so we can grow. This is our opportunity to come close to Hashem. That is why He gave us this struggle. He is calling us. He wants me and He wants you. And this is one of the main reasons we came down to this world. Hashem wants us to use this struggle with sincerity as a 'spring board', now all we have to do is jump on it. And if we fall, chas vesholom, we just gather momentum for a higher jump next time."

As I was lost in this musing my granddaughter came into the garden and deposited her young baby onto my lap. I watched this precious child smile, and allowed her to use my stomach as a trampoline; after all what are Ziedy's for? As her eyes sparkled I told her about the tree that was watching her overhead. She is sort of used to my babbling, and at eight months of age seems to take me quite philosophically. However, at that moment I became clearer in my own mind; yes those trees came to the rescue once again. If they can grow I guess we all can, despite the anger that comes our way.

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