

Forgiveness In The Heart

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I. Forgiveness in the heart?

The Gemara responds that the prohibition against taking vengeance and bearing a grudge indeed applies to cases of personal anguish; however, actually, **the scholar may keep resentment in his heart**, though he should not act on it or remind the other person of his insulting behavior. The Gemara asks: But didn't Rava say: With regard to whoever forgoes his reckonings with others for injustices done to him, the heavenly court in turn forgoes punishment for all his sins? The Gemara answers: Indeed, even a scholar who is insulted must forgive insults, but that is only in cases where his antagonist has sought to appease him, in which case he should allow himself to be appeased toward him. However, if no apology has been offered, the scholar should not forgive him, in order to uphold the honor of the Torah

ואמר רבי יוחנן משום רבי שמעון בן יהוּצָדָק:
כל תלמיד חכם שאינו נוטר כְּנֶחֱשׁ —
אינו תלמיד חכם. והקתיב: "לא תקום ולא
תשור" ... ?

לעולם דְּנָקִיט לִיה בְּלִיבֵיהּ.

והאמר רבא: כל המעביר על מדותיו —
מעבירין לו על כל פשעיו!

דמפיסו ליה ומפיס.

On the conception of forgiveness as *debt forgiveness*, matters of the *heart* are not essential to forgiving. Is that right? Recall Exodus 32:

Turn from Your blazing anger, and renounce the plan to punish Your people.

שוב מחרון אפך והנחם עליהרעה לעמך:

Moses is asking not only for G-d to give up an *action*, the *vengeance* to which He is entitled as a kind of moral debt; also asking for a change of heart, to give up His *anger*

Imagine angerless “forgiveness” in your own life:

You forgive your partner for their betrayal but resent them for it the rest of your life

You apologize to a friend for hurting him and he “forgives” but makes clear he still *resents you*

Another view: **to forgive is to foreswear resentment or (moral) anger**

An intriguing suggestion, one that most philosophers in the analytic tradition think is either the truth or something close to it. But it raises important questions:

- 1) What is anger/resentment such that it plays this important role in our lives?
- 2) How can we forgive?

II. Emotions, Reasons, Judgements

Emotion is often *contrasted* with “reason”; but is that right?

Emotions can be *warranted* and *unwarranted* (apt/inapt, appropriate/inappropriate)

exs: fear; anger

Emotions have *normative standards*—they are responsive in some way to *reasons*

The Passover Haggadah

Pour your wrath upon the nations that did not know You and upon the kingdoms that did not call upon Your Name! Since they have consumed Ya'akov and laid waste his habitation (Psalms 79:6-7). Pour out Your fury upon them and the fierceness of Your anger shall reach them (Psalms 69:25)! You shall pursue them with anger and eradicate them from under the skies of the Lord (Lamentations 3:66).

הגדת פסח

שִׁפְךָ תִּמְתֵּךְ אֶל־הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדְעוּךָ וְעַל־מַמְלָכוֹת אֲשֶׁר בְּשִׁמְךָ לֹא קָרְאוּ. כִּי אָכַל אֶת־יַעֲקֹב וְאֶת־נְוֵהוּ הִשְׁמִי. שִׁפְךָ־עֲלֵיהֶם זַעֲמָךְ וְחַרוֹן אַפֶּךָ יִשְׁיגֵם. תִּרְדֹּף בְּאַף וּתְשַׁמְדֵם מִתַּחַת שָׁמַי ה'.

Maimonides Mishneh Torah Human Dispositions 1:4

The straight path is the mean disposition found in each and every tendency of all the human tendencies. Such tendency is removed from both extremes an equal distance, and is not nearer to one than to the other. Therefore have the wise men of yore commanded that man should ever review his tendencies estimate them, and direct them toward the middle-path so that he will be sound in body. How may one do it? He should not be an excitable person, easily angered; nor like the dead without feelings, but adopt a middle-course, not to become indignant, save only at something big which is worthy enough to be angry at, so that the like should not be done another time.

משנה תורה להרמב"ם הלכות דעות

ד:א

הַדָּרֵךְ הַיָּשָׁרָה הִיא מִדָּה בִּינֹנִית שֶׁבְּכֹל דְּעָה וְדַעָה מְכַל הַדְּעוֹת שֵׁיִשׁ לוֹ לְאָדָם. וְהִיא הַדְּעָה שֶׁהִיא רְחוּקָה מִשְׁתֵּי הַקְּצוּוֹת רְחוּק שְׁוֶה וְאֵינָה קְרוּבָה לֹא לְזוֹ וְלֹא לְזוֹ. לְפִיכָךְ צִוּוּ חֲכָמִים הַרְּאוּשׁוֹנִים שֶׁיְהִיֵּא אָדָם שֶׁם דְּעוֹתָיו תְּמִיד וּמִשְׁעֵר אוֹתָם וּמְכֹנֵן אוֹתָם בְּדָרֶךְ הָאֲמֻצְעִית כְּדִי שֶׁיְהִיֵּא שְׁלֵם בְּגוּפוֹ. כִּי־צָד. לֹא יִהְיֶה בְּעַל חֶמָה נוֹחַ לְכַעַס וְלֹא כִּמֵּת שֶׁאֵינּוּ מְרַגִּישׁ אֶלָּא בִּינֹנִי. לֹא יְכַעַס אֶלָּא עַל דָּבָר גָּדוֹל שֶׁרְאוּי לְכַעַס עָלָיו כְּדִי שֶׁלֹּא יַעֲשֶׂה כִּי־וְצָא בּוֹ פַּעַם אַחֲרָת.

Maimonides Mishneh Torah, Human Dispositions 2:3

And, yet, there are certain tendencies which man is forbidden to follow in the middle-way, but must distance himself from extreme to extreme....One should teach himself not to get angry, even over a matter which befits anger. If one desires to engender awe in his children and his household, or in the public, if he be at the head of a community, even if he desire to get angry at them so as to bring them back to the good way, he should only act angry in their presence so as to reprove them, but his disposition must remain calm within himself, even as a man imitates, who is angry when the time calls forth anger but in reality he is not angry. The sages of yore said: "He who yields to anger is as if he worshiped idolatry". They also said: "Whosoever yields to anger, if he be a wise man his wisdom

משנה תורה להרמב"ם הלכות דעות ב:ג

וַיִּשׁ דְּעוֹת שֶׁאֲסוּר לוֹ לְאָדָם לְנַהֵג בָּהֶן כִּי־בִינֹנִית אֶלָּא יִתְרַחַק מִן הַקְּצָה הָאֶחָד עַד הַקְּצָה הָאֲחֵר....וַיִּלְמַד עֲצָמוֹ שֶׁלֹּא יְכַעַס וְאֶפְלוּ עַל דָּבָר שֶׁרְאוּי לְכַעַס עָלָיו. וְאִם רָצָה לְהַטִּיל אֵימָה עַל בְּנָיו וּבְנֵי בֵּיתוֹ אוֹ עַל הַצִּבּוּר אִם הִנֵּה פְּרִנָּס וְרָצָה לְכַעַס עָלֵיהֶן כְּדִי שֶׁיִּתְחַזְּרוּ לְמוֹטֵב יִרְאֶה עֲצָמוֹ בְּפִנְיָהֶם שֶׁהוּא כּוֹעֵס כְּדִי לְיַסְרֵם וְתִהְיֶה דְּעוֹתוֹ מִשְׁשָׁבֵת בִּינּוֹ לְבִין עֲצָמוֹ שֶׁאָדָם שֶׁהוּא מְדַמֶּה כּוֹעֵס בְּשַׁעַת כְּעֵסוֹ וְהוּא אֵינּוֹ כּוֹעֵס. אֲמָרוּ חֲכָמִים הַרְּאוּשׁוֹנִים כָּל הַכּוֹעֵס כְּאֵלוֹ עוֹבֵד עֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים. וְאָמְרוּ שֶׁכָּל הַכּוֹעֵס אִם חָכֵם הוּא חֲכָמָתוֹ מִסְתַּלְקֵת מִמֶּנּוּ וְאִם נְבִיא

leaves him, and if he be a prophet his prophecy leaves him." Verily the life of irritable persons is no life. They have, therefore, commanded to be afar from anger, so that one will train himself not to mind even the things which do cause irritation, for such is the good way. The conduct of the just is to take insults but not give insults, hear themselves flouted but make no reply, do their duty as a work of love, and bear affliction cheerfully. Concerning them the Verse says: "But may those that love Him be as the rising of the sun in his might" (Judg. 5.31).

הוא נבואתו מסתלקת ממנו. ובעלי כעס אין תייהם חיים. לפיכך צווי להתרחק מן הכעס עד שינהיג עצמו שלא ירגיש אפלו לדברים המקעיסים וזו היא הדרך הטובה. ודרך הצדיקים הן עלובין ואינן עולבין שומעים תרפתם ואינם משיבין עושין מאהבה ושמתים ביסורים. ועליהם הכתוב אומר (שופטים ה לא) "ואהביו כצאת השמש בגברתו":

Different emotions are constitutively connected to different judgements

That I was wronged... That he is a wrongdoer... (anger/resentment)

That it is dangerous (fear)

That he has what I want (jealousy)

We have a *kind* of control (with obvious limits) over our emotions via these judgement

Some emotions are essentially *bipolar*

Contrast general anger/frustration/irritation with *resentment* or being *angry at*

A new picture of wrongdoing and forgiveness:

1) To wrong another, among other things, *warrants her resenting you*

A kind of connection here, not of a moral debt, but a moral-emotional response

2) To forgive is to withdraw that anger

III. A New Puzzle: How is Forgiveness Ever Appropriate?

Seems like a strange puzzle—and indeed, we'll see it has a clear solution. But suppose you are angry at someone for hurting you; is it ever right to forgive?

1) Either the hurt they caused warrants anger or it does not

2) If it warrants anger, then you should not forgive (withdraw anger)

3) If it did not warrant anger, then forgiveness isn't necessary—you shouldn't have been angry in the first place

If this sort of picture is right, then forgiveness is always a kind of transcendence of what you have reason to do—it's always "a mistake" but maybe a mistake we are willing to make.

How might we diffuse this puzzle: by pointing to something that *changes* whether or not anger is warranted. Something like *apology* or *reparation*

Why would apology warrant the withdrawal of anger:

The wrongdoer has renounced their wrong

They humble themselves

Forge a connection through apology and forgiveness that heals the anger

IV. So Why Forgive

Two kinds of answer:

- 1) In a given case, because anger is no longer appropriate
- 2) More generally, because anger/resentment has consequences—can be destructive