



Talmud Tales – Session 19 – God’s Anger

BT Brachot 7a

And said R. Yohanan in the name of R. Yosé: How do we know that one should not placate a person when he is angry? It is in line with the following verse of Scripture: ‘My face will go and then I will give you rest’ (Exo. 33:14). Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to Moses, ‘Wait until my angry countenance passes, and then I shall give you rest.’

But does the Holy One, blessed be He, get angry?

Indeed so.

For it has been taught on Tannaite authority: “A God that is angry every day” (Psa. 7:12). And how long is this anger going to last?

A moment.

And how long is a moment?

It is one fifty-eight thousand eight hundred and eighty-eighth part of an hour. [*about 1/1000th of a second*]

And no creature except for the wicked Balaam has ever been able to fix the moment exactly. For concerning him it has been written, “He knows the knowledge of the Most High” (Num. 24:16). Now if Balaam did not even know what his beast was thinking, was he likely to know

what the Most High is thinking? But this teaches that he knew exactly how to reckon the very moment that the Holy One, blessed be he, would be angry.

That is in line with what the prophet said to Israel, “O my people, remember now what Balak, king of Moab, devised, and what Balaam, son of Beor, answered him... that you may know the righteous acts of the Lord” (Mic. 6:5).

Said R. Eleazar, “The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel, ‘Know that I did any number of acts of righteousness with you, for I did not get angry in the time of the wicked Balaam. For had I gotten angry, not one of (the enemies of) Israel would have survived, not a remnant.’ That is in line with what Balaam said to Balak, ‘How shall I curse whom God has not cursed, and how shall I loathe whom the Lord has not loathed?’ (Num. 23:8). This teaches that for that entire time [God] did not get mad.”

And how long is God’s anger?

It is a moment.

And how long is a moment?

Said R. Abin, and some say, R. Abina, “A moment lasts as long as it takes to say ‘a moment.’”

And how do we know that a moment is how long God is angry?

For it is said, “For his anger is but for a moment, his favor is for a lifetime” (Psa. 30:6).

If you like, you may derive the lesson from the following: “Hide yourself for a little while until the anger be past” (Isa. 26:20).

And when is God angry?

Said Abbaye, “It is during the first three hours of the day, when the comb of the rooster is white, and it stands on one foot.”

But it stands on one foot every hour.

To be sure, it stands on its foot every hour, but in all the others it has red streaks, and in the moment at hand there are no red streaks [in the comb of the rooster].

A certain Sadducean who lived in R. Joshua b. Levi's neighborhood would give him plenty of trouble by citing verses of Scripture. One day [Joshua] took a rooster and put it between the legs of his bed and watched it. He thought, "When that very moment comes [that the comb is unstreaked], I shall curse him."

When that very moment came, [Joshua] was dozing. He said to him, "That fact implies that it is not proper to do things this way."

'And his tender mercies are over all his works' (Psa. 155:9), and it is written, 'Neither is it good for the righteous to punish' (Pro. 17:26).