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## Yalta and the Place of Anger in Leadership

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### **I. Righteous Anger**

#### **1. Talmud Bavli Brachot 51b**

עולא אקלע לבי רב נחמן. פריד ריפתא, פריד ברפת מזונא, יתב ליה פסא דברכתא לרב נחמן. אמר ליה רב נחמן: לישדר מר פסא דברכתא לילתא. אמר ליה: הכי אמר רבי יוחנן: אין פרי בטנה של אשה מתברך אלא מפרי בטנו של איש, שנאמר "וברך פרי בטנה". "פרי בטנה" לא נאמר, אלא "פרי בטנה". תניא נמי הכי, רבי נתן אומר: מנין שאין פרי בטנה של אשה מתברך אלא מפרי בטנו של איש — שנאמר: "וברך פרי בטנה", "פרי בטנה" לא נאמר, אלא "פרי בטנה" אדחכי שמעה לתא, קמה בזיתא, ועלת לבי חמרא, ותברא ארבע מאה דני דחמרא. אמר ליה רב נחמן: גשדר לה מר פסא אחרת, שלח לה: כל האי נבגא, דברכתא היא. שלחה ליה: ממהדורי — מילי, ומסמרטוטי — כלמי.

'Ulla was once at the house of R. Nahman. They had a meal and he said grace, and he handed the cup of benediction to R. Nahman. R. Nahman said to him: Please send the cup of benediction to Yalta. He said to him: Thus said R. Johanan: The fruit of a woman's body is blessed only from the fruit of a man's body, since it says, He will also bless the fruit of thy body. It does not say the fruit of her body, but the fruit of thy body. It has been taught similarly: Whence do we know that the fruit of a woman's body is only blessed from the fruit of a man's body? Because it says: He will also bless the fruit of thy body. It does not say the fruit of her body, but the fruit of thy body. Meanwhile Yalta heard, (that Ulla had refused to send her the cup) and she got up in a passion and went to the wine store and broke four hundred jars of wine. R. Nahman said to him: Let the Master send her another cup. He sent it to her with a message: All that wine can be counted as a benediction. She returned the answer: Gossip comes from peddlars and vermin from rags.

#### **2. The Madwoman in the Rabbi's Attic: Rereading the Women of the Talmud, Gila Fine, 10-12**

"Gossip comes from peddlars and lice from rags," Yalta snaps back, incensed. Infuriated by this rabbinic messenger and his Israelite way, she responds by throwing Ulla's gesture, together with as many insults as she possibly can, back in his face: "You, Ulla, are nothing but a gossiping, rag-wearing, lice-infested peddler!" Thus far the story of Yalta. At first reading, we seem to have before us a classic shrew tale: We have the comedic undertones; the violence, both verbal and physical; the pitiable and placating husband; and most

importantly, the bad-tempered madwoman, who feels herself scorned and unleashes her fury at everyone, and everything, in her path. But is this the story the Talmud is telling?

...A similar point is made by Susi Kaplow in a 1973 essay "Getting Angry," which discusses the fraught relationship between women and anger. When men get angry, claims Kaplow, they are indignant; when women get angry, they are irrational. This, too, is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Dismiss a woman as irrational, ill-tempered, and shrewish, and she will become irrational, ill-tempered, and shrewish.

### 3. Talmud Bavli Niddah 20b

ילתא אייתא דמא לקמיה דרבה בר בר חנה - וטמי לה, הדר אייתא לקמיה דרב יצחק בריה דרב יהודה - ודכי לה. והיכי עביד הכי? והתניא: חכם שטימא - אין חברו רשאי לטהר, אסר - אין חברו רשאי להתיר מעיקרא טמויי הוה מטמי לה, כיון דא"ל: דכל יומא הוה מדכי לי כי האי גונא, והאידנא הוא דחש בעיניה - דכי לה..

Yalta once brought some blood to Rabbah b. Bar Hana who informed her that it was unclean. She then took it to R. Isaac the son of Rab Judah who told her that it was clean. But how could he act in this manner, seeing that it was taught: If a Sage declared [aught] unclean another Sage may not declare it clean; if he forbade anything his colleague may not permit it? — At first he (R. Isaac) informed her indeed that it was unclean, but when she told him that on every other occasion he (Rabbah) declared such blood as clean, but that on the last occasion he had a pain in his eye, he gave her his ruling that it was clean. But are women believed in such circumstances? — Yes, and so it was also taught: A woman (who does not submit the original blood) is believed when she says, 'I saw a kind of blood like this one (which she produces) but I have lost it.' (and if the blood she submits is clean she may be declared clean).

### 4. Rachel Adler, *Here Comes Skotsl: Renewing Halacha*

The authority passing judgment on women's blood, Yalta slyly suggests, has a pain in its eye, and that is why it mistakenly rules the blood impure.

### 5. Maharsha (Samuel Eidels, 1555-1631) Ibid.

כעסה ילתא ותברא ארבע מאה דני דחמרא להורות שאין כעסה בשביל כוס יין שלא שלח לה שהרי אינו נחשב בעינה אלא על כוס הברכה שלא שלח לה כעסה.

Yalta was angry and broke four hundred jars of wine to teach that she was not angry because of the wine that was not sent to her, as the wine per se was not important to her; rather, she was angry because the cup of benediction was not sent to her.

## 6. The Madwoman in the Rabbi's Attic: Rereading the Women of the Talmud, Gila Fine, p 21

...[W]e may now understand the final line, not as a torrent of abuse, but as Yalta's staking her claim to the blessing of childbirth. "*Gossip comes from peddlers and lice from rags*"; lice, according to ancient biology, did not reproduce, but rather spontaneously generated. Take women out of the reproductive equation, says Yalta to Ulla, and you might be able to reproduce lice, you might be able to generate gossip. But for any real act of procreation, both woman and man, vessel and seed, are necessary. Women might be vessels, but they are no less essential to the creation of life.

## II. God's Anger

### 7. Bereishit 49:7

אָרוּר אַפֶּם כִּי עָז וְעִבְרָתָם כִּי קִשְׁתָּהּ אֶחְלָקֶם בְּיַעֲקֹב וְאַפִּיצֶם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל: {פ}

Cursed be their (Shimon and Levi) anger so fierce, And their wrath so relentless. I will divide them in Jacob, Scatter them in Israel.

### 8. Gemara Brachot 7a

מאי מצלי?

The Gemara asks: **What does God pray?**

אָמַר רַב זוטרא בר טוביה, אָמַר רַב: "יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶי שְׂיִכְבְּשׁוּ רַחֲמֵי אֵת כַּעַסִּי, וַיְגֹלּוּ רַחֲמֵי עַל מַדּוּתִי, וְאַתְּנֶהֱג עִם בְּנֵי בְּמִדַּת רַחֲמִים, וְאַכְנִס לָהֶם לְפָנִים מִשּׁוֹרֵת הַדִּין". וּמִי אֵיכָא רַתְחָא קַמִּיהָ דְקוּדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא

**Rav Zutra bar Tovia said that Rav said: God says: May it be My will that My mercy will overcome My anger towards Israel for their transgressions, and may My mercy prevail over My other attributes through which Israel is punished, and may I conduct myself toward My children, Israel, with the attribute of mercy, and may I enter before them beyond the letter of the law. And is there anger before the Holy One, Blessed be God? Can we speak of God using terms like anger?**

אין, דתנינא "וקל זועם בכל יום".

The Gemara answers: **Yes, as it was taught** in a *baraita*, God becomes angry, as it is stated: "God vindicates the righteous, **God is furious every day**" (Psalms 7:12).

וכמה זעמו — רגע. וכמה רגע — אחד מתמשת רבוא ושמנות אלפים ושמנה מאות ושמנים ושמנה בשעה, וזו היא רגע. ואין כל בריה יכולה לכיין אותה שעה, חוץ מבלעם הרשע, דכתיב ביה: "וידע דעת עליון".

**How much time does His anger last? God's anger lasts a moment. And how long is a moment? One fifty-eight thousand, eight hundred and eighty-eighth of an hour, that is**

**a moment.** The Gemara adds: **And no creature can precisely determine that moment** when God becomes angry, **except for Balaam the wicked, about whom it is written: “He who knows the knowledge of the Most High”** (Numbers 24:16)...

השפתא דעת בהמתו לא הוה ידע, דעת עליון הוה ידע? אלא, מלמד שהנה יודע לבוין אותה שעה שהקדוש ברוך הוא פועם בה. והיינו דאמר להו נביא לישראל: “עמי זכר נא מה יעץ בלק מלך מואב וגו’”. מאי “למען דעת צדקות ה’”? אומר רבי אלעזר, אומר להם הקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל: דעו כמה צדקות עשיתי עמכם שלא כעסתי בימי בלעם הרשע, שאלקלי כעסתי — לא נשתתיר משונאייהם של ישראל שריר ופליט. והיינו דקאמר ליה בלעם לבלק: “מה אקב לא קבה אל ומה אדעם לא דעם ה’”, מלמד שכל אותן הימים לא דעם. וכמה דעמו — רגע. וכמה רגע? אומר רבי אבין ואיתימא רבי אבינא: רגע כמימריה.

This should not be understood to mean that Balaam was a full-fledged prophet. **Now**, clearly, Balaam **did not know the mind of his animal; and he did know the mind of the Most High?** If he could not understand the rebuke of his donkey, he was certainly unable to understand the mind of the Most High. **Rather, this** verse from Numbers **teaches that Balaam was able to precisely determine the hour that the Holy One, Blessed be He, is angry.** At that moment, Balaam would utter his curse and, through God’s anger, it would be fulfilled. **And that is what the prophet said to Israel: “My nation, remember what Balak king of Moab advised,** and how Balaam, son of Beor, responded; from Shittim to Gilgal, so that you may know the righteous acts of the Lord” (Micah 6:5). **What is** meant by the statement: **“So that you may know the righteous acts of the Lord”?**

Rabbi Elazar said that the Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Israel: Know how many acts of kindness I performed on your behalf, that I did not become angry during the days of Balaam the wicked, for had I become angry, there would have been no remnant or survivor remaining among the enemies of Israel, a euphemism for Israel itself. Instead, God restrained His anger and Balaam’s curse went unfulfilled. **And that is what Balaam said to Balak: “How can I curse whom God has not cursed? And how can I condemn whom God has not condemned?”** (Numbers 23:8). This verse **teaches that all those days, God was not angry.**

**And how long does His anger last?** God’s anger lasts **a moment.** **And how long is a moment?** Rabbi Avin, and some say Rabbi Avina, said: A moment lasts as long as it takes to say it [*rega*].

## 9. A Yiddish Folktale: Here Comes Skotsl



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Once upon a time, women began to resent that men seemed to own the world. Men got to read from the Torah and had all the interesting mitzvot and all the privileges. The women decided to present their grievance directly to God. They appointed Skotsl, a clever woman and a good speaker, as their representative. But how was the messenger to be dispatched? They decided to make a human tower. Skotsl was to scale the tower and then pull herself into heaven. They scrambled up on one another's shoulders, and Skotsl began to climb. But somebody shrugged or shifted, and woman tumbled every which way. When the commotion died down, Skotsl had disappeared. Men went on ruling the world, and nothing changed. But still, the women are hopeful, and that is why, when a woman walks into a house, the other women say, "Look, here comes Skotsl." And someday, it might really be she.