

## How Do We Answer Anger?

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So here we are. Again. Some person (or persons) is trying to make a point, have their grievances aired, by doing something violent. How do we stop this? How do we answer anger?

Our sages have the answer for us. The Israelites had witnessed the ten plagues and Moses' ability to part the waters. You would think they would be cheerful about being on the road to freedom. But no. Instead, they complain that there is no water (Exodus 17:1-7).

On the one hand, I understand this. They had lived their whole lives in Egypt, which has a reliable and generous water supply. They had been slaves, they were not used to being in charge of their own lives. On the other hand, I understand Moses' frustration. He had accomplished a superhuman task and he was getting complaints on his feedback forms! Moses, wisely, asks God how to handle the situation.

God answers,

Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel and take along the rod with which you struck the Nile and set out. I will be standing there before you on the rock. Strike it and water will come out of it and the people will drink. (Exodus 17:5-6)

Our sages wonder about this choice of words. Why should Moses pass before the people? Isn't he already in front of them? And why pass before them instead of just stand? Why do we need this little parade? So they comment on what these words mean:

“Pass before the people” means: Pass over their words.

Rabbi Yehoshua says: Pass on ahead of them, for you are to bring forth the water for them.

Rabbi Nehemiah says: Pass by their sin.

Another interpretation: Pass before the people and let him who feels hurt speak out. (Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael, Vayassa 7 on Exodus 17:5-6)

Rabbi Yehoshua thinks that God is telling Moses that he need have no fear since he's about to give them water and answer their complaint.

Rabbi Nehemiah thinks that God is urging him to forgive the people for complaining.

The third opinion suggests that God is saying, “Listen to their complaints.” Listen...and then solve the problem.

### Discussion Questions:

1. How do we most effectively deal with people who feel they have a grievance? Do we supply them with what they want? Do we forgive them for having a grievance? Do we listen to their side of the story?
2. Are these a series of ever-higher and more sophisticated responses to those who have a grievance?
3. Which of these techniques might have stopped the Boston bomber?
4. What can we do that might stop the next person who feels that the only way he/she can be heard is to blow something up?

As always, looking forward to your insights!