



## Love is Not for Free!

**W**hat is *ahavat chinam* (usually translated as baseless love, or literally, love for free, for no reason at all)? It's important to note that there is no such phrase in *Chazal*.

In the Talmud and the *poskim* we only find *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred, which caused the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash*. It seems that *Chazal* understood (as I do, by the way), that the expression *ahavat chinam* is derogatory.

Is there a reason to think we can love a person, especially a Jew, for free, for no reason? Can we not find even one spark, one good thing about them? In that sense, isn't the expression *ahavat chinam* rather condescending?

The story of *Kamtza* and *Bar Kamtza*, which caused the destruction of *Yerushalayim*, is a story of viability. Is it viable, is it worthwhile, to invite *Bar Kamtza* to the meal? What does *Bar Kamtza* need to pay in order to appease his host? Half the price of the banquet? The price of the whole banquet?

The *Ramban* offers a wonderful explanation on the words *אֶהְיֶה לְרַעְךָ כְּמוֹךָ*: "One should not give measurements to love." Love is immeasurable. It is not for pay, and it is not free. Loving fellow Jews is simply because of *תְּנַחֲמֵנוּ*, from the word *תָּן*, their natural grace. So simple and yet so complex.

When we speak of the *Geula*, the Redemption, we look forward, to the future. When we speak of love, we look to the sides, to those walking beside us. When we do this, when we see the weak, the distraught and the lonely at our sides, love will bring the *Geula*. In other words, the *Geula* will, automatically, be attracted to the love.

We often have lofty discussions on bringing the *Geula* closer which ignore bringing the people who are close to us closer. The future redemption will appear anywhere there is a current redemption, for those walking at our sides. "In a vast throng, they shall return... the blind and the lame among them, the pregnant and those in labor..." (*Yirmiyahu* 31:7). Only when we come with them, with the weakened, will the *Geula* come to us.

*Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai* did not 'respond' to the *churban*. He initiated. He requested the ingenious start-up of *Yavneh* and its scholars, *Rabban Gamliel's* dynasty and the healing of *Rabbi Tzadok*. That's exactly how each of us needs to behave. Enough with posts responding to the tragedy of *Meron*, the tragedy of disunity and political calamities! Give us *Yavneh* and its *chachamim*! Give us religious thought about a new *Beit HaMikdash* and not just an old one that was destroyed!

I'll end with a tip for increasing love and Jewish unity, a tip *Rabbi Nachman* requested we use every day, the *nekuda tova*, the "good point" (*Likutei Moharan Torah* 282). Every morning, find a good point, something good in someone who may be a little difficult to love. "Through finding within him some good and judging him favorably, through this you truly lift him to be judged favorably [in Heaven]."

This tip alone can enlighten us now and forever so we should rid ourselves of the term *ahavat chinam*. It was never free. Only the crying of the Jews on that first *Tisha B'Av* in the desert, after the sin of the spies, is called *bechia lechinam*, crying for free, for no reason.

Every single person in our incredible nation has a *nekuda tova*! It's up to us to find it!

What is the biggest challenge in bringing the *Geula* today? We've become a society of reactors as opposed to a society of initiators. We've become accustomed to "like" or "dislike" instead of taking that finger icon and pointing it in a new direction. It's so easy to respond, and it's so difficult to get up tomorrow morning and sing a new song in one's heart and teach it over and over again to anyone who will listen.



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