



Rebuilding with Love

“Just as the *Beit HaMikdash* was destroyed due to baseless hatred, it will be rebuilt due to baseless love” (Orot HaKodesh vol. 3, p. 324). While this oft-cited teaching of Rav Kook sounds simple, it is in fact highly nuanced, and deserves more serious consideration.

The image that comes to mind when we hear the words *sinat chinam* is usually one of rampant, wanton violence. The word *chinam* is more accurately translated as “free of charge” or “at no cost” in a monetary sense. Rather than hatred for no reason whatsoever, it implies hatred for which the price is somehow incongruous or out of balance. The problem is not that we dislike people for no reason; generally, we all feel we have very good reasons to dislike the people we do. We may have been hurt, insulted, or, worst of all, ignored, and we develop a healthy animus toward the offender as we defend ourselves and our tattered egos. The problem is that more often than not, our response is not proportional. We ‘overcharge’ for these real or perceived wrongs. The price is not right. We pay back with interest, and, as we all know, the Torah prohibits usury.

If we were to be honest with ourselves, we would be forced to recognize that at times our own insecurity and emotional fragility lead us to interpret the behavior or speech of others as malicious, even when no such malice was intended.

Here then is the dilemma: regarding the admonishment against baseless hatred, most of us can, with absolute honesty, categorically state we are innocent. On the other hand, when we reframe the question and ask instead if we have ever overreacted, if we are guilty of exaggerated responses to real or perceived slights, I am afraid many of us can answer in the affirmative. We are quite guilty but blind to our own malevolence, simply because we think the other person has earned every bit of it. Whatever hatred we have for them is not “free.”

As far as “baseless love,” we are taught to love others even though they are undeserving. But is this the case? Are we not commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves? Our love for others is not “free” or baseless; it is grounded in the knowledge that every person is created in the image of G-d, and every Jew is a unique part of our collective, a beautiful piece in the mosaic of our peoplehood.



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By what right do we imagine that the love and support we should be giving is unwarranted or free? This other person is my brother, sister or cousin too-many-times removed. I am obligated by Jewish law to love and care for him, to worry about her and constantly consider how I can improve her life, to pray for each and every other Jew. They are me, and we are one.

And therein lies the rub. We have somehow learned to convince ourselves that the hatred we feel is well-deserved, while the love we are obligated to feel and express is unearned and given to the undeserving.

Judaism teaches us to see our world from G-d’s perspective as well as our own. While we justify our hatred of others by focusing on the wrongs they have committed, from G-d’s higher vantage point, our hatred for others is *sinat chinam* – unearned, disproportionate, high-interest payback. While we consider our acts of kindness or gestures of love free and unearned, we are, in fact, fulfilling a very specific obligation to love and care for them.

This dual perspective is discernible in *Parashat Devarim*. Moshe, recalling the episode of the spies, recounts: “You grumbled in your tents, and said, ‘G-d brought us out of the land of Egypt because He hated us...’” (Devarim 1:27).

Rashi observes what should be obvious to us: quite the opposite was the case. “He loved you, but you hated Him...”

Here we have the core of *sinat chinam* – baseless hatred. Lonely, frightened man, controlled by his own insecurity, is unable to feel G-d’s love. In a knee-jerk reaction, he lashes out, with hatred that is both baseless and unearned, projecting this hatred back onto G-d.

Humankind is a strange species, capable of love yet afraid to love. We fail to consider the true nature of love as our greatest natural resource, which grows exponentially the more it is ‘used.’ Why are we so stingy in sharing it with others?



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