



The Root of Baseless Hatred

The Talmud says that one of the reasons the second *Beit HaMikdash* was destroyed was because of “baseless hatred.” What was the nature of this “baseless hatred”?

The Jewish community is outstanding when it comes to physical acts of *chesed* and volunteerism, as is evident from *mitzvot* like *bikur cholim* (visiting the sick), *hachnasat orchim* (hospitality) and *pidyon shevuim* (redeeming Jewish captives). Rav Yehonatan Eybeshitz explains that while these *mitzvot* are certainly laudable, spiritual support is far more important – but unfortunately more scarce – within the Jewish community.



Unfortunately, there are many who do not understand that sometimes honest rebuke is an indication of love.

For example, many show no concern when they see others talking improperly, behaving immodestly or talking during *tefilla*. This lack of concern for another's spiritual wellbeing is a form of the baseless hatred that led to the destruction of the second *Beit HaMikdash*. Towards the end of that period, the majority of the Jews were observant and maintained the standards expected of them. Other large sectarian minorities, however, such as the *Tzedukkim* and *Baytusim*, did not subscribe to the Oral Law, the *Torah shebe'al peh*, and subscribed to all manner of deviant practices. Additional groups adopted extreme and ascetic strictures. Yet the Rabbis did not rebuke these instigators. This indifference can be considered a form of baseless hatred.

While an important part of a Rabbi's job is to offer spiritual guidance and rebuke when necessary, there are certain advantages when a lay person reprimands his fellow, primarily because some people

will more readily listen to their peers. This is why Rabbi Yehoshua instructed, “Make for yourself a Rabbi, and acquire for yourself a friend.” While one should seek halachic guidance from those who are more knowledgeable, one also needs the unique spiritual support that only friendship and camaraderie can offer. Unfortunately, there are many who do not understand that sometimes honest rebuke is an indication of love.

Similarly, the Zohar says that when a congregation recites the blessing of *mechayeh hameitim* in *Shemoneh Esrei*, G-d asks, “Who is it that took the effort to reprimand sinners and attempt to return them to the court of their king?” In response, “an angel arrives and brings the visage of such a person.” This teaching shows that one who corrects others' behavior is deserving of Heavenly commendation, but what does the blessing of *mechayeh hameitim* have to do with it?

Rav Yehonatan explains that spirituality is the essence of life. Therefore, someone lacking spirituality is likened to being dead. When one guides the evil back to the right path, he is essentially providing them with a new lease on life. Performing the *mitzvah* of rebuking others gives the average person the ability to perform a miracle on the scale wrought by the prophets Elyahu and Elisha, who both literally brought the dead back to life:

“Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani said in Rabbi Yonatan's name: “The righteous are destined to resurrect the dead, for it is said: Once again, old men and old women shall sit in the broad places of Yerushalayim, every man with his staff in his hand for old age; and it is written (concerning Elisha's resurrection of the child): And lay my staff upon the face of the child.”

However, those who do attempt to ‘resurrect the dead’ in this non-literal manner must themselves stay paragons of virtue or else risk appearing hypocritical. *Chazal* added that above all, it is important to keep

in mind the dictum of “love your neighbor as yourself” especially with regards to sensitive issues like correcting others' behavior.

Rav Yehonatan points out that the prophet Yirmiyahu also felt that more could have been done to provide for the people's spiritual needs, as written in *Eicha*: “All her people sigh, they seek bread; they have traded their pleasant things for food to refresh the soul. See, G-d, and behold how abject I have become.” The people who seek bread are those who were looking for spiritual meaning, but because the Jewish leadership did not provide any, they looked elsewhere for fulfillment and traded their “pleasant” Jewish heritage for heathen culture by engaging in promiscuity and idolatry.

Rabbi Berel Wein says that when he speaks from the pulpit he is not talking to his congregation. He is speaking to himself. I imagine that only someone who feels he is speaking to himself and is interested in improving his own spirituality, is capable of offering others spiritual direction as well. Which in turn will contribute to the restoration of *Yerushalayim Ir HaKodesh*.

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