

Rabbi Dr. Yosef Bronstein



Transforming Baseless Hatred into Baseless Love

“If we were destroyed and the world was destroyed with us due to baseless hatred, we will return to be rebuilt and the world will be rebuilt with us through baseless love.”

Orot HaKodesh 3, page 324

This aphorism of Rav Kook is frequently quoted during this time of year. But what did Rav Kook mean by this statement?

Rav Kook explains that when we feel hatred or disdain towards other people, there is a human tendency to rationalize and justify these feelings. Accordingly, we often locate the source of our negative feelings for other people in ideological or behavioral differences. With “scientific precision,” we delineate our intellectual and moral claims against them and thereby feel justified to hold onto our hatred.

But Rav Kook argues that many times these justifications are but “small indications” of a deeper and more primal force within us. G-d endowed each human being with a unique and singular soul which vivifies the person. This essential life force is the foundation upon which a person builds his particular worldview, aspirations and spiritual style. But at its core, the soul itself transcends all these expressions. The soul is “the treasure of life... filled with impenetrable depths” – a spark of G-d embedded within a person.

Even as this concept of the specialness of each soul is beautiful and inspirational, it also contains the seeds of the pernicious problem of baseless hatred. When a person looks and speaks with another human being, his eyes and conscious mind might notice the other’s dress, behaviors and ideology. Subconsciously, though, a person’s soul senses the presence of another soul. This can be a disconcerting experience.

On the one hand, the person realizes that the soul standing before him is a spark of G-d – just as Divine and precious as

himself. And yet, due to the singular nature of each soul, this other soul might seem utterly foreign and different. The juxtaposition of the Divinity of the other soul and its foreignness can leave a person feeling threatened. A person might feel that his very identity and place in the world is being undermined by the presence of this “other” spark of G-d that seems so alien and unfamiliar.

The result of this subconscious process is that the person hates the other person simply because he is different. One might couch this primal feeling of hatred in intellectual or moral terms. But at its core, baseless hatred is a fear and a loathing generated by the very fact that a person so different from me can exist in this world.



To draw down the “Great Fire” of the *Shechina* into this world, each of us must connect with others who are different than ourselves and who therefore represent a different shade of the Divine picture.

If this is the definition of baseless hatred, what then is baseless love? Rav Kook explains that it entails a reorientation of this selfsame realization of the otherness of another person: “This inclination towards baseless hatred contains within it the hidden love which is also baseless.” Love for the other should not only stem from an affinity in ideology or lifestyle. Rather, baseless love means loving other people due to the simple fact they are different from oneself.

Elsewhere, Rav Kook elaborates that a person will only feel threatened by the existence of a different soul if he subconsciously self-identifies as the optimal expression of G-d in this world. Then, he

will be confused and threatened by the existence of a Divine soul different from himself. In reality, though, G-d is too transcendent and infinite to be expressed through any single terrestrial medium.

Rather, each person should view himself as a unique “small spark” of G-d who can and must manifest that godliness in this world. But as Divine as an individual soul might be, it can only capture a certain shade of Divinity. To draw down the “Great Fire” of the *Shechina* into this world, each of us must connect with others who are different than ourselves and who therefore represent a different shade of the Divine picture (Orot HaKodesh 2, pg. 569 and Ein Ayah end of Berachot).

As Rav Kook once formulated this idea: “The character trait of baseless hatred will be fixed” when we realize that “the unique hue of another person does not diminish [his] own identity” but rather, “enriches the Jewish people with multiple lights” (Orot Yisrael 4:6). Each of these “lights” is at once unique and distinctive, but ultimately interlinked. Only through baseless love or loving other people *because* of our differences, can we attempt to bring G-d’s presence into our world and rebuild the *Beit HaMikdash*.

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