



עֵינֵינוּ הַחֹדֶשׁ

Clilei HaChodesh

Av 5779

Torah Thoughts from the YIGC Community

Ending Baseless Hatred

Leon Margolin

As we approach Tisha B'av, we usually concentrate on "*sinat chinam*," baseless hatred. According to Chazal, *sinat chinam* – as demonstrated in the famous story of Bar Kamtza (Gittin 55b) – caused the destruction and *galut* that we experience to this day.

These concepts are very familiar to any observant Jew, and at the same time seem distant from us. After all, no "normal" person would hate somebody *chinam*, for no reason. In addition, none of us would throw a guest invited by mistake to the street, or try to take revenge for a personal insult by cleverly plotting national destruction like Bar Kamtza did.

Each year, as this *galut* persists, we have to fast on the ninth of Av as a sign that the problem of *sinat chinam* is not resolved. It seems difficult to understand how *sinat chinam* practically applies to us and what we practically can do to stop it. If so many previous generations, so much greater than we are, did not resolve it – how can we succeed?

Interestingly, in a completely different context, the Torah uses the word *sin'a* (hatred) in a way that may help us gain a different understanding of this word. In Bereishit 29:31, the Torah comments that Leah was "*snu'a*." Radak, among others, explains this statement does not mean that Yaakov hated Leah, but that he was closer with Rachel than with Leah, who therefore felt more distant and alienated.

The Torah teaches us the ideal of "*ish al machnehu, ish al diglo*": each person belongs to a tribe with a place and is equally important in the "*machane*," the camp of the Jewish people. The Chafetz Chaim mentions in his Mishna Berurah that each tribe has a different *nusach* and a different way of serving Hashem, which is related to the differences between the different *nuschaot* and groups we have today in the Torah world.

Unfortunately, we have often failed to live up to this ideal, and strife and alienation between the tribes was a source of major problems in Tanach and since.

I remember in the mid- and late 90s, I lived in the dorms on the campus of Hadassah Ein Karem Hospital in Yerushalayim and volunteered on Shabbat for the Bikkur Cholim in the hospital. It was an amazing experience, as I was able to spend time and learn with rabbis from across the spectrum of Orthodoxy: from a rabbi in a settlement to a

rabbi in the Toldot Aharon sect, from a *litvishe* yeshiva rabbi to Breslov or Viznitz *chasidim* or Sefardic rabbis. At the time, there was a strong movement to educate Russian Jews, and each of these rabbis spent time explaining his *derech*, which I greatly enjoyed. What bothered me, however, was that many of them would sound somewhat alienating when they mentioned another *derech*, which reminded me of the problem of baseless intolerance. This alienation can turn into extremes that make headlines in the news, when one group disparages or even physically attacks its ideological opponents. Unfortunately, such behavior is frequently rationalized as being "for the sake of heaven," which only makes it worse. The Kotzker Rebbe, in describing how Penina mistreated Hannah in the first chapter of Shmuel, explained that the worst injustice a God-fearing Jew can commit is that which he rationalizes as necessary "for the sake of heaven."

In our everyday lives, we can all find opportunities to improve our connections with other people. Let me illustrate with a story. Rabbi Kaplan, from the Yeshiva of Philadelphia, had to travel out of town when he was very old and sick. He made a big effort to attend a morning minyan in a remote town. Since he was very weak, he sat during the recitation of a particular paragraph in *pesukei d'zimra*. One of the daveners recognized him and asked after davening why the Rosh Yeshiva sat when the accepted custom is to stand. Rabbi Kaplan answered, "It seems that you ask this question because you care about me; however, if you really cared, you would ask if I had a breakfast today."

Sometimes we jump to judge other people instead of checking on whether they "had a breakfast today." The Kamtza and Bar Kamtza story teaches us that the 'small actions of ordinary people can cause destruction – but they also have the potential to end it and bring redemption.

We have seen tremendous growth in Torah study and observance over the last generations. One of our challenges is to turn our Torah into "*Torat imecha*," to be more like the mother who accepts all her children, with all their problems, and helps them to grow.

Our small everyday words and acts of *Torat chesed* can foster *ahavat chinam*, so we will not have to fast on Tisha B'av in the years to come.

B'tzaysi MiMitzraim - B'tzaysi MiYerushalaim

Rabbi Moshe Berger

Certain national events and experiences in our history have exerted a fundamental, defining impact upon us – both as individuals and collectively.

Halacha insists that we not permit quantitative time to distance us from such significant occurrences, lest we trivialize them and thereby lose touch with essential aspects of our self-definition. As a result, we would ultimately forget who we are and our purpose in history.

A"T – Ba"Sh is a popular mnemonic which correlates each of the seven days of the week upon which the seven days of Pesach occur in a given year with the occurrences of the first days of the various Jewish holidays in that year. *A"T*, for example, informs us that the first day of Pesach [=A] always falls on the same day of the week upon which the following Tisha B'Av [=T] will take place. This correlation between the Exodus and Tisha B'Av may be understood as follows: Both the Exodus (בצאתי ממצרים)

and the Churban (בצאתי מירושלים) constitute *events which define who we are* – collectively and as individuals. On Pesach, we were irreversibly redeemed as Hashem's Chosen People. Tisha B'Av marks the defining reality of our physical displacement – united by Torah values, commitment to one another, and by a yearning for Messianic redemption – not only for ourselves but also for all of humanity.

On those two days, therefore, Halacha insists that we “fly back” in time. We joyously re-enact and relive the Exodus at the Seder table, and we mournfully recite elegies on Tisha B'Av as we sit on the synagogue floor. Thus, we temporarily re-live and, as a result, re-experience these radically opposite events – thereby generating authentic memories, values, and visions which constantly inform our daily lives.

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Andreia and Steven Schwartz

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