

Love and Hate

That are not Baseless

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Everything is Based on Interests

The Gemara in tractate *Megilla* (26b) discusses the various situations in which the sanctity of a synagogue can expire. After the Gemara deals with the case of sale, it asks:

מתנה פליגי בה רב אחא ורבינא חד אסר וחד שרי.
[With regard to a synagogue which has been made] a gift, Rav Acha and Ravina disagree: One forbids [it to be used for secular purposes], and one permits this.

A simple explanation of the disagreement might be suggested: The question is whether the sanctity of a synagogue expires only when the congregation receives something in exchange for the synagogue, or whether the act of disowning the synagogue by itself suffices. In the continuation, the Gemara explains the various arguments:

מאן דאסר בהאי תפקע קדושתה ומאן דשרי אי לאו דהוה ליה הנאה מיניה לא הוה יהיב ליה הדר הוה ליה מתנה כזבני.
The one who forbade did so on the ground that there is nothing through which its sanctity can be transferred, while the one who permitted it argued that if he [the giver] did not derive some benefit from



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the act he would not give it, so that in the end the gift is equivalent to a sale.

That is to say, the Gemara assumes that people do not distribute gifts freely; they expect to receive some benefit in return. If you like, what we have here is a cynical view of human nature — **everything is based on interests**. This idea is manifestly pessimistic, and therefore anybody driven by those schools of thought that paint a rosy picture of the human soul will be disappointed; the Gemara does not bring an alternative view that adopts a more positive outlook regarding the soul of man.

In tractate *Gittin* (50b) as well, we encounter identical arguments, though they relate to a different law. There the discussion relates to the Mishna's ruling that payment cannot be recovered from mortgaged property when there are free assets available. If the borrower has assets that had been sold to another party, but he also owns free assets, the lender cannot recover his debt from

the mortgaged property in the hands of the buyer. In the continuation the Gemara asks about assets that had been given away as a gift, rather than sold, and the wording is very similar to that found in tractate *Megilla*:

או דלמא מתנה נמי אי לאו דאית ליה הנאה מיניה לא יהיב ליה מתנה והלכך כי פסידא דלקוחות דמי.

Or do we say this even in the case of a gift, for if he did not derive some benefit from it he would not have given him the gift, and therefore his loss is on the same footing as the loss of the buyer.

The Gemara here understands the way that a gift operates in the same way that the Gemara in *Megilla* understood it: A gift does not stem solely **from the goodness of the giver's heart**, but also from **self-interest**.

Why have I cited these passages? It is not my intention to deal with *Gittin* or *Megilla*, with the laws of a synagogue or with the collection of a debt. But I wish to understand the Gemara's hidden message. The

Gemara poses the following question: Is it possible to speak of a gift that is given absolutely freely? In these passages *Chazal* examine man's inner world, assessing the extent to which his considerations are idealistic or economic.

During the Three Weeks we remember the shocking and terrifying destruction that befell the people of Israel two thousand years ago. So too must we confront *Chazal's* assessment of the causes that led up to that destruction. *Chazal* distinguished between the circumstances leading to the destruction of the First Temple and those associated with the destruction of the Second Temple. There are dreadful accounts of the First Temple period; even though there were ups and downs, the overall picture is very gloomy. The problems of the First Temple period included idolatry, incest and bloodshed. Anyone who doesn't understand the message in the narrative sections of the books of Melakhim and Divrei Ha-yamim can open the books of Yeshaya and Yirmiya and see the full picture.

The Second Temple period presents a sharply different picture: the institution of the synagogue begins to take hold alongside that of the Temple; Torah study and loyalty to the Sages of Israel are on the rise. Here too there were ups and downs, but the general impression is that during this period the people are clearly committed to the Torah and to observance of the *mitzvot*. *Chazal* understood that in order to explain the destruction of the Second Temple, we must look elsewhere and find problems that differ from those of the First Temple period. As is well known, *Chazal* turned their eyes to what they called *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred.

Getting to the Root of the Problem

Here arise several questions: Granted that baseless hatred is an undesirable phenomenon, but in what way is it so severe that it brought about the destruction of the Temple? There is a prohibition, "You shall not hate your brother in your heart," but is the violation of this prohibition so serious that the Temple should be destroyed on its account? We have it on the authority of Rabbeinu Yona that a negative commandment that does not involve an action is less severe than a negative commandment that involves an action!

It seems to me that there is an important point that must be kept in mind. It might very well be that on the scale of sins and transgressions, baseless hatred does not stand at the top of the pyramid. There is no specific prohibition of "baseless hatred"; there is only a prohibition of hatred. However, in the list of sins composed by the Geonim and recited as part of confession on Yom Kippur (*Al chet*), a distinction is made between **hatred** and **baseless hatred**. What is the difference between them?

The list of sins in the *Al chet* confession is not meant to be comprehensive. We are dealing with a list that relates not only to **sins**, but also to the **sinner**. This confession focuses upon the individual and collective awareness that we are all sinners. Here enter all kinds of problematic qualities and behaviors that are not necessarily included in the list of prohibitions; and even if they are found there, it is not necessarily at the top.

In this connection, I have frequently mentioned the words of the Rambam who noted this point:

אל תאמר שאין תשובה אלא מעבירות שיש בהן מעשה כגון זנות וגזל וגניבה אלא כשם שצריך אדם לשוב מאלו כך הוא צריך לחפש בדעות רעות שיש לו ולשוב מן הכעס ומן האיבה ומן הקנאה ומן ההתול ומרדיפת הממון והכבוד ומרדיפת המאכלות וכיוצא בהן מן הכל צריך לחזור בתשובה ואלו העונות קשים מאותן שיש בהן מעשה שבזמן שאדם נשקע באלו קשה הוא לפרוש מהם.
הלכות תשובה ז:ג

A person should not think that repentance is only necessary for those sins that involve a deed such as promiscuity, robbery, or theft. Rather, just as a person is obligated to repent from these, similarly, he must search out his evil character traits. He must repent from anger, hatred, envy, frivolity, the pursuit of money and honor, the pursuit of gluttony, and the like. He must repent for all [of the above]. These sins are more difficult than those that involve deeds. If a person is attached to these, it is more difficult for him to separate himself.

Hilkhot Teshuva 7:3

When the Rambam writes that these are more difficult, he is not referring to the severity of the prohibition, but rather to the influence that it has on the person. If we ask ourselves what is the place of baseless hatred, the answer is that it involves a violation of a negative commandment. However, it was not the transgression and its severity that brought *Chazal* to list baseless hatred as the cause of the destruction of the Temple, but rather its impact on the individual and upon the nation.

Why is this so? For a simple reason that brings us back to the starting point: What is meant by baseless hatred? Does a person wake up in the morning and decide for no reason that he can't stand his neighbors? If some ulterior motive underlies **unwarranted love** and **unwarranted**

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gifts (as we saw in the talmudic passages cited above), there must be some reason behind **unwarranted hatred**. There is really no such thing as baseless hatred; it merely **seems** baseless.

What level of self-interest must a person reach in order to engage in “baseless hatred”? It was because of this lack of sensitivity, because of a disregard of general human ethics, because of a rejection of values — it was because of contempt for all these things and holding fast only to those things that are closest to a person’s heart that the Temple was destroyed.

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All this relates to what happened in the time of *Chazal*, but it has ramifications for later generations as well. The Mishna states:

על שלשה דברים העולם עומד, על התורה ועל העבודה ועל גמילות חסדים.

אבות א:ב

The world rests on three foundations:

Torah, Divine service and the practice of loving-kindness.

Avot 1:2

These are the foundations upon which the world rests; and when these are undermined, the world collapses.

Introspection

We have learned from the Rambam at the beginning of *Hilkhot Ta’aniyot* that fasting is merely a fulfillment by rabbinic decree of the mitzva of crying out to God. By Torah law the mitzva is to cry out and to sound trumpets **in the event of any distress that arises**. The Rambam emphasizes that this is all part of repentance and introspection:

ודבר זה מדרכי התשובה הוא שבזמן שתבוא צרה ויזעקו עליה ויריעו ידעו הכל שבגלל מעשיהם הרעים הורע להן ככתוב עונותיכם הסו וגו' וזה הוא שיגרום להם להסיר הצרה מעליהם:

אבל אם לא יזעקו ולא יריעו אלא יאמרו דבר זה ממנהג העולם אירע לנו וצרה זו נקרה נקריית הרי זו דרך אכזריות וגורמת להם להדבק במעשיהם הרעים ותוסיף הצרה צרות אחרות הוא שכתוב בתורה והלכתם עמי בקרי והלכתי גם אני עמכם בחמת קרי כלומר כשאביא עליכם צרה כדי שתשובו אם תאמרו שהוא קרי אוסיף לכם חמת אותו קרי:

This practice is one of the paths of repentance, for when distress arises, and

the people cry out [to God] and sound the trumpets, everyone will realize that [the distressing situation] occurred because of their evil conduct. This [realization] will cause the removal of this distress.

Conversely, should the people fail to cry out [to God] and sound the trumpets, and instead say, What has happened to us is merely a natural phenomenon and this distress is merely a chance occurrence, this is a cruel conception of things, which causes them to remain attached to their wicked deeds. Thus, this time of distress will lead to further distresses.

Hilkhot Ta’aniyot 1:2-3

The Rambam emphasizes two points: First, the recognition that the troubles that befall us are due to our immersion in sin; second, the obligation to locate the failing and that which needs correction. The Rambam says the same thing regarding the fixed fasts commemorating events of the past:

יש שם ימים שכל ישראל מתענים בהם מפני הצרות שאירעו בהן כדי לעורר הלבבות ולפתוח דרכי התשובה ויהיה זה זכרון למעשינו הרעים ומעשה אבותינו שהיה כמעשינו עתה עד שגרום להם ולנו אותן הצרות.

הלכות תעניות ה:א

There are days when the entire Jewish people fast because of the calamities that occurred to them then, to arouse [their] hearts and initiate [them in] the paths of repentance. This will serve as a reminder of our wicked conduct and that of our ancestors, which resembles our present conduct and therefore brought these calamities upon them and upon us.

Hilkhot Ta’aniyot 5:1

We see, then, that fast days were instituted for the purpose of introspection. What should we examine on a fast day? There are three layers to this examination. First

and foremost, there should be an examination of **deeds** — “This will serve as a reminder of our wicked conduct and that of our ancestors.”

There is a second layer, that of **introspection** and **soul searching**. On a certain level, introspection relates to a person’s conduct — what he should have done, and what not. But introspection involves not only an examination of the deed, but also of the doer, of his soul. The Rambam speaks of this layer in the passage in *Hilkhot Teshuva* cited above — those evil character traits that dull the soul and destroy every good part of it.

There is, however, also a third layer. In addition to the expression in deed of these negative inclinations, and the negative qualities in themselves, one should examine the **roots** of these traits and actions. What made this possible? From where does the baseless hatred come? We are not dealing with an examination that contents itself with the surface levels, which are more comfortable to deal with. We are dealing with a fundamental examination of the deepest roots of one’s soul. Even the soul has a subterranean layer, from whence comes the drive to sin and perversity.

This point is to a certain degree based on Scriptural verses. The Rambam, in that same introduction to chapter 5 of *Hilkhot Ta’anuyot*, derives the matter from the verse: “And they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers” (Vayikra 26:40).

This verse appears at the end of the rebuke in *Parashat Bechukotai*. There is a certain difficulty there regarding the order of the verses, with which the early commentators already struggled. It first says: “And they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their

fathers,” which indicates repentance; but immediately afterwards it says: “And I too shall walk contrary to them, and bring them into the land of their enemies.” (v. 41), and only afterwards do we come to repentance on the part of the people of Israel: “Then only will their uncircumcised hearts be humbled” (v. 41), and with it to the hoped-for salvation.

The answer seems clear. Israel did indeed begin to confess their sins owing to their distress and suffering, but the confessors only reached the outer layer. They confessed about the actions that grew out of their uncircumcised heart, but not about the heart itself; they did not deal with the uncircumcised heart. The purification process had clearly not been completed, and therefore God still “walks contrary to them,” and only then is their uncircumcised heart humbled. Only in this way will all the bad qualities be humbled; what we have here is a repair of the soul, rather than merely a repair of deeds.

A person cannot achieve repair without repairing his deeds, but his deeds can be repaired without the person achieving repair. It is possible to repair the sins without repairing the soul.

The end of the verse is unclear — “And they will make amends for their sin.” Are we dealing here with atonement? It seems to me that it would not be far-fetched to understand that here we are dealing with the third layer of man’s self-examination: locating and treating the roots of sin. This is the pinnacle of repair.

If we wish to apply these conclusions to our own circumstances, we should examine ourselves with respect to the three principles upon which the world of the individual and of the collective

stand: Torah, Divine service and the practice of loving-kindness.

A person comes to the Yeshiva in order to build himself in these three realms. He wishes to grow in Torah, in service of God and in his practice of loving-kindness. A person must constantly engage in introspection — how is he progressing, what are his difficulties? If he finds that he is failing, he must ask himself to what extent is he examining not only the external cause, but also the inner layer, the root of the problem.

Repentance — Obligation, Mitzva, Opportunity

Many areas leave room for introspection. We must always ask ourselves the question that arises from the proper understanding of the concept of baseless hatred: not only **what happened**, but also **what is the root of the problem**.

If a Yeshiva student finds that his prayer is a bit dry, that it falls into the category of fixed prayer, of prayer recited by rote — this is certainly something for which he must seek atonement and repair. But the more fundamental question is not how his prayer appears, but why does it appear that way. How is it that a person can sit all day in the *beit midrash*, and yet his prayer is dry? It is possible that he will find an answer in the world of prayer; but it is also possible that the answer lies in the entirety of his soul — the weakness of his prayer might be an expression of the weakness of his Torah. Dryness recognizes no borders.

If a person asks himself regarding his acts of loving-kindness, he might find that he practices kindness, but drags his feet. Perhaps he lacks human sensitivity. And perhaps even when he

exerts himself to do good, there is still something missing in his personality.

If somebody thinks that he came to the Yeshiva to grow in Torah, and that things will be simple and easy — this is a problem. When he encounters difficulties, he will point to various factors: a problem with his *chavruta*, with his *shiur* or the like. But a person must ask himself here as well: What is the root of the problem? What broke him in those crises? Perhaps his roots do not provide him with sufficiently strong foundations. If his learning is defective, the problem is not only in his learning; it might stem from a **lack of love of Torah**. If he is missing a basic sense of connection, this in itself is a spiritual catastrophe; but it also

has practical ramifications, and this influences his entire spiritual world.

We stand today on the threshold of Tisha be-Av. At such a time, we are expected to conduct a fundamental reckoning, in such a manner that we can understand where the problems are located within us.

If someone has been studying in a Yeshiva for more than a year, and is not learning as he should, something is going on, and he must deal with the problem. This is the obligation of repentance, the mitzva of repentance, and this is an opportunity. Perhaps the first root that must be treated is the root of opportunity — its exploitation or its neglect: To what extent does a person who merited to sit in a *beit*

midrash exhaust the opportunities available to him, and to what extent does he allow them to pass him by?

We have been given the great privilege of being *bnei Torah*. This is a privilege that can determine a person's role within the people of Israel and within all of humanity.

Let us hope to find what the Gemara sought but did not find: **baseless love**. In order that we should find it the next time we examine ourselves, we must begin to cultivate it already today.

May it be Your will that we should merit, in this period of trouble for Israel, to rise up, and grow, and aspire increasingly more to be counted among God's servants — with all that this entails.

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