

Parshiot Matot-Masei 5779, 2019:

Thinking About the Three Weeks

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Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof and Pittsburgh, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

A crucial aspect of the Three Weeks that is often ignored is that of introspection — *cheshbon hanefesh*. In my estimation, this period is precisely the time for looking into the mirror of our souls and reflecting upon where we have been, where we are, and where we should be going. It is the perfect moment to examine our thoughts and actions so that we may come to live more meaningful Jewish lives.

One way we can begin our introspective journey is to focus upon the well-known Gemara in *Talmud Bavli, Yoma 9b*:

The first Holy Temple, why was it destroyed? This took place because of three different aspects that had become part of its very nature: idol worship, illicit physical relations and murder...The second Holy Temple wherein they were involved with Torah study, *mitzvot* observance, and acts of loving-kindness, why was it destroyed? It was because of groundless and baseless-hatred (*sinat chinam*). This comes to teach us that baseless-hatred is the equivalent of the three cardinal prohibitions of idol worship, illicit physical relations, and murder. (Translation my own)

Is our age similar to the time of the Second *Beit HaMikdash*? On the positive side, there is ample evidence to suggest that we are studying more Torah today than at any other time in Jewish History. *Mitzvot* observance continues to grow, and acts of loving-kindness (*gemilut*

chasadim) are performed by more institutions and individuals than one can possibly count or know. In some ways, we are experiencing a renaissance of Jewish growth and identity.

On the negative side, however, *sinat chinam* — baseless hatred — which our Talmudic passage teaches us is the equivalent of the three heinous sins that destroyed the First *Beit Hamikdash* and the sin that destroyed the Second *Beit HaMikdash*, seems to be growing stronger each day. Powerful and disruptive rifts fracture our Jewish communities. Little wonder, then, that we have not yet merited the building of the Third *Beit Hamikdash*.

Fortunately, there is a strong countermeasure to the pernicious sin of *sinat chinam*. Rabbi Yitzhak Avraham Kook *zatzal* (1865-1935), the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Palestine under the British Mandate, offers us a valuable insight into this ray of hope. He proposes *ahavat yisrael* — unconditional love for the Jewish people — as the antidote for *sinat chinam*, and conceptualizes it in the following poetic manner:

Listen to me, my people! I speak to you from my soul, from within my innermost soul. I call out to you from the living connection by which I am bound to all of you, and by which all of you are bound to me. I feel this more deeply than any other feeling: That only you — all of you, all of your souls, throughout all of your generations — you alone are the meaning of my life. In you I live. In the aggregation of all of you, my life has that content that is called 'life.' (This, and the following translation, *Shemonah Kevatzim* 1:163, translation, Chanan Morrison)

Continuing his love song for the Jewish people with the following stirring words, Rav Kook exclaims:

Without you, I have nothing. All hopes, all aspirations, all purpose in life, all that I find inside myself — these are only when I am with you. I need to connect with all of your souls. I must love you with a boundless love.... Each one of you, each individual soul from the aggregation of all of you, is a great spark, part of the torch of the Light of the universe which enlightens my life. You give meaning to life and work, to Torah and prayer, to song

and hope. It is through the conduit of your being that I sense everything and love everything.

It is crucial to realize that Rav Kook's unlimited love for all Jews was far more than a mere theoretical construct. He embodied *ahavat yisrael* in all aspects of his life, and in the most pragmatic of situations, as the following story amply illustrates:

A vocal group of ultra-Orthodox Jerusalemites vociferously opposed Rav Kook, due to his positive attitude towards secular Zionists. Often they would publicize posters along the city streets, attacking the Chief Rabbi and discrediting his authority. One day, Rav Kook returned from a *brit milah* ceremony in Jerusalem's Old City, accompanied by dozens of students. Suddenly a small group of hotheaded extremists attacked the rabbi, showering him with waste water. The chief rabbi was completely drenched by the filthy water. Emotions soared and tempers flared.

By the time Rav Kook had arrived home, news of the attack had spread throughout the city. Prominent citizens arrived to express their repugnance at the shameful incident. One of the visitors was the legal counsel of [the] British Mandate. He advised Rav Kook to press charges against the hooligans, and promised that they would be promptly deported from the country. The legal counsel, however, was astounded by Rav Kook's response. "I have no interest in court cases. Despite what they did to me, I love them. I am ready to kiss them, so great is my love! I burn with love for every Jew."

<http://ravkooktorah.org/KDOSHM62.htm>

We must note that for Rav Kook, the opposite of *sinat chinam* was not *ahavat chinam* — love of one's fellow Jew without cause — since, within his understanding of the world, such a concept simply did not exist. Rather, this great and holy soul considered every Jew, by definition, to be worthy of love and respect. As such, he is famous for the following powerful statement: "There is no such thing as '*ahavat chinam*' — groundless love. Why groundless? He is a Jew, and I am obligated to love and respect him. There is only '*sinat chinam*' — hate without reason. But '*ahavat chinam*'? Never!" (Adapted by Chanan Morrison from Rav Kook's work, *Malachim Kivnei Adam*, pages 483-485)

As we seek to infuse the Three Weeks with profound meaning, let us engage in the depth-level soul-searching that is fitting for this period, and endeavor to remove all aspects of *sinat chinam* from the deepest recesses of our being. Then, and only then, will we be prepared to honestly embrace Rav Kook's noble words, and replace *sinat chinam* with *ahavat yisrael*. With Hashem's help and our fervent desire, may this be so. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>
They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org> using the search criteria Etengoff and the *parasha's* name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

*** I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's English language audio** *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.