

Parshiot Matot - Masei 5778, 2018:

Conquering Baseless Hatred

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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 Yecheiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, Shayna Yehudit bat Avraham Manes and Rivka, and HaRav Raphael ben HaRav Ephraim, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, Yekutiel Yehudah ben Pessel Lifsha, Yakir Ephraim ben Rachel Devorah, Eliezer ben Sarah, Shoshana Elka bat Etel Dina and Tzvi Yoel ben Yocheved and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

We are now approaching the end of the Three Weeks, the saddest period of the Jewish year. It concludes with Tisha b'Av, the day upon which we commemorate the destruction of the two Holy Temples, the first in 586 BCE, and the second in 70 CE. In an oft-quoted Talmudic passage, our Sages famously ask, "Why were the two Holy Temples destroyed?" Their answer informs every aspect of Jewish life until our own historical moment:

Why was the first Sanctuary destroyed? Because of three [evil] things which prevailed there: idolatry, immorality, bloodshed... But why was the second Sanctuary destroyed, seeing that in its time they were occupying themselves with Torah, [observance of] precepts, and the practice of charity? Because hatred without cause (*sinat chinam*) prevailed therein. This teaches you that groundless hatred is considered equal to the three sins of idolatry, immorality, and bloodshed taken together. (*Talmud Bavli, Yoma 9b, Soncino Talmud* translation with my emendations to enhance readability)

In sum, the second *Beit Hamikdash* (Holy Temple) was destroyed because of *sinat chinam* (baseless hatred) - even though our ancestors seemed "to get everything else right." Moreover, *sinat chinam* creates such a toxic behavioral environment, that it is equal to *avodah zarah* (idol worship), *gilui arayot* (immorality) and *shefichute damim* (murder) combined – the three cardinal sins for which individuals are obligated to give up their lives rather than violate. ("Yaharaig v'al ya'avor," *Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 74a*)

If *sinat chinam* was the vitriolic poison that destroyed the second *Beit Hamikdash*, then it stands to reason that its polar opposite, *ahavat Yisrael* (love of all Jews) must be the necessary antidote. This may very well be the reason that Rabbi Akiva famously declared, “‘And you should love your fellow Jew as yourself.’...This is the most overarching principle of the Torah.” (*Sefer Vayikra* 19:18; *Talmud Yerushalmi, Nedarim* 9:4) Rabbi Akiva’s dictum that *ahavat Yisrael* is the singular principle of the Torah is reminiscent of a celebrated passage in *Talmud Bavli, Shabbat* 31a, wherein Hillel teaches a would-be convert the most unifying idea of the Torah:

On another occasion it happened that a certain non-Jew came before Shammai and said to him, “Make me a proselyte, on the condition that you teach me the entire Torah while I stand on one foot (*regal achat*).” At that point he [Shammai] threatened him with the builder’s tool which was in his hand. [In contrast,] when he went before Hillel, he [Hillel] said to him, “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor - that is the whole Torah, the rest is the commentary - go and learn!” (Translation, *The Soncino Talmud*, with my underlining and emendations)

In his Torah commentary, *Kli Yakar*, the great biblical exegete Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim ben Aaron Luntschitz (1550 – 21 April, 1619) explains that the responses of Shammai and Hillel stemmed from two very different perceptions of the non-Jew who came before them. Whereas Shammai thought the individual was acting in a jocular and disrespectful manner, Hillel perceived him as a would-be righteous convert (*gare tzedek*) who approached him in an authentic and searching fashion:

For in truth, he [the potential *gare tzedek*] honestly sought from him [Hillel] the pillar of Torah upon which all the *mitzvot* stand (i.e. *regal achat*) in order that he should not fall into the grip of forgetfulness that might very well be found in a convert who had not learned anything about the Torah during the days of his youth. Therefore, he asked him to transmit to him the one overriding principle that encapsulates the entire Torah...in order that he would be able to remember all of the *mitzvot* of Hashem. (Comment on *Sefer Vayikra* 19:18, translation and brackets my own)

Based upon the statements of Hillel, Rabbi Akiva and the analysis of the *Kli Yakar*, *ahavat Yisrael* emerges as one of Judaism’s ultimate values. On measure, it is the most effective means of counteracting the frightening effects of *sinat chinam*. Now we are ready to ask, “How can we perform *ahavat Yisrael* in our daily lives?” We are fortunate that the Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-

1204) provides us with a clear response that incorporates both the positive actions that we ought to do, and Hillel's meta-axiom of Torah behavior:

We are commanded to love others [i.e. our fellow Jews] in the same manner that we love ourselves. My mercy and love for my brother [i.e. my fellow Jew] should be exactly like the mercy and love I have for myself, [specifically in regards to] his money, physical welfare, and everything that will ever be in his possession or he will want. And, everything that I wish for myself, I should desire for him. [Conversely,] anything that I would hate for myself or for anyone who associates with me, I should find hateful to him in the exact same fashion. This is what the Torah stated: "...and you shall love your neighbor as yourself." (*Sefer Hamitzvot*, Positive Commandment 206, translation and brackets my own)

In sum, the Rambam is urging us to be considerate and caring of others in precisely the same manner we would like to be treated. In addition, we must ever be on guard against those behaviors that would be hateful to both ourselves and others.

I believe that if we fulfill the *mitzvah* of *ahavat Yisrael* on an ongoing basis, we will be well on our way to ending *sinat chinam* in our time. Moreover, we will set the stage for the imminent arrival of the *Mashiach* (Messiah) and the rebuilding of the *Beit Hamikdash*, soon and in our days. With the Almighty's help and our heartfelt desire, may this be so. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org/> using the search criteria of 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.