

So what is “baseless” hate when we can always find justification for our hate?

In the Babylonian Talmud, tractate Yoma 9b, we are told: “Why was the First Temple destroyed? For three reasons: idolatry, incest and bloodshed. But, the Second Temple, in which they studied Torah, kept mitzvot and gave to charity – why was that destroyed? Because there was “baseless” hatred- **שנאת חנם**. This teaches that “baseless” hatred is as bad as three sins together: idolatry, incest, and bloodshed”.

This source does not try to teach us why the first temple was destroyed, nor why the second temple was destroyed, but rather it seems to teach us about “baseless” hatred. The three sins of the First Temple take place in three circles. Idolatry is the circle of ritual and faith; incest is the family circle; and bloodshed could be directed against any other person—a close relative or a total stranger. The three circles are the three levels of closeness to a person. The closest circle is the family circle, in which there exist the most pronounced feelings, both positive and negative, even hatred. The most distant circle is the circle of ritual and faith, made up people and groups who think and practice differently, who are therefore easy to hate because of this difference. Even the random stranger can be hated easily—if they do one thing that bothers us, we can direct all of our frustrations at them. From these sins of the First Temple, we learn that there are different circles in our lives. In any of these circles we can commit serious transgressions, as in the First Temple, and we can be guilty of hatred, for which the Second Temple was destroyed.

So what is “baseless” hate when we can always find justification for our hate? We should not call it “baseless” hatred — hatred that is for nothing, for no reason – for there is no such thing. Instead, we should think of the Hebrew word defined as “baseless”- *hinam* (**חנם**). Not only does this word mean baseless, but it is the shortened form of *hahen shelahem* (**החן שלהם**), their grace. It is the particular quality that makes each one of us unique. *Sinat hinam* is hating what’s good about somebody else, having an inability to find “grace and favor” in other people. To see the good in somebody else, to justify what they are doing even when it bothers us—that is the opposite of this hatred.

As a Masorti Jew, I must celebrate the work done by our Orthodox and Reform colleagues, even when they do things differently than I would. I need them to cater to the public that I cannot serve because I believe in a different path. We are all partners in the mission of perpetuating Judaism and the Jewish people. So that we can learn not to destroy our home of Israel today—and even to build a stronger society—we must learn to see every individual’s “grace,” no matter how different they are than we are.

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