

Illuminating Man's Inner World

THROUGH THE LENS OF THE PARSHA

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Parshas Kedoshim: I Guess It Is a Pretty Big Deal

Undoubtedly, there are few people who need convincing how religiously, morally and emotionally harmful it is to hate another human being. With every fiber we understand the poisonous nature of hate and the eternal value of love. In fact, the meforshim emphasize based on the pasuk in this week's parsha:

לֹא־תִשְׁנָא אֶת־אֶחִיךָ בְּלִבְךָ הוֹכֵחַ תּוֹכִיחַ אֶת־עַמִּיתְךָ,
that the prohibition does not need to find an expression in speech or behavior. Just having animus in one's heart suffices to violate the איסור דאורייתא.

Furthermore, while the gemarah in Pesachim 113b learns that there is in fact a mitzvah to hate a רשע, this conclusion is not advocated by the Rambam and, according to many acharonim, is rejected out of hand for our day and age. What is clear is that hatred for anyone, perceived רשע or otherwise, has no place in our religious outlook.

What is perhaps not so clear are two questions that I was recently thinking about that emerge from the famous gemarah in Yoma that stands as the single most well-known source concerning the dangers associated with שנאת חנם. The gemarah writes that:

אָבֵל מִקְדָּשׁ שְׁנֵי שָׁהִיו עוֹסְקִין בְּתוֹרָה וּבְמִצְוֹת וּגְמִילוּת חֻסְדִּים, מִפְּנֵי מָה חָרַב? מִפְּנֵי שְׁהִיְתָה בּוֹ שְׁנֵאת חָנָם. לְלַמְדֵךְ שֶׁשְׂקוּלָה שְׁנֵאת חָנָם כְּנֶגֶד שְׁלֹשׁ עֲבִירוֹת: עֲבוּדָה זָרָה, גְּלוּי עֲרִיזוֹת, וּשְׂפִיכוֹת דָּמִים.

While the gemarah perhaps needs no explanation, I was struck by the questions of both how and why. The gemarah goes out of its way to say that during bayis sheini there was a conscientiousness about Torah, mitzvos and

gemillas chasadim. Logically, how is it possible for a generation to excel in the above behaviors and at the same time fail so abjectly in the area of ahavas and sin'as chinam. It seems difficult to fathom.

Additionally, while we understand the pernicious nature of שנאת חנם, why does it warrant the destruction of the 'ה' בית? Is the impact of שנאת חנם truly equivalent to the full societal breakdown reflected by the three big sins? Big deal? Absolutely. Catastrophically and apocalyptically big? On first blush I'm not so sure.

So why in fact does hatred of others as demonstrated by the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza rate as a sin of such magnitude. Among other reasonable and plausible explanations let me suggest that a comment by the Chazon Ish (beginning of the 4th perek of Emunah and Bitachon) is instructive. The Chazon Ish argues that all of character development boils down to whether man has the capacity and the desire to impose the רגש חיוני (the refined and elevated feeling) onto the רגש תאוני (the natural and instinctive feeling). All of man's behavior in this world revolves around the one fundamental question of whether man can bring to bear his/her refined instincts instead of just giving free reign to one's baser nature.

In a way שנאת חנם is the ultimate reflection of uncontrolled natural and base instincts. Such and such a person, community, or ideology bothers me, annoys me, triggers me and I just let the natural emotions of dislike carry the day. That behavior demonstrates the same lack of

control evident in the big three sins and in and of itself constitutes some measure of churban. That environment is incompatible with the Beis HaMikdash which emphasizes kedusha and refinement.

There might be another approach as well. The next pasuk in the parsha completes this particular segment of pesukim dealing with interpersonal relationships and feelings by commanding the mitzvah of אהבת ריע and concludes with the words 'אני ה'. The placement of this statement that 'I am G-d' coming on the heels of the מצוות בני אדם לחבירו should not be superficially glossed over. Why is it here that we are reminded of G-d's existence and preeminence?

There is no shortage of answers in the meforshim that deal with this issue but I would like to suggest the following. The mitzvos to love another person and to eliminate feelings of hatred extend well beyond the necessity for a social contract or the imperative of tikkun middos. As Rav Kook emphasizes in a number of his writings, ahavas rei'a is at heart the recognition of the אור ה' that burns in every human especially as it is manifest in those who have the same covenantal history as we do. In some, that אור ה' burns fully and deeply and one does not have to struggle to recognize the other's innate G-dliness. In others, the task of identifying their fundamental Elokus poses more of a challenge and then the onus is upon us to probe deeper and marshal the necessary עין טובה and the proper spirit of compassion. (Please see a beautiful Oznim L'Torah on this pasuk Vayikra 19:17)

At heart ahavas rei'a is a mitzvah that recognizes the presence of G-d everywhere, in everything and in everyone. The one who hates others has either consciously rejected the ubiquitous nature of G-d's presence in the world or does not have the capacity of perceiving Elokus. That inability on a personal level is a genuine tragedy, and on

a national level is nothing short of a catastrophe.

I believe that this approach sheds light on the questions that were posed earlier. It is certainly conceivable that a person or a society can excel in fulfilling and maintaining the 'body' of observance - learning, mitzvos, gemillas chassadim etc... - while somehow being disconnected from the 'soul' of observance which is defined by recognizing, connecting with and expanding Elokus in this world. We understand and are often witness to how dichotomous our lives can be and how the body can take front and center while the soul lags far behind. That seemed to be the state of affairs during bayis sheini.

Is that comparable to avodah zarah and gilui araiyos? Should it animate the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash? The answer is clearly yes. The purpose of a Mishkan or Mikdash is to create a structure that brings awareness of G-d's presence in the universe. The existence of that structure cannot co-exist with a lack of Elokus be it in the form of behavioral immorality or in the form of the community's inability to perceive sanctity among their neighbors and friends. These are both forms of rejecting G-d's presence in the world and the destruction of the Batei Mikdashos were less a punishment per se and more of a natural consequence.

The bad news is that we collectively still struggle with the challenges posed by the mitzvos of ahavas and sin'as chinam. The good news is that we have ample opportunities (almost every minute of every day) to address these challenges. IY'H we should have the strength of spirit and the presence of mind to bring our innate desire for sanctity into the domain of human interactions.

Have a good Shabbos
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