

## Never Underestimate Hatred

People do what's best for them, or so we assume. We expect that everyone will act in their own self-interest, and when we negotiate we offer incentives to the opposing party with this assumption in mind. We believe that all conflict can be resolved, provided that the settlement satisfies everyone's self-interest.

This fundamentally misunderstands hatred. In 1932 Freud and Einstein exchanged letters on the possibility of world peace. Freud wrote to Einstein: "you surmise that man has in him an active instinct for hatred and destruction, amenable to such stimulations. I entirely agree with you. I believe in the existence of this instinct...". Hatred is an instinct, and one that is ever-present; and like its opposite, love, it sometimes blossoms into a full blown passion. And like all passions, hatred can lead to irrational behavior<sup>1</sup>. The power of hatred is so great that suicide bombers are content to destroy themselves if they can do even more damage to those they hate. Indeed, the entire history of anti-Semitism is filled with examples of countries that harmed their self interest in their murderous pursuit of the Jews.

The Talmud refers to this passion for hatred when it makes reference to *sinaat chinam*, "unnecessary hatred", as being the reason the Second Temple was destroyed. "Unnecessary hatred" is when the emotion is so overwhelming, that you continue to engage in a conflict simply to hurt the other person. This hatred is passionate and bitter, so powerful that self-destruction seems like a small price to pay for hatred.

The dark side of hatred and envy is endless. Rav Aharon Soloveichik once remarked in a lecture that hatred may be an even more powerful passion than love. He noted that in the famous story of Solomon and the two mothers, the "fake" mother is willing to cut the baby in half. Rav Aharon asked: How could she want to do this, if she loved the baby enough to adopt him the day before? The answer, he said, is that even though the woman loved the baby, her hatred and envy for the other woman was even more powerful than her love for the baby.

Once we recognize that hatred is a passion, we look at it differently. A common failing in the realm of foreign policy is a lack of awareness of the role passionate hatred plays in international conflicts. However, extremist groups cannot simply be pacified with money, and giving them what they want won't mean that we will have peace in our time. And in our own community, even with our own friends and family, we underestimate how intense hatred can become. People can nurse grudges and cultivate hatreds, and wreak havoc because of them. It is a passion so potent it has torn families apart, and made lifelong enemies of close friends. The phrase "unnecessary hatred" reminds us that hatred should never be underestimated.

So what can be done? Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook was quoted as saying that "if the Temple was destroyed because of *sinaat chinam* "unnecessary hatred", it will rebuilt because of *ahavat chinam*, "unnecessary love". This quote is sweet and heartwarming, which is why it is so easy

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<sup>1</sup> See Rashi in this week's Parsha to Numbers 22:21: "hate causes a disregard for dignified conduct". Cf. Rashi Genesis 22:3 "love causes a disregard for dignified conduct".

to gloss over it and treat it as endearing sentiment. In actuality, the quote is quite profound; it teaches the lesson that the only way to overcome the passion for hatred is to cultivate an opposite passion, a passion for love.

However, to do so requires exceptional strength of character. The Klausenberger Rebbe, Rav Yekusiel Yehuda Halberstam, lost his entire family, including 11 children, in the Holocaust. At one point during the war, he was injured and didn't know if he would live. He made the following vow: "If I merit to survive I will garner all my energies to build a hospital in the Holy Land where every human being will receive the same dedicated medical care irrespective of nationality or creed." And after the war, the Rebbe went to Israel and built the Laniado Hospital in Netanya.

It would have been natural for the Klausenberger Rebbe to be bitter; but instead, with a broken heart, he chose to care for the ill and vulnerable. This is exactly what *Ahavat Chinam* means: that we should cultivate love, even if offers us no benefit whatsoever. May we all merit to follow on this path.