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STAM TORAH

SHABBOS NACHAMU

PARSHAS VAESCHANAN 5776

“THE POWER OF ONE”

On January 6, 2011, the Gluck family - a wonderful family in our community and personal friends - celebrated the wedding of their daughter Reina to Yaakov Chaifetz of BrooklynNY, in AteresCharna in Spring Valley, NY.

During Shabbos ShevaBerachos I met Mrs. Liz Gluck, the mother of the kallah, walking with her family. After I wished her mazal tov, she excitedly related to me the following extraordinary story:

“During the 1970s a young boy named Shlomo was a student in Yeshiva Chaim Berlin. When his father died as a young man, his mother simply could not afford to pay Shlomo’s full tuition. She made an agreement with the administrator of the yeshiva to help the yeshiva in any way she could. She would run fundraisers and help organize the yeshiva dinner, etc.

“Throughout those years she would often remark to Shlomo that she was so touched by how the administrator treated her. He never spoke to her disparagingly or made her feel badly about her predicament. In fact, he always smiled when he saw her and warmly thanked her for all of her efforts, according her tremendous dignity and respect.

“The young Shlomo from the aforementioned story is my husband, Shlomo Gluck. This week our daughter married Yaakov Chaifetz, the son of Rabbi AryehLaibChaifetz, the administrator of Yeshiva Chaim Berlin. When our daughter first began to date and someone mentioned Yaakov as a potential shidduch[[1]](#footnote-2) for Reina the name resonated and we wondered whether Yaakov was related to Rabbi Chaifetz from Yeshiva Chaim Berlin. When we found out that he was we decided to pursue the shidduch above all else.

Rabbi Chaifetz could never have known that the widow to whom he accorded such respect was the grandmother of his future daughter-in-law!”

The oft-quoted gemara[[2]](#footnote-3) relates, “During the second Temple era they were engaged in Torah, mitzvos, and good deeds. So why was it (the second Temple) destroyed? מפני שהיתה בו שנאת חינם- Because there was in it (the generation) *sinaschinam* - baseless hatred[[3]](#footnote-4). This teaches us that baseless hatred corresponds (in severity) to the three (most stringent) sins – idolatry, immorality, and murder.”

It’s been noted many times that, if we are still in exile and the Temple has not yet been rebuilt, it is indicative of the fact that *sinaschinam* is still rampant among us.

The vernacular of the sages is always very precise. Why did they choose to term disunity ‘*sinaschinam’*? Anyone engaged in a personal feud or who possesses feelings of enmity or resentment for another sect of Jews will counter that they have a perfectly valid reason for their bad feelings. They may even agree that baseless hatred has a pernicious effect on the Jewish people as a whole. But they will justify themselves by claiming that their hatred is warranted, and therefore surely does not fall into the category of ‘baseless hatred’. The sages could have easily referred to it as ‘disharmony’ or ‘disunity’. Why did they choose to refer to it as ‘baseless hatred’ or ‘hatred for/of nothing’?

We offer three different approaches to this question[[4]](#footnote-5):

1. The Chofetz Chaim writes that people only speak loshon hora about others because they fail to realize the greatness of the person they are slandering. If one who was about to speak disparagingly about his neighbor suddenly is informed that one of the leading Torah sages has regular correspondence with that neighbor, he would hesitate before relating his negative remarks. ‘If such a righteous person feels that my neighbor is such a worthy person, perhaps I was wrong about what I surmised about him.’

The Torah[[5]](#footnote-6) states, “For you are a holy people to Hashem, your G-d; Hashem, your G-d has chosen you to be for him a treasured people above all the peoples on the face of the earth. Not because you are more numerous than all the peoples did G-d desire you and choose you, for you are the fewest of all the peoples. Rather, because of G-d’s love for you and because He observes the oath that He swore to your forefathers…”

The Chofetz Chaim explains that just as G-d loves each and every Jew unconditionally, we must foster such love for each other, because we are all special and holy. If we appreciate how valuable and precious every Jew is we will view others in a different light, even in the face of their personally vexing shortcomings and idiosyncratic annoyances.

A person does not hate someone he admires and reveres. If we have feelings of hatred for others it is because we view them as ‘a nothing’. We fail to recognize their true value and greatness. That is one meaning of ‘*sinaschinam’* – hatred that emanates from nothing, i.e. from viewing others as valueless ‘nothings’, by failing to appreciate them.

2. President Abe Lincoln was once asked why he doesn’t destroy his enemies if he has the ability to do so. He replied that he seeks to build a relationship with his enemies and develop feelings of friendship and camaraderie with his enemies. “If I make my enemies into friends, am I not essentially destroying my enemies?”

We do not hate those we love. We may, at times, become very annoyed, and even angry, with our closet friends. We may even hate what they do and be extremely frustrated with their way of life. But we do not hate them personally.

We only hate people with whom we feel no connection, or a negative connection. Such feelings are termed, *sinaschinam* – hatred of nothing, because there is nothing, i.e. no relationship between them[[6]](#footnote-7). If one is able to build a relationship with the person he dislikes it often helps him uproot negative feelings from his heart.

3. Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon shlita offered the following analogy to explain the detriment of sinaschinam: A teacher was delivering a lesson to his class when he noticed one student playing with his pencil, making a big mess and causing a significant disturbance. The teacher warned the student to put away the pencil but he ignored the teacher. The teacher then walked over to the student, grabbed his hand and slammed it into his desk until the bone literally broke.

The next day the irate parents burst into the classroom screaming at the teacher, “What in the world is the matter with you? You broke our son’s hand for no reason?” The teacher looked up incredulously, “How can you say it was for nothing? I made sure he stopped playing with his pencil didn’t I?!”

Rabbi Salomon explained that everyone understands that although the teacher may technically have had ‘a reason’ for breaking the student’s hand, the punishment was so outlandishly harsh relative to the crime it was for nothing. So too, if we understood how detrimental disunity and enmity is to us as a people, and how much punishment and pain it causes us nationally and globally, all of our reasons would fall by the wayside. Our Sages termed disunity *sinaschinam* to remind us that there is nothing that justifies enmity among Jews.

*This all does not mean that we have to love everything all Jews do. It also does not mean that we don’t have a responsibility to protest – at times loudly – against our brethren when we feel that they are desecrating the Torah. There are also extreme situations when it may not be possible to build a relationship with another person for various reasons. Still-in-all, we must strive to love others as people, simply because they are Jews. If someone’s child was, G-d forbid, acting inappropriately and even humiliatingly, the parent would abhor what the child was doing and denounce his acts. However, the parent would continue to love the child. Every Jew is a child of G-d, our brother and sister.*

Rabbi YitzchokZilbersteinshlita relates a powerful incredible story which demonstrates the power of peace and unity in protecting us from danger:

There were two women who were involved in personal feud for a number of years. One day one of the women attended a lecture she heard about the importance of peace. She was deeply inspired by what she heard and she decided that the time had come for her to end the feud and make peace. She approached her former rival and told her how much she regretted their long standing quarrel. She explained that it was so important to her that they build a relationship that she was inviting her to her daughter’s wedding which was to take place in a few weeks. The second woman was excited by the invitation, but when she heard the date she replied sadly that she would be unable to attend because she was to have surgery that day.

The first woman was so steadfast that her new ‘friend’ attend that she approached a distinguished Rabbi and asked him if it was appropriate for her to push off the wedding so her friend could attend! The Rabbi replied that, not only was it permissible, but it was laudable for her to do so.

The first woman was indeed able to arrange that the wedding be detained so her friend could attend.

Incredibly, the original date and location of the wedding was the Versailles Wedding Hall in Jerusalem on Thursday, May 24, 2001, the exact time and place of the infamous wedding disaster when the third floor of the four story building collapsed, killing 23 people and injuring 380.[[7]](#footnote-8)

After recounting on Tisha B’av many of the traumatic suffering we have endured throughout the exile, we read the prophet’s clarion call, “’Console! Console My people!’ says your G-d.” It is a national consolation. We have been made to suffer as a people and therefore we can only be comforted as a people. But that depends on whether we are ready to stand united.

It was baseless hatred that was the catalyst of the destruction of the Temple, and it is unequivocal – and oftentimes underserved – love that will bring it back.

“Because there was baseless hatred”

“For you are a holy people to Hashem”

1. ‘match’ for marriage [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Yoma 9b [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Literally “Hatred of/for nothing” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. From the sefer ‘OtzarosHatorah –Tisha B’av’ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Devorim 7:6-8 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. It’s a fairly common experience that one who doesn’t like someone else for whatever reason may voice his feelings to another. Then if he becomes friendlier with the person he vilified prior he will feel badly for everything he said before they became familiar with each other. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. This story in no way minimizes or detracts from the horrific tragedy during the wedding of Keren and AsafDror. However, for the woman in our story, her decision to pursue peace saved her and her family. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)