

Mon 19 July 2010
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 Congregation Adat Reyim
 Tish'A B'Av Study session

What Causes Senseless Hatred?

Motivation

-Today is Tish'a b'Av, when we commemorate two great calamities of the past, the destruction of the two Temples – the first by the Babylonians in 587 BCE and the second by the Romans in 70 CE.

-Talmud:

Why was the First Temple destroyed? Because idolatry, sexual immorality, and murder prevailed... But why was the Second Temple destroyed, given that in its time they WERE occupying themselves with Torah, observance of mitzvot, and the practice of deeds of kindness? Because senseless hatred [sin'at chinam] prevailed.

That teaches you that senseless hatred is considered as serious as the three sins of idolatry, sexual immorality, and murder combined. [Yoma 9b]

Does Talmud imply that too much observance can lead to “senseless hatred”?

Can one care too much – so much that the slightest disagreement causes hatred?

-Purpose not to knock observance (far from it) but explore how far it is proper to go, and how tolerant one should be of those who observe less or differently.

History: Divisions in 70 CE

Religious:

- Pharisees (Oral law / World-to-Come, rabbis)
- Sadducees (no Oral law, no World-to-Come, aristocracy)
- Essenes (monastic sect)
- Christians and followers of other would-be Messiahs
- Hellenized/Romanized seculars
- Others: Very intense religious fervor

Political:

- Against an uprising (and spies and collaborators)
- For an uprising (3 factions of Zealots [kana-im])

Senseless hatred

-Clearly it's not enough to be technically observant

-Prayer of little girl in Religious School: Dear God, please make the bad people good and the good people nice.

1. R. Akiva's 24,000 students died of disease because they "because they did not treat each other with respect" in their religious disputes. [Yevamot 62b]
 - This decades AFTER Temple was destroyed
 - They practiced stinginess [of spirit]. [Bereshit Rabbah 61:3]
 - They felt that another student's success in Torah study diminished them. [Sifsei Chayyim 3, 44-48]
 - Talmud: They died of 'askerah'.
 - Rashi: That was diphtheria [on Shabbat 33a].
 - Maharal: It blocks power of speech, a punishment fitting the crime.
 - R. Akiva had to start over with 7 students.

2. Hillel prevailed against Shammai JUST because his disciples were kind and humble, and always quoted the other side's opinions before their own.

R. Abba stated in the name of Samuel: For three years there was a dispute between Beth Shammai and Beth Hillel, the first saying, 'the halachah agrees with us' and the second [also] saying, 'the halachah agrees with us'.

Then a heavenly voice [bat kol] was heard saying, 'Ellu v'ellu divrei Elohim Chayyim – These and these are the words of the living God, but the halachah agrees with Beth Hillel.'

However, since both are the words of the living God, what was it that entitled Beth Hillel to have the halachah agree with them? Because they were kind and modest, and studied both their own rulings and those of Beth Shammai and were even so [humble] as to mention the opinions of Beth Shammai before their own.

This teaches you that God raises up those who humbles themselves, and humbles those who exalt themselves; that greatness flees those who seek it and follows those who flee it; that time forces back those who force it and stands by the side of those who yield to it. [I.e., those so anxious to succeed that they take great risks are courting disaster, but those who do not tax their abilities will succeed in due course.] [Eruvin 13b]

-What is "senseless hatred"? Rashi on Shabbat 32b: It is hatred of people who have not committed any action justifying the hatred.

-When does the hatred make sense?

Pesachim 113b: You may bear ill will towards someone if you *witnessed* him engaging in a forbidden act.

Bava Metzia 32b: But you must assist him *before* assisting those you love [so that ill will does not turn to hatred.]

Sanhedrin 27b: A hater [sone] is someone who does not speak to his fellow for 3 days because of enmity.

-What is difference with First Temple? Before the fall of the First Temple, sins were out in the open, then people repented. Before the fall of the Second Temple, sins were in their hearts and they did not repent:
 Rashi: The Second Temple sinners practiced wickedness clandestinely.
 Maharsha: They harbored senseless hatred in their heart, but in public they ate and drank in congenial manner with those they hated.
 -Torah enjoins us not to hate secretly:

Leviticus 19:17: Lo tisna et achicha bilvavecha -- Do not hate your brother in your heart.

-Talmud includes a prayer to be delivered from hatred:

May it be Your will, O Lord our God and God of our fathers, that no hatred against any person come into our hearts, and no hatred against us come into the hearts of any other person, and may none be jealous of us, and may we not be jealous of anybody; and may Your Torah be our labor all the days of our lives, and may our words be as supplications before You. [J. Talmud, Berachot 8:6]

Is it happening today?

-Clear turn to the right in past few decades, accompanied with rigidity, accelerating, especially in Israel

-Bitter disputes even among very observant Jews on what appear to be minor points (although some major points). Talmud says not all disputes are bad:

A controversy for the sake of heaven [machloket l'shem shamayim] will result in something that endures. One that is not for the sake of heaven will not result in something that endures. Which is a controversy for the sake of heaven? The controversy between Hillel and Shammai. And which is not for the sake of heaven? The controversy of Korach and all his faction." [Pirkei Avot 5:17]

How do you know which is which? Investigate motivation. Is it envy, greed, hatred, lust, desire for power? Or is it genuine desire to understand Torah?

-Phenomenon of Baalei Teshuva (newly observant Jews). They sometimes want to do more. (To atone for past non-observance?).

Talmud:

Rabbi Isaac said: Is what the Torah prohibited you not enough, that you need to [also] prohibit yourself things that are permissible? [Yerushalmi, Nedarim 9:1]

Tolerance

-Many feel they are standing at the exact ideal place in the wide spectrum of observance: Everyone to the right of them is a radical religious fanatic, and everyone to the left of them is a secular godless communist. ☺.
How much tolerance is good?

-Tolerance is not just theoretical, but has practical implications: What if you can't eat in their house? What if you don't want your children to associate with their children whom you consider a bad influence?

Degrees of tolerance:

- I will try to harm you
- I will try to stop you
- I will not associate with you
- I will associate with you with some restrictions
- I will associate with you with no restrictions

We all do some of each depending on the case (in order: Naziism, communism, converts out of Judaism, less observant Jews, Jews with different views).

-Note that the most tolerant are frequently the least observant. But they also assimilate the fastest. Their branch soon dies on the Jewish tree. So broad tolerance is clearly not desirable.

- What about "respect"? It can be granted only item-by-item, not wholesale:
- Some items I may agree with and therefore respect
 - Some items I may disagree with but still respect if I think they represent a defensible point of view
 - Some items I may disagree with and NOT respect (e.g., when Jews are described in negative terms).

Two thoughts to conclude

-The Temple was destroyed because of senseless hatred [sin'at chinam]; it will be rebuilt because of senseless love [ahavat chinam].

[Rebbe Yechezkel Taub of Kuzmir, 1755-1856, founder of Motzitz Hasidic sect, known for its music, as well as for learning, in [Mechmad MiZahav, Pietrekov, 1909, p 17. The phrase was popularized by Rabbi Avraham Kook, first Chief Rabbi of Israel]

-Hinne! Ma tov, uma na'im, shevet achim gam yachad!"

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity! [Psalms 133:1]