



The Link Between Shame and Baseless Hatred

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We are defining shame as the discomfort produced when the ego feels diminished or deflated. **We are defining *sinat chinam*** as baseless hatred, meaning hatred that has no justification, that has no basis to it.

The first step is to distinguish *sinat chinam* from generic dislike which does not qualify as *sinat chinam* because it is “lighter” than that and also, reasonable. Some people are irritating to be around. That’s fair. There’s no sin in having people-preferences. The ideal might be to find something endearing about everyone and to focus on that, but there’s no obligation.¹ The mitzvah of “loving your neighbor as yourself” means that whatever good you seek for yourself, you hope that upon your neighbor. So, bottom line, as long as there’s no ill-will—no wishing them bad or causing them harm—it is not *sinat chinam*.

Next is to distinguish *sinat chinam* from hate that is permitted (and perhaps even obligated)² because the person is a dangerous, murderous psychopath (in Torah’s language, an Amalakite) who is incapable of teshuva and needs to be eliminated by incarceration, assassination or war. This is also a “reasonable hatred” for the evildoer is in the category of “pursuer:” who will kill others unless he is slain first. This is a criminal level of evil.

The space between these two extremes (between harmless dislike on one end and legitimate survival-threat on the other)...the space between them is the place in our psyche most vulnerable to shame and susceptible to *sinat chinam*.

In that space, there are a million things that cause ego distress (a synonym for shame): An inappropriate joke or an insecurity triggered by envy; a persistent disagreement or an unmet expectation of entitlement; an unrequited love or a date arriving late; a lack of recognition or a sin exposed; an unfaithful spouse or a demotion at work...etc. Some folks are more sensitive than others. The challenge is to process these ego-assaults without lapsing into a place of ill-will, grudge or revenge.

The thing that these upsets all share in common is their ego distress which activates a defense scenario whose goal is to suppress the shame or dump it on someone else. And yet, the shame is real and it is we that feel humiliated by it. So in order to dodge its disgrace our visual field distorts our perceptions and presents an altered reality where the shame is projected onto someone else...whereby *they* become the shameful failure or rejected one. This is called scapegoating.

It's a bit like Einstein's Theory of Relativity which proved that the speed of light is constant in all frames. Consequently, everything else is relative and adapts to that ruling truth. Time and space distort in ways that seem impossible but actually do happen: time seems to slow or accelerate and

¹ One should only focus on this issue (of minor dislike) after they have cleared themselves of any actual *sinat chinam* in their life. Focusing on the former (the *chumra*, so to speak) conveniently distracts one from the real issue—the shame and *sinat chinam* that is the priority and the very hard inner work.

² Sefer HaChinukh, mitzvot 603-605.

solid objects appear to shrink or stretch.³ Reality warps and alters to uphold the ruling parameter, that everything is relative *except* for the speed of light.

Similarly with shame. From the unenlightened ego's perspective, the one constant fact in the universe is its faultlessness. It is always correct, center, blameless and on top. Whatever facts and realities must distort in order to preserve its delusional status, well, so be it.

The preservation of that deceit—of the ego's absolute, unqualified and flawless reputability, is—like the speed of light—undeniable, at least by its own reckoning. And so, to bolster that lie, it warps perceptions in such a way that the shame we are denying lands on someone else's plate. For an ego skilled in this deception, the guilty party appears absolutely innocent and the innocent one appears guilty.

This is a universal feature of the unenlightened ego though it is not equal across the board. Some folks are more capable of honest self-reflection, others are less so. Nevertheless, its mechanism applies on all scales: couples, work groups, national politics and geo-political diplomacy.

To those with eyes to see, the whole ploy is absurd and transparent. But it works, even on a grand scale. The Anti-Zionist-Hamas-Supporting demonstrations and student encampments that followed the Oct 7 pogrom in Israel, are a testimony to how vulnerable people are to a twisted thought form that makes no sense, but if it relieves enough shame and gets repeated enough times it takes on a force of truth and compels tens of thousands of people (including the intellectual elite) to raise its banner and take to the streets shouting "Death to Zionists."

At first Hamas was proud of their invasion and captured everything on film. But when their rampage of murder, rape and decapitation was viewed through western eyes, it brought shame instead of glory. Within 24 hours they disassociated from the massacre, blamed it on Israel and turned the facts upside down.

Every sham accusation leveled against Israel was false for Israel but true for the perpetrators who are now damning Israel for the very crimes that they committed. This is a stunning example of shame's power to distort reality and weave a narrative that is, literally, the very opposite of truth and yet, nevertheless, is accepted as truth by so many.

The Biblical story of the spies and their disparaging of the Holy Land is also, according to the Zohar, exactly this mechanism, as explained, in detail, in the new book. Another Biblical tale that clearly illustrates the warping of perception produced by shame, is the story of Yosef and his brothers. When we step into a forcefield of shame—a shame spasm as it's termed in the book—we become completely unreliable witnesses to our lives. Our perceptions can be as far from truth as the post oct 7 protests mentioned above.

It's clear, in that timely example of the world's response to 10/7, that another characterizing feature of *sinat chinam* (that distinguishes it from generic dislike) is that the hater cannot tolerate the very existence of the *other* and leaves no conceptual space (no *dalet amot*) for them to exist—for them to hold a contrary view. The very fact of disagreement becomes a source of shame and outrage to the narcissistic ego's intolerance of contrariety.

When we find ourselves reviling a person altogether, feeling ill-wishes toward them, tearing them apart in our heads even if we don't voice those thoughts to another, not being able to sit at the same table with them, feeling a glimmer of joy when hardship comes their way or even secretly hoping that it will... in that case, at that point, we have crossed the line into *sinat chinam* (baseless hatred), even if we haven't expressed those feelings in any way.

³ The person themselves (traveling near the speed of light) does not see clocks slow or objects stretch. It's life as usual inside that spaceship. But to an observer watching that person approach...the person appears elongated, and their clock slows down.

And the hidden factor that instigates this shift from dislike to hatred... can always be traced back to a knee-jerk reflex that is attempting to protect us from some shame (aka ego discomfort) that has been triggered by that person (or category of people). The ego's defense strategy is to dump the shame back on them (or onto some other scapegoat) by identifying *their* shame and then feeling justified in despising them.

The sequence is that: Envy or a sense of being judged, wronged, insulted, rejected, belittled or contradicted leads to ⇒ Shame (ego-deflation) ⇒ which is relieved by dumping that shame onto others through hating, belittling, humiliating, blaming, demonizing or subjugating them. They are the bad guys, evildoers, frayers!

And so the work is to follow the breadcrumb trail back to the source of our intolerance which, inevitably, begins with an ego-deflating emotion (like envy, fear, insecurity, frustration, inadequacy, embarrassment, anxiety or weakness) which produced the shame that we now need to purge by projecting it onto our offender or an available proxy.

Now, having identified the intra-psycho culprit, it's tikun is to find a way to process the discomfort in a more spiritually productive way.

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### **What To Do When a Person Finds Themselves Feeling *Sinat Chinam***

In order to avoid *sinat chinam* we must ...

- a) rid ourselves of any ill-will that we might be carrying against our fellow human. And...
- b) create a conceptual space for them to exist, along with the opinion we find so offensive.

### **Eliminating Ill-Will**

The Tanya informs us that that there are two levels of thought. The thought as it initially pops up, as if from nowhere. And then the decision we make about how to relate to it. Do we explore it, and indulge it, or do we label it as corrupt and push it aside. The first level of thought is not our responsibility, says the Tanya. We are made from raw materials that are laced with impurities from primordial times, from the era of broken vessels to be exact. Part of our life mission is to clean out those impurities. Yet, we can only do so when they pop up as the spontaneous, first-level thoughts mentioned above. Once they are visible we have something to work with. Until then, they are inaccessible.

The malice that we hold in our hearts about people—its vengeance, grudge and ill-will—is an ancient impurity. The fact that it pops up, says Tanya, is just part of our design—no blame and no accountability for that. But once it's here and visible, we must decide how to process its content. What should be our response. This is our choice point.

Is it a thought that we should cultivate or reject? To choose the former—to indulge the malice— is to foster *sinat chinam*. To reject the thought and to, instead, replace it with a spiritually productive truth or verse, for example: the Shema, or HaShem's name, or an affirmation of Divine oneness, or a prayer for the teshuva and spiritual awakening of that person or persons...that option averts *sinat chinam* and rather, fulfills the obligation of "neighborly love" by renouncing the perverse allure of ill-will.

In addition, at some future point, it will likely need some journal processing or therapy to get to the root of things and actually clear it out.

### **Creating Conceptual Space For Antagonists To Exist**

Find the space of neutrality inside yourself and sort through your adversary's argument or position paying attention to how each assertion makes you feel. Notice the places that produce anger/shame/outrage/indignation.

What exactly is it that's so intolerable? Is there anything you can do about that? Is acceptance productive...or even possible? How do *they* justify their position? Is there any truth in that?

Then go through each point again and identify any assertions that you might actually agree with though, for other reasons, perhaps contextual, you can't really admit that to them. But even so, simply by acknowledging to yourself, that they have at least one legitimate point creates a conceptual space for them to exist in the world.

In general there are three ways of extending conceptual space to an antagonist:

1. Sometimes the actual content of our opponent's opinion must be considered (whether in whole or in part). He or she is expressing a fact (or perspective) that we overlooked and must now admit (if we are genuinely seeking truth). It might be that after further consideration we still reject their position as a whole. Yet, the fact that we acknowledge even one point as valid gives them (at the very least) a *dalet amot* of standing room which takes us out of the category of *sinat chinam*.
2. Sometimes their assertions are just plain false (as far as we can see). Perhaps their data was flawed or their arguments are biased or their opinions just do not ring true. But even so, their intentions are good. They are motivated by a Torah value and seek to do the ethical thing. To admit their sincere intentions in this way is an antidote to *sinat chinam*.
3. Sometimes there is nothing redeemable about their content or intention. They are thugs through and through. But HaShem brought them into our lives for a reason. They are delivering a providential message which we must decode by finding the most spiritually productive response to the ordeal. HaShem chooses the most fallen souls for that dirty work.

Now this third category also includes the justified hatred of the psychopathic sort mentioned above. It will take a careful eye and wise heart to clarify who's on this side of that red line and who has crossed it. This is an extremely ambiguous area of moral assessment. The stakes are supremely high in both directions. There are deadly consequences to both sides—to being overly forbearing and lenient, as well as being overly zealous and calculating.

### Extra Credit— Cuppa Tea

Commit yourself to the task of finding something endearing about that person who you presently find irritating. Invite them for a coffee, tea or glass of wine and stay with it until you succeed. If your intention is sincere, it should not be difficult to accomplish this mini mission of finding something genuinely likable in them.

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We all know that *sinat chinam* is the primary obstacle to our messianic redemption. And it has become clear that unless we get to the root of the problem and address the shame and ego-states that fuel its resentments, we will not be done with it.

Please HaShem, as we step into our new year, and receive our bounty of *ohr chadash* whose specialty is paradigm-shifting, may we receive its light into the depths of our being and be transformed in ways that serve You and please You and glorify Your name (i.e., Your people, Israel, who carry Your name.)

אור חדש על ציון תאיר, ונזכה כלנו (יחד) במהרה לאורו:

Shine a new light on Tsion, and may we, all of us [together], speedily merit to its radiance.