

Gratuitous Hatred

What Is It And Why Is It So Bad?

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Why was the first Temple destroyed? Because the three cardinal sins were rampant in society: idol worship, licentiousness, and murder... And why then was the second Temple – wherein the society was involved in Torah, commandments and acts of kindness – destroyed? Because gratuitous hatred was rampant in society. This teaches you that gratuitous hatred is equal in severity to the three cardinal sins: idol worship, licentiousness, and murder.

Yoma 9b.

What exactly is gratuitous hatred? Why is it equated with the most serious of sins? How can gratuitous hatred be compared to something as heinous as murder? How does such a trait lead to the destruction of the Temple?

I gained an insight to these questions during a taxi ride in Jerusalem when the driver inveighed of the woes of Israeli society. He said, “You know what’s wrong with our society? We hate each other.” This weighty allegation prompted me to respond, “I think that is going a bit far; perhaps it is not that we hate each other as much as it is that we only care about ourselves.” He glanced at me in his rear view mirror and said, “Maybe you’re right, but nevertheless, we are jealous of each other; we can’t stand to see our neighbor have something more than us; we question how someone else got what they did; we forever look enviously ‘in the plate’ of the other.”

This exchange reminded me of the traits referred to in three separate but parallel teachings in the Mishna of Pirke Avot:

- “[Those who have] a good eye, a humble spirit and a ‘lowly’ soul are of the students of our father Abraham. [Those who have] an evil eye, an arrogant spirit and a desirous (lit., ‘wide’) soul are of the students of the wicked Balaam ...” (Avot 5:19).
- “An evil eye, an evil inclination, and hatred of one’s fellow remove a man from the world” (Avot 2:11).
- “Jealousy, lusting, [pursuing] honor remove a man from the world” (Avot 4:21).

These three statements highlight three paradigmatic traits and their opposites.

First, we note that the trait of a “good eye” is contrasted with that of an “evil eye” and “jealousy”. R. O. Mibartenura explains that a “good eye” indicates that one is satisfied with what he has, doesn’t covet the money of others and furthermore, is not jealous when he sees that his friend has more than him. R. Y. Lifshitz, in his commentary “Yachin”, adds that someone with a “good eye” is actually happy for the success of his fellowman. In contradistinction, an “evil eye” is indicative of dissatisfaction with one’s station, covetousness, jealousy, and vexation over another’s success.

Second, a “lowly soul” (*nefesh shefeilab*) is distinguished from a “wide soul” (*nefesh rebava*), “lusting” and an “evil inclination”. R. O. Mibartenura teaches that a “lowly soul” is indicative of one who distances himself from the pleasures of the flesh. By contrast, one with a “wide soul” is one who indulges the lusting of his evil inclination.

Third, a “humble spirit” (*ruach nemucha*) is pitted against an “arrogant spirit” (*ruach gevoha*), “pursuing honor” and “hatred of one’s fellow”. A “humble spirit” is noted by R. O.

Mibartenura to indicate extreme humility, whereas an “arrogant spirit” bespeaks one who is haughty and full of empty self-pride. Indeed, it is such a person who pursues honor for himself, ever occupied in his own self-aggrandizement. Such an outlook begets disdain for others, noted in the Mishna as “hatred”.

Tellingly, Rashi explains the term “hatred for others” as “gratuitous hatred”. This brings us back to our original questions regarding gratuitous hatred. Surely no sane person hates for no reason. Rather, when one is motivated by an arrogant spirit, seeking honor for himself, he brings himself to a state whereby his actions are like those of a person who hates everyone, whether he has reason to or not.

R. S. R. Hirsch (on Avot 4:21) helps us appreciate the interrelatedness of the three paradigmatic traits by noting a common denominator between them: “The vices listed here ... make selfish interest the sole purpose of him whom they dominate and so they cause him to clash with the rest of the world, for under such circumstances the world has value to him only as long as it will cater to his desires.”

We can thus explain the relationship of the three traits as follows. Within every person lie desires, drives, or in the terminology of the Mishna, an evil inclination. This inclination (*yetzer*) is raw power and is only labeled as “evil” due to its propensity to be abused for evil pursuits (Tanhuma, Ber. 7). To satisfy his desires, man uses his physical senses, depicted in the Mishna as the “eye”. Thus, if man seeks to tilt his inclination toward negative pursuits, his eye becomes an accessory to that evil, roving jealously to acquire all that he sees. What distinguishes man’s use of his “inclination” and his “eye” toward the good or the evil is, in a word, motivation. If one’s motivation is rooted in selfishness then he will use his “eye” to satisfy his “inclination” at the expense of everyone around him – he will in this sense act like one who “hates everyone” – for no reason.

Gratuitous hatred, then, is simply the natural and inevitable consequence of selfish interest. This explains why gratuitous hatred is equated with the three cardinal sins and impugned with destroying the Temple. The fabric of society is woven of the interactions of every member of society. At the moment that the members of society seek only their own well being, the fabric is torn asunder, leaving a pile of fragile, even insignificant, threads. A society in which its members think only of themselves will destroy itself just as surely as if they murder each other.

The Maharal (Netzach Yisrael, ch. 4) explains that the second Temple was a reflection of society’s cohesive strength. The breakdown of society signaled the breakdown of the Temple. This is why the Temple was destroyed, and this, according to Rav Kook, is precisely why the Temple will be rebuilt. Rav Kook teaches that “just as the Temple was destroyed over gratuitous hatred, so it will be rebuilt when man learns to love his fellow with gratuitous love.”

And just as “gratuitous hatred” does not mean hate for no reason, but rather exhibiting hatred born of selfishness, so too “gratuitous love” does not mean loving for no reason, but rather exhibiting love born of selflessness. During these nine days wherein we mourn the destruction of the Temple and the tragedies left in its wake, let us focus on this most fundamental of lessons and seek selflessness in place of selfishness, humility in place of haughtiness, joy in place of jealousy. May we thus merit Rav Kook’s promise wherein we see the rebuilding of our society with the Temple radiating its perfection.