

Hatred in Judaism

by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel

This essay is reprinted from the book, “The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values” published by Urim, or the upcoming books, “The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values: Man to Man” or “The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values: Man to G-d” to be published in the future. This essay is not intended as a source of practical halachic (legal) rulings. For matters of halachah, please consult a qualified posek (rabbi).

Every thinking person should agree that hatred is an emotion that not only hurts people, in general, but also damages many individuals who are the object of this emotion. Yet, hate is such a powerful feeling that it often guides the actions of many people and even the actions of nations. It seems very natural to hate and wish to harm someone who has wronged you. Should a person always fight that emotion or sometimes give in to it? Does Judaism advocate avoiding hatred in all situations or is it permitted to hate someone in certain circumstances? Or rather, should a person love everyone and hate no one? Is that really a Jewish idea?

WHERE AND WHY JUDAISM OPPOSES HATRED

There are many sources pointing out the strong antagonism of Judaism to the emotion of hatred. These sources flow from the Torah, the Tanach-Scripture, the Talmud and Midrash. The Torah specifically says¹ that one may not hate a brother (fellow Jew) in one's heart. The verse in Obadiah² admonishes the Jew from rejoicing when a particular enemy is fallen. Another verse³ also says that one may not be joyous when your enemy is defeated, lest G-d get angry. This concept, of not being happy when an enemy falls, is codified in the Mishna by Shmuel Hakatan.⁴

The idea of hatred was so distasteful to the Jew that the Talmud records that the Second Temple was destroyed because of unfounded hatred among Jews even though they performed mitzvot-commandments and were also kind people.⁵ Furthermore, it also says in that passage that since we know that the First Temple was destroyed because Jews violated the three cardinal sins of Judaism – adultery, murder and idolatry (the only three of the 613 that one must rather die for rather than perform at gunpoint). This teaches us that he who hates needlessly, is as if he has violated all three cardinal sins combined! Other commentators have taken this Talmudic statement one step further. In view of the fact that the length of the Diaspora following the destruction of the First Temple lasted only seventy years but the length of the Diaspora following the destruction of the Second Temple has lasted more than 1900 years and is still continuing, we can further see the greater severity of the sin of hating as compared to the three sins of adultery, murder and idolatry.

The very essence of Judaism itself involves the avoidance of hatred. When Hillel was asked by a non-Jew to tell him the entire essence of Judaism while standing on one foot,⁶ Hillel replied, “Do not do unto others what is hateful to you. The rest is commentary. Now, go learn.” Thus, the essence of Judaism,

¹ Leviticus 19:17

² Obadiah 1:12

³ Proverbs 24:17-18

⁴ Avot 4:19

⁵ Yoma 9b

⁶ Shabbat 31a

according to Hillel, is not to act in a hateful manner. (It is interesting to note that this statement was expressed in the negative rather than the positive – to love one's neighbor – as is stated in the Torah verse, because G-d does not mandate an emotion such as love. But G-d does demand actions towards others which are not hateful.) Sefer Ha-Chinuch⁷ calls this trait of hatred the ugliest of all human traits. The Mishna⁸ says that the emotion of hatred can remove a person from the world. We see that the Rabbis were so afraid of the emotion of hatred that they asked only Shmuel Hakatan, the epitome of the person who could not hate (and composer of the Mishna about not hating one's enemy) to compose the nineteenth blessing in the Silent Prayer against talebearers and informers.⁹ It would be too easy for most people to write this blessing with a bit of hatred. The Rabbis, therefore, asked Shmuel Hakatan, who could not hate, to compose this blessing.

The first Jewish Diaspora in Egypt as well as Jewish slavery came about, according to the Talmud,¹⁰ only because of hatred. The hatred of the brothers for Joseph caused them to sell him and eventually bring the Jews down to Egypt. The very definition of a Jewish hero is not measured in terms of physical prowess. According to the Avot DeRabbi Natan,¹¹ the ultimate Jewish hero is he who can turn one's enemy into a friend – i.e., convert hatred into love (see chapter about “Heroes” for an expansion of this theme). Maimonides¹² informs us that the Torah attempted to eradicate feelings of hatred by commanding every Jew to help unload the burden on the back of an animal belonging to his enemy.¹³ In this, way, it is hoped, both parties will come to eliminate any feelings of hatred.

After the defeat of the great enemy of the Jews, Pharaoh and the wicked Egyptians who had mercilessly killed Jewish babies, who were drowned in the sea, the angels wished to rejoice and sing praises. G-d admonishes them by saying, “My handiwork (My creations, the Egyptians) are drowning and you wish to sing praise and be happy?”¹⁴ This shows that G-d and the Jews themselves should not hate even the worst enemies of the Jews. It also shows why one cannot hate anyone. The most evil person is still a creation of G-d, containing the image of G-d within. Thus, rejoicing at the death of any creation of G-d diminishes G-d. Therefore, on Passover, it is the Jewish custom to remove ten drops from the wine cup when recounting the Ten Plagues which killed many wicked Egyptians. Similarly, during the last six days of Passover, the entire Hallel (Praise of G-d) prayer is not recited, but two paragraphs are omitted in deference to the Egyptians, creations of G-d who died.

DEFINITION OF THE SIN OF HATRED

Defining the specific sin of hatred is much more difficult than simply stating to Jews “Do not hate.” First, in general, Judaism does not define sinning as merely feeling an emotion, such as hatred. Usually (but not always) a sin requires an action or refraining from an action that is driven by a feeling. In addition, we

⁷ Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah #238

⁸ Avot 2:11

⁹ Berachot 28b

¹⁰ Megillah 16a

¹¹ Avot DeRabbi Natan 23

¹² Maimonides, Hilchot Rotze-ach 13:13

¹³ Exodus 23:5

¹⁴ Sanhedrin 39b

will see that there is a fundamental disagreement about what precisely constitutes the sin of hatred from a Jewish perspective.

The Mishna simply states that hatred is defined as disliking an individual so much that it causes a Jew to refrain from speaking to someone for a minimum of three days as a result of that animosity or antagonism towards the person.¹⁵ A fifteenth century rabbi does not attach a specific action to hatred, but says that this emotion is a sin when it causes several other actions that violate Jewish law, including slanderous speech, revenge, lying, etc.¹⁶ A contemporary rabbi, Yitzchak Silver, defines this sin as lack of communication with the object of one's loathing¹⁷ for a minimum of three days, like the Talmud. Then he adds that this person would be forbidden to sit on a Jewish court and judge the object of his scorn. He continues and states that even though this Jew feels hated, it is forbidden in Jewish law to return that hatred to the other person.

The specific argument about the sin of hate, however, is based on a close reading of the Torah text prohibiting hatred of another Jew. The verse says "You may not hate your brother in your heart."¹⁸ The implication is that it is only in your heart that it is forbidden to hate. The Talmud, in fact, states that only hatred in one's heart violates this particular sin,¹⁹ implying that if the animosity is stated openly, then the sin is not violated. Describing the classic example of hate in the Torah narrative, it states that Joseph's brothers hated him and could not speak in peace with him.²⁰ On this last phrase, Rashi comments that although they were wrong in hating him, at least this hatred was out in the open and they were not hypocritical by keeping hate in their hearts while feigning friendliness outwardly.²¹ That would be far worse than openly showing one's hatred. Like the Talmud, the Midrash also states that only hatred in one's heart (privately), and not expressed hate, is forbidden by the Torah.²²

Maimonides specifically says that if a person informs the person that he hates him or her, he or she has not violated the prohibition of hatred (although other sins may have been committed).²³ Later on, in a different volume, Maimonides rules that if a Jew does not keep anger in his or her heart, there is no violation of the sin of hatred, even if he or she takes action as a result of the hatred, and hits or damages the person of scorn.²⁴ He then states that the continuation of the Torah verse about not hating, which is to reprove and admonish a sinner, is actually connected to the prohibition of hatred. If you hate someone, you should tell the person why you hate him or her, what this person has done wrong, says Maimonides. Chinuch continues this theme and also says that openly stating one's hate removes any violation of the sin

¹⁵ Mishna, Sanhedrin 3:5

¹⁶ Orchot Tzadikim, Shaar Shishi "*Sinah*"

¹⁷ Mishpotei Hashalom 2:8, 10, 12

¹⁸ Leviticus 19:17

¹⁹ Erchin 16b

²⁰ Genesis 34:4

²¹ Rashi commentary on Genesis 34:4

²² Midrash, Yalkut Shimoni, Leviticus 19, 613

²³ Maimonides, Sefer HaMitzvot, Lo Taase 302

²⁴ Maimonides, Hilchot Deot 6:5-6

of hatred, which must take place only in one's heart to be a Torah violation.²⁵ However, by announcing his hate, the person does violate the prohibition against taking revenge (see chapter on "Revenge" for an expansion of this theme) and does not fulfill the mitzvah-commandment of "loving one's fellow neighbor as oneself." That is why Abraham openly admonished King Avimelech that his servants had stolen from Abraham.²⁶ According to tradition, Abraham observed the entire Torah, so he knew that the prohibition of hatred was to keep that antipathy within his heart. Thus, he told Avimelech about his feelings and explained why he felt that way.

On the other hand, Nachmanides disagrees with this approach. He makes no distinction between hatred that is kept in one's heart and hatred that is expressed openly.²⁷ Rabbi Yaakov Kenievsky, known as the Steipler Gaon (1899-1985), points out this difference between Maimonides and Nachmanides (and Sefer Yera'im), which, according to Nachmanides, even if a Jew expresses his or her anger, the sin is still violated.²⁸ Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan (known as Chofetz Chaim) states that it is far better that a person should declare his anger openly rather than act hypocritically.²⁹ He then says that the sin is defined like Maimonides and Chinuch, and not like Nachmanides. Rav Silver cites all the opinions discussed above, but then explains that it makes no difference practically if one keeps the hatred within or not. If a Jew expresses his hatred, even though he has not violated one sin of hatred, he still is committing other sins, as noted above. In addition, every act of hatred (whether expressed or not) is always a failure to fulfill the mitzvah of loving one's fellow Jews.³⁰

Sheiltot, as explained by Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin in his commentary,³¹ as well as another modern rabbi,³² have a different interpretation of why the Torah spoke about "hating in one's heart." The Torah is trying to teach us that not only is a Jew guilty of hatred if he or she acts upon the hatred, but even if the hatred is kept silent within one's heart, that person is still guilty of this sin. Finally, there is a fourth interpretation of the nature of this sin. Meiri argues that a Jew is not guilty of sin until he or she acts upon it. Therefore, hatred in one's heart is not a sin unless a specific action comes about as a result.³³ Rabbi Asher Weiss expands upon this interpretation, but then says that this is a novel approach that is not held by anyone else.³⁴

WHY DO PEOPLE HATE OTHERS?

Why is it so common for human beings to tend to hate each other? By understanding what drives

²⁵ Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 338

²⁶ Genesis 21:25

²⁷ Maimonides commentary on Leviticus 19:17-18

²⁸ Kehilot Yaakov, Erchin 4

²⁹ Chafetz Chaim, Hilchot Lashon Hara, Introduction with Beer Mayim Chaim commentary

³⁰ Mishpitei Hashalom 2:7, 5

³¹ Haamek She-elah on Sheiltot 27

³² Torah Ha-Adam Le-adam, Kovetz 3, page 71

³³ Meiri commentary on Yoma 85a

³⁴ Rabbi Asher Weiss, Torah Ha-Adam Le-adam, Kovetz 3, page 71

people to hate, maybe a person can overcome that feeling and eventually minimize it or make it disappear. Orchot Tzadikim gives many reasons and motivations why, in the course of life, individuals are resentful of others and hate them.³⁵ When a person feels wronged monetarily, it often results in hate. A human being naturally hates anyone who has physically assaulted him or her. Hatred is also naturally directed at anyone who embarrasses an individual, or slandered him or her. Although it is extremely difficult, a Jew who is the object of such pain should resist the natural urge to hate the person who caused that pain. That is the essence of this commandment. Orchot Tzadikim further says that even a failure to do a favor for someone or lend money in a time of need may also bring about hate. Sometimes even a positive act can result in hate. When a person receives a gift, but the gift is inadequate or far less than expected, it can result in feeling hatred for the gift giver. There is also a far worse source of hate: jealousy. Hating someone who does something good for others or better than me is also quite common.

Rabbi Silver expands upon jealousy as a source of hatred, and says that competition between two individuals can also cause this emotion (see the chapters on "Jealousy" and "Competition" for an expansion of these themes). In addition, when people argue about what is right and wrong or other moral issues, their diametrically opposed opinions often bring about hostility towards those that disagree. Especially when it comes to differences in political views or lifestyles, great animosity can be engendered.³⁶ Rabbi Papo adds that petty differences among family members also often bring out feelings of loathing. Any time a person's honor has been damaged, it can result in feelings of enmity, as can feelings of jealousy.³⁷ In a different place, Pele Yoetz says that sometimes seeing a person going down the wrong path in life can engender feelings of antagonism towards that person.³⁸

What, then, should a person do, when he wants to hate someone that the Torah forbids hating? How can he or she be around this person and see the object of his or her hatred on a regular basis, and not display this emotion? The Rabbis, based on the precedent of Abraham, give us one possible remedy. When Abraham saw that his nephew Lot and Lot's shepherds were acting in an immoral and despicable manner (by stealing the grazing land of others), in order not to come to the emotion of hate over these actions, which was forbidden, Abraham, asked Lot to depart from him and gave him the choice of the best land. Thus, by choosing to avoid any further contact with these people, Abraham rid himself of his ill feelings before those feelings could turn to actual hatred.³⁹

WHEN HATING IS PERMITTED

Having shown Judaism's antipathy toward hatred, there are numerous other Jewish sources which seem to permit hatred in certain circumstances. Once these sources are presented, it is important to demonstrate where and when Judaism permits and where it forbids hatred. The very same book of Proverbs that said not to rejoice when an enemy falls also says⁴⁰ that when the wicked are eliminated one

³⁵ Orchot Tzadikim, Shaar Shishi "Sinah"

³⁶ Mishpotei Hashalom 2:8, 10, 12

³⁷ Pele Yoetz, "Ahavat Re-im"

³⁸ Pele Yoetz, "Sinah"

³⁹ Genesis 13:5-12

⁴⁰ Proverbs 11:10

should be happy. Ecclesiastes⁴¹ says that there is a proper time to hate. The Talmud⁴² says that it is permitted to call an arrogant person an “evil person” and he or she is even permitted to hate him, based on the verse in Ecclesiastes.⁴³ The Psalms⁴⁴ says that G-d does hate the enemies of the Jews. A Talmudic quotation⁴⁵ also declares that one may hate the sinner. The logic of the Talmud is that the Torah acknowledges that a person has enemies. Therefore, one is permitted to hate if the Torah itself speaks of enemies whose animal one must unload. When the great Rava became ill, it was announced that now his enemies can rejoice.⁴⁶

All of these sources seem to fly in the face of the previously cited sources showing Judaism's repulsion to the emotion of hatred. How can the two views be reconciled, if at all? When is it allowable to hate and when is it wrong? There seem to be two specific groups of people who Judaism see to be the legitimate object of hatred, under certain circumstances. One target group is one's enemies. It appears that one may indeed hate those people who try to destroy the Jews – e.g., Haman, Hitler, Ahmadinejad, etc. But how can this hatred be permitted when the verse in Proverbs and later the Mishna says, “You may not rejoice when your enemy falls?” At the very moment that one's enemies fall, one may not rejoice. But afterwards (and before), one may indeed hate them and what they stood for.

Why is it that Jews are not supposed to be happy at the time of the death of their enemy? As with the angels who were instructed by G-d not to rejoice when the enemy of the Jews, the Egyptians, drowned in the sea, these enemies are still human beings created in G-d's image. For that part of them that is destroyed, one cannot rejoice when they die. Afterwards, one certainly can be happy that these people are no longer around to destroy the Jewish people. This concept is reflected in the situation where the killer or sinner is to be hanged by a Jewish court. Although this person was evil, Judaism does not permit the community to let the body hang publicly for too long,⁴⁷ based on a clear verse in the Torah.⁴⁸ Here too, says the Talmud, since this evil person is still created in the image of G-d and is a reflection of that image, shaming him, even after death, is forbidden. And, after all, the Jewish community does celebrate the downfall of Haman and the defeat of the Egyptians. Part of the Purim and Passover holidays certainly include being happy that the enemy is defeated. Hating an enemy, especially during time of war, is part of warfare. When Ecclesiastes says “a time to hate,”⁴⁹ the Midrash⁵⁰ clearly explains this refers to an enemy during time of war. In addition, according to one opinion in the Talmud,⁵¹ when the verse and Mishna recorded that one may not rejoice at the downfall of an enemy, it refers only to a Jewish enemy, but for a non-Jewish enemy one may rejoice (even though this seems to contradict the earlier reference where G-d

⁴¹ Ecclesiastes 3:8

⁴² Taanit 7b

⁴³ Ecclesiastes 8:1

⁴⁴ Psalms 139:21-22

⁴⁵ Pesachim 113b

⁴⁶ Berachot 55b

⁴⁷ Sanhedrin 46b

⁴⁸ Deuteronomy 21:22-23

⁴⁹ Ecclesiastes 3:8

⁵⁰ Kohelet Rabbah 3:10

⁵¹ Megillah 16a

did not allow the angels to sing praises when the Egyptians died). Although it may not be logical, says the Talmud,⁵² there are times where one should hate an enemy such as Amalek, for example.

The second category of people one is apparently permitted to hate is true Jewish sinners. When a Jew is so evil that, after thoroughly knowing how wrong a serious sin is, he still sins repeatedly, the Talmud says⁵³ that one may hate him. This is the enemy referred to in the Torah whose animal you must help, and is thus codified in Maimonides.⁵⁴ Chinuch also says that it is a mitzvah-commandment to hate sinners after they have been admonished for their sins many times, but did not change their ways⁵⁵. However, before the reader gets the idea that one may hate Jews today, Maimonides immediately specifies a modification when one is allowed to hate – only for the purpose of getting this sinner to repent. From the tenor of Maimonides and the positive feelings towards every Jew he expresses in that same paragraph, it is clear that if one will not cause a Jewish sinner to repent, then one may not hate. (This is the case of almost all sinners today). In addition, Rabbi Yeshayahu Karelitz, who lived in the twentieth century,⁵⁶ says there is no mitzvah to hate Jews today and no mitzvah to even rebuke sinners today (see chapter about "Attitude to non-Observant Jews). Thus, this category of hate is not applicable today.

There are other categories and types of individuals who it seems proper to hate. The Talmud describes three types of individuals who G-d hates (and, by extension, we, who are supposed to imitate G-d's ways, should also hate)⁵⁷: 1) a person who is a hypocrite (speaks one way but feels differently in his heart), 2) a person who has knowledge to exonerate someone in a court of law, but refuses to testify, and 3) a person who sees someone commit a terrible sin but cannot testify, since the testimony of one person has no validity in a Jewish court. Although nothing can be done to this transgressor legally, it is permitted for the one who observed him sin to hate him or her for this action.

Another category of individual who may be hated is a person who tries to uproot Judaism and its values through his or her actions. The Torah speaks about this person in the parlance of the time for what was common then – one who tries to get others to worship idols. This Jew may be hated and is not subject to the obligation to “love every Jew as oneself.”⁵⁸ Maimonides codifies this Jewish law regarding anyone who tries to uproot Judaism, and says that not only is a Jew not obligated to love this person (as every other Jew), but he or she may even be hated.⁵⁹ Chinuch stresses the “importance” of hating such an individual even more than Maimonides does.⁶⁰ Chafetz Chaim brings as examples of this idea regarding two individuals in the Torah, Datan and Aviram, who continually tried to undermine Moses and the Jewish people.⁶¹

⁵² Yoma 22b

⁵³ Pesachim 113a

⁵⁴ Maimonides, Hilchot Rotze-ach 13:14

⁵⁵ Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 338

⁵⁶ Chazon Ish on Maimonides, Hilchot Shechita 2:16

⁵⁷ Pesachim 113b with Rashi commentary

⁵⁸ Deuteronomy 13:7-9 with Rashi commentary.

⁵⁹ Maimonides, Sefer HaMitzvot, Lo Taase 17-18

⁶⁰ Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvot 457-458

⁶¹ Chafetz Chaim, Be-er Mayim Chaim 9

PRACTICAL QUESTIONS REGARDING JEWISH HATRED TODAY

As noted above, there are sometimes people in the Jewish community who are hated for legitimate reasons. Often, this legitimate animosity has caused real problems and questions regarding certain aspects of Jewish life. We will examine three of these situations.

The Cantor's role in a synagogue (see chapter on "Music") is not to entertain and not even simply to lead the services, but, in essence, the Chazan-Cantor functions as the community's representative to G-d. If one person in the community has animosity towards the Cantor and legitimately hates him, can this hatred prevent the Cantor from leading the services, as the Cantor cannot legitimately represent all the people – in this case, the person who hates him? Unfortunately, this is a question that has been asked in Jewish communities for many hundreds of years. Rema in Shulchan Aruch (in the 1500's) rules⁶² that this one individual can indeed prevent a Cantor from representing the entire community, but only before that Cantor is appointed. Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, in his twentieth century book of Jewish law, expands on this idea.⁶³ He explains that since the prayers take the place of the public offerings in the Holy Temple, having a Cantor not representing every individual in the congregation might invalidate the entire "offering" to G-d. After the Cantor has been appointed, however, one individual's legitimate hatred cannot remove the Cantor. Only if the majority of the congregation wishes to remove this person, can they do so. However, that Cantor must receive his entire promised salary. This situation only applies to a Cantor who represents the community to G-d. A rabbi or noted teacher in the same situation cannot be removed.

Another situation where a hated person involves a mitzvah-commandment is the obligation to visit the sick. Can someone who hates an individual legitimately visit that person when he is ill? Is he obligated to do so? It is possible that he wishes to make peace with that person before the individual dies. This question is also discussed at length. Although Rabbi Moshe Isserles cites some minority views that it is permitted, he rules that it should not be done. He reasons that others (or the sick person) may interpret the visit in the wrong manner, believing that the visitor is "gloating" over the condition of the sick individual and is happy that this person who was hated is now ill. Therefore, it is best not to visit.⁶⁴

The same question is discussed regarding visiting an individual mourning for a parent during the seven day *shiva* period, when there is an obligation to go to be with him or her. Unlike visiting the sick, the purpose of comforting the mourners is more complicated. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein explains that there is a double mitzvah-commandment when visiting a *shiva* house. There is comfort provided for the relatives of the person who died, the mourners, but also comfort and respect for the actual person who died.⁶⁵ If the animosity was between the potential visitor and the actual person who died, Rabbi Reisman writes it is then certainly legitimate to visit the mourners, since the person who died is no longer affected by the hatred, and the visit will be taken as a gesture of reconciliation. However, if the hatred is towards the mourners themselves, then while it is true that visiting them might also honor the

⁶² Rema, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 53:19

⁶³ Mishne Berurah commentary on Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 53:19

⁶⁴ Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 338:2 with Siftei Kohen commentary

⁶⁵ Responsa Igrot Moshe, Orach Chaim 4, 40:11

departed parent, the mourners may interpret the visit as “gloating” over their loss. Thus, for this reason, it would be improper to visit this *shiva* house. However, it is always advisable to try to reconcile with anyone who hates another individual. If the visitor knows for certain that his or her visit will help reconcile the hatred, then a visit is indeed in order.⁶⁶

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel currently works with Rabbi Berel Wein and the Destiny Foundation as the Director of Education, whose mission is “to bring Jewish history to life in an exciting, entertaining and interactive way.” Rabbi Amsel has also served as a teacher, a school principal, and an adjunct professor. He has also taught over 2000 educators how to teach more effectively. Rabbi Amsel has worked in all areas of formal and informal Jewish education and has developed numerous curricula including a methodology how to teach Jewish Values using mass media. Recently, he founded the STARS Program (Student Torah Alliance for Russian Speakers), where more than 3000 students in 12 Russian speaking countries learn about their Jewish heritage for five hours weekly. Rabbi Amsel previously served as the Educational Director of Hillel in the Former Soviet Union. He lives in Jerusalem with his wife and has four children and four grandchildren.

⁶⁶ Ratz Katzvi, Yerach Eitanim 11:2-3