YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***Bein Adam Le-chavero:* Ethics of Interpersonal Conduct**

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**Dedicated in memory of   
Joseph Y. Nadler, z”l, Yosef ben Yechezkel Tzvi**

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**Shiur #19: *Ahavat Chinnam* — A Communal Outlook**

In the previous lessons, we have examined the dangers of *sinat chinnam* (baseless hatred) and *machaloket* (controversy). As we noted, hatred may have a reason, but the question is whether it is always *halakhically* justified (see lessons #15-16). If so, one who learns how to take part in a dispute without feeling hatred is praiseworthy.

A number of more recent sources stress the need to develop an intense love of one's fellow Jew in order not to arrive at *sinat chinnam*, even when involved in *machaloket*. Understanding the nature of this love and the way in which positive experiences of *machaloket* are supposed to contribute to feelings of love amongst the Jewish people is integral.

**Does It Exist?**

We will begin with a quote attributed to Reb Shlomo Carlebach in order to investigate whether his insight has any backing in the various sources that discuss these issues. He is quoted as saying that:

Everyone knows the holy Temple was destroyed because of *sinat chinnam*… If it was destroyed through baseless hatred, it can only be rebuilt through *ahavat chinnam*.

In truth, the term *ahavat chinnam* is rather new and does not appear in early sources. In fact, a search of all the works in the Bar Ilan Responsa Project reveals only one source at all referencing the term. If *sinat chinnam* is a common term, why wouldn't its antonym appear?

The simple reason for its absence is that there is always a good reason to love a fellow Jew. While there are clear limitations on the license to hate a fellow Jew, there never is a lack of a basis for loving another Jew.

In fact, even in instances in which it is permitted to hate another, there may be a level of love that must always remain, as we discussed in lesson #16. A necessary outgrowth of loving God is caring for His creations, and it is an expression of the character of a Jew who walks in the footsteps of Avraham. As the Netziv explains (see Year 1, Lesson 19), even though he hated Sedom, Avraham still cared about its citizens’ welfare and prayed for them.

If so, is there any room for the term *ahavat chinnam*?

In truth, the concept of *ahavat chinnam* as expressed here is actually found earlier, in the works of Rav Avraham Yitzchak Ha-Kohen Kook (*Orot Ha-kodesh* 3:323-324):

If we were destroyed, and the world destroyed along with us, by *sinat chinnam*, then we may return and be rebuilt, and the world rebuilt along with us, by *ahavat chinnam*.

His son, Rav Tzvi Yehuda (*Li-ntivot Yisrael* 2, 222), explains the intention of the term *ahavat chinnam*. It is not meant to be “baseless love” in the negative sense, but love without any ulterior motives — a love emanating from a basic understanding of the Jewish people:

This *ahava* is not dependent on anything. It is like God's love for the Jewish people, which is an eternal covenant. *Ahavat chinnam* is not about the aspiration to attain an added level of divine service or to do a good deed. *Ahavat chinnam* comes when there are no personal advancements to be won. This *ahava* exists regardless of any shortcomings in the beloved and without any conditions that have to be met. Even with all of the deficiencies and imperfections in people, *ahava* for them must be total, as the verse (*Zekharya* 8:17) states: "And let none of you devise evil in your hearts against his fellow." There may be great differences among personalities; there may be great disagreements in study; there may be great debates over the right thing to do. Nevertheless, true *ahava* transcends all of this and surrounds all of the children of Israel. This is the eternal love of God for His people.

Rav Tzvi Yehuda continues that this *ahava* is also significant in that it binds the nation together and allows their combined power to accomplish so much more.

A similar idea is indeed found in Rashi's comments (based on *Torat Kohanim, Bechukkotai* 1:2) on a verse in *Vayikra* (26:8) describing the great achievements of the Jewish people in war if they adhere to the word of God:

Five of you will pursue a hundred, and a hundred of you will pursue ten thousand, and your enemies will fall by the sword before you.

Rashi is bothered by the mathematical jump from five pursuers to a hundred. Since five will pursue a hundred, this means that each Jew will pursue twenty enemies.

But is this calculation correct? Therefore, should Scripture not have written here: and a hundred of you will pursue two thousand? But there is no comparison between few who fulfill the Torah and many who fulfill the Torah.

Thus, a unified Jewish people is an exponentially stronger Jewish people. It is not at all difficult to understand why baseless hatred could destroy the Temple, and it clear how loving other Jews under all circumstances can indeed deliver great things for the nation as a whole. *Ahavat chinnam* doesn't mean that one is to love another for no reason at all, but that one doesn't need a specific reason to do so. Anyone with a deep understanding of what it means to belong to the Jewish people needs no additional reason to love a fellow Jew.

The need to distance oneself from evildoers is the basis for permission to hate evildoers (see lesson #15). This distance aims to prevent one from learning from others involved in detrimental behavior.

In truth, Rav Kook (*Iggerot Re’iya* 2, p. 187) is quick to warn that love is dangerous if applied too openly and without caution:

Regarding the souls of the non-righteous, one may lack the depth of knowledge and subsequent insight to distinguish between the inner aspect of holy treasurein them and the polluted side of their free will, which surrounds their inner souls like the thorns which surround a rose. Now, should one attempt to bring them close to belief, one could be greatly damaged, God forbid, and learn from their deeds, becoming attached to their evil side. One is obligated to keep a distance from them, and the Almighty will place in his heart a feeling of enmity and a desire to keep away so that these people won't ruin him.

This fear of the destructive consequences of closeness to evildoers does require anyone who might be influenced to keep his or her distance, sometimes even expressed as hatred. However, the lesson of *ahavat chinnam* teaches that one should always try to keep the big picture in mind, reminding oneself that these are Jews who have strayed from the path; rather than disown them, we must hope for their return.

Rav Tzvi Yehuda attempts to bring proof to the concept that one should maintain feelings of love even for those who have distanced themselves from the Torah. He points to *Avot* 1:12:

Hillel says: "Be of the disciples of Aharon: love peace and pursue peace, love the creations and attract them to Torah."

Rav Tzvi Yehuda (*ad loc*.) comments:

Is this speaking about people who are close to Torah or those who are far away? Obviously, there is no need to draw close one who is near. Rather, Hillel refers to those far away; he instructs us to love people who are distant from Torah. However, the Mishna doesn't tells us to love people in order to bring them close to Torah, but rather to love them and afterwards bring them close to Torah. The main point is to love; from this, they will naturally come close to Torah.

In short, what Rav Kook seems to be advancing is a communally conscious outlook, which enables one to rise above petty differences with individuals in order to achieve the greater good. The concept of community is significant in that it gives the Jewish people an identity above and beyond that of individuals. Being part of a community is a sanctifying experience.

**Rav Soloveitchik's Covenantal Community**

Rav Yosef Dov Ha-Levi Soloveitchik stresses the importance of individual performance, placing less emphasis on the community. Nevertheless, he is not oblivious to this unique concept. In his essay, "The Community," he writes:

The community in Judaism is not a functional-utilitarian, but an ontological one. The community is not just an assembly of people who work together for their mutual benefit, but a metaphysical entity, an individuality; I might say, a living whole. In particular, Judaism has stressed the wholeness and the unity of Knesset Israel, the Jewish community. The latter is not a conglomerate. It is an autonomous entity, endowed with a life of its own. We, for instance, lay claim to Eretz Israel. God granted the land to us as a gift. To whom did He pledge the land? Neither to an individual, nor to a partnership consisting of millions of people. He gave it to the Knesset Israel, to the community as an independent unity, as a distinct juridic metaphysical person. He did not promise the land to me, to you, to them; nor did He promise the land to all of us together. Abraham did not receive the land as an individual, but as the father of a future nation. The Owner of the Promised Land is the Knesset Israel, which is a community persona. However strange such a concept may appear to the empirical sociologist, it is not at all a strange experience for the halakhist and the mystic, to whom Knesset Israel is a living, loving, and suffering mother. The personalistic unity and reality of a community, such as Knesset Israel, is due to the philosophy of existential complementarity of the individuals belonging to the Knesset Israel. The individuals belonging to the community complement one another existentially. Each individual possesses something unique, rare, which is unknown to others; each individual has a unique message to communicate, a special color to add to the communal spectrum.

The Rav is speaking of the halakhic category of *knesset Yisrael*, the Israelite congregation as a corporate entity greater than the sum of its parts. In *Temura* (15b), the Talmud deals with the status of an ownerless sin-offering. Generally, such an offering serves to expiate one’s offense, but what if the owner dies after the animal has been designated but before it has been offered? Normally, the animal can no longer be brought, but if the animal was designated as a public sin-offering, it is irrelevant what happened to the one who designated it, because “the community cannot die.” The Rav explains that “the existence of the community as a metaphysical unity surpasses the physical existence of its individual members.”

Rav Saadia Gaon declares: "The unifying factor which makes us a nation is our connection to Torah." In his essay "Torah and Humility," Rav Soloveitchik advances some of the ramifications of this communal outlook on the *kedusha* (holiness) of the relationship between the Torah and the Jewish people.

The Bach explains that the blessing we recite in the morning, "*la-asok* *be-divrei Torah*" (to engage in the words of the Torah), is more embracing than "*li-lmod Torah*" (to learn Torah). The *berakha*, recited by all, including the great scholar, is not for the esoteric intellectual experience of Torah, but rather for the exoteric love of Torah and for the *kedusha* that results. The entire Jewish community is a Torah community, and hence a holy one, including both the aristocrat of mind and spirit, and the simple anonymous individual. "*Torah tziva lanu Moshe, morasha kehillat Yaakov*." The Torah is the inheritance of the entire community of Israel…

*Kedushat Ha-Torah* is based on the certainty that all the congregation of God is holy, that all can achieve sanctity. The Rambam writes that the Torah guarantees that the Jews will repent and come closer to God. The humble, generous *ben Torah* must have confidence and faith in *Klal Yisrael*, the Jewish community as a whole. He cannot belong to a sect, concerned only with itself. Every Jew has the capacity for *kedusha* and a desire for sanctity, even if he is unaware of it, and none shall be expelled. We shall never give up on a single Jew, we have faith in "the lost in the land of Edom and the oppressed in the land of Egypt," the assimilated and the downtrodden, even as we believe in the words of the prophet, "Peace, peace, says God, to the far and the near, and I shall heal them."

**Communal Responsibility**

Understanding the Torah's communal outlook is essential for understanding numerous laws which place tremendous importance on communal involvement. The Yerushalmi (*Berakhot* 5:1) states in reference to one who misses the proper time for prayer:

One who is involved with the needs of the congregation is comparable to one who is involved in Torah study.

The Rema in his *Responsa* (83) notes this passage and says:

One who is involved with the needs of the congregation is comparable to one who is involved in Torah study, which is greater than all other commandments.

Similarly, in the Bavli, the Sages have harsh words for one who separates from the community. *Ta'anit* 11a states:

Our Rabbis taught: “At a time when Israel is immersed in distress, if one separates from them, the two ministering angels who accompany a person come and place their hands on his head and say: ‘This man, so-and-so, who has separated himself from the community, let him not see the consolation of the community."

Why is focusing on one's individual needs viewed so negatively? Doing so expresses a totally misplaced outlook, a lack of understanding of the unity of the Jewish people. There may be differences between individuals, but *knesset Yisrael* is one unified whole. This idea may in fact by the terminology used to define the Jewish people as opposed to the other peoples of the world. In *Bereishit* 12:2-3, God promises Avraham: “I will make you into a great nation… All the families on earth will be blessed through you.” The Torah seems to differentiate between the Jewish people — they are a nation, but the other peoples are families. Similarly, “one nation in the land” (II *Shemuel* 7:23) is interpreted by the Alshikh as an expression of this fundamental distinction. The Jews are one unified people, incomparable to other nations. (See also Year 1, Lesson 30.)

Rav Yehuda Ha-Levi echoes this idea in *Sefer Ha-Kuzari* (III, 19):

If the individual, however, neglects his being part of the whole, that is to say, his obligation to act on behalf of the welfare of the community of which he is part, and decides to retain any benefit that he may achieve for himself alone, he sins against the community, and more against himself. For the relation of the individual to the community is as the relation of the single limb to the body. Should the arm, in case bloodletting is required, refuse to relinquish its own blood, the whole body, the arm included, would suffer. It is, however, the duty of the individual to bear hardships, or even death, for the sake of the welfare of the community. At the very least, he must consider his being part of the whole, so that he will always give his portion and not neglect it.

**Love of Community and Individuals**

Sometimes, the love of community may eclipse one’s love of family and even one’s own identity. The Torah (*Devarim* 20:8) includes the following instruction concerning combat: “Who is the man who is afraid or faint-hearted? Let him go and return to his house.” The Rambam (*Hilkhot Melakhim* 7:15) explains that the Jewish army has no need for a person whose heart is not brave enough to withstand combat. He explains:

Once a soldier enters the throes of battle, he should rely on the Hope of Israel and their Savior in times of need. He should realize that he is fighting for the sake of the Oneness of God's Name. Therefore, he should place his soul in his hand and not show fright or fear; he should not worry about his wife or children. On the contrary, he should wipe their memory from his heart, removing all thoughts from his mind except the war.

How can one be expected to forget his family when fighting a war?

Rav Kook (*Iggerot Re’iya* 3, p. 258) explains that, when fighting a war, one has the unique opportunity to work completely on behalf of his people; thus, he loses his individual identity. He ceases to care for his individual family because he is fighting on behalf of his people. In fact, the whole idea of going out to fight a battle is putting oneself in the line of fire for “saving the Jewish people from an enemy who is approaching.” This is a lesson in selflessness that the Jewish warriors throughout the generations and the Israeli soldiers of today can teach all those who do not physically take part in the protection of the nation. (See Rav Zvi Tau, *Le-emunat Iteinu,* Vol. 4, p. 24-26, for Rav Kook's explanation of the debate between the Chinnukh and Minchat Chinnukh about going out to war when there is danger.)

In fact, Rav Kook goes one step further, analyzing the praise which the Sages have for those who are silent when attacked (see lesson #14). He explains that this is not due to the undesirability of feeling personal pain when mistreated; rather, the love of one’s people and their unity should be so important to one that he or she is capable of forgoing personal pain by focusing on the bigger picture.

**The *Ahava* to Help Others**

*Ahavat chinnam* recognizes not only love and concern but also the willingness to correct another, even when doing so is unpopular. In truth, reproving a misguided friend is one of the greatest acts of love, though it is seldom viewed in this manner. It is actually quite curious that regarding natural disasters or overpriced merchandise, people are generally happy to be warned that they are going in the wrong direction, but when it comes to spiritual matters, people often feel the opposite. The initial knee-jerk reaction of most people is to hate those who try to improve their behavior; however, this is highly erroneous. The wise King Shelomo dedicates numerous verses (*Mishlei* 10:17, 12:1, 15:10) to informing us that dislike of rebuke is liable to lead one into a very dangerous tailspin. Shelomo powerfully expresses the connection between love and rebuke (*ibid*. 3:11-12):

My son, do not despise God’s discipline and do not resent His rebuke, because God disciplines those He loves, as a father the son he delights in.

The well-known Peter Principle states: "Employees tend to rise to their level of incompetence." Those who have no real chance of advancement are given the opportunity to continue with their less-than-perfect performance. On the other hand, those individuals who have the chance of real success are often corrected and even rebuked. While the experience is often uncomfortable, this is a sure sign of being believed in and cared for.

The Sages are not oblivious to people's abhorrence of rebuke (see *Shabbat* 89b regarding the hatred that begins at Mount Sinai and *Pesachim* 49b regarding the hatred the ignorant have for scholars). While they required that it be done carefully and with concern, they were unwilling to forgo this great expression of love. In a modern expression of King Shelomo's advice, one who hates honest givers of rebuke must also hate dentists and surgeons. (See also *Tamid* 28a, as well as *La-reiakha Kamokha* by David Ariav, “*Tokhacha*,” page 188.) *Arakhin* 16b mentions the love Rabbi Akiva had for Rabbi Yochanan ben Nuri after the latter reproved the former numerous times. This is supported by the verse (*Mishlei* 9:8):

Reprove not a scorner lest he hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you.

This love is *ahavat chinnam*: the willingness of the rebuker to care for another even while discharging the unpleasant responsibility of reproof and the corresponding love of the recipient. The one who accepts rebuke embraces proper character traits. (See Rabbeinu Bachya’s commentary to the beginning of *Parashat Nitzavim.*) Such an individual is truly able to grow in Torah, as *Avot* 6:6 lists "love of rebuke" as one of the 48 characteristics necessary for acquiring Torah.

If so, the *ahavat chinnam* necessary for rebuilding the Temple has two contrasting elements. On the one hand, one must maintain a communal outlook even when disagreeing with others on important issues. On the other hand, one must be willing to reprove others even when this is uncomfortable. In order to deepen our understanding of the communal aspect of rebuking others and the differences between various individuals, next week we will take a look at the obligation of rebuke and the concept of mutuality.