

## CHAPTER 11

### HOW TO OVERCOME GROUP *SINAT CHINAM* BETWEEN RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR ZIONISTS

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This chapter came about as a response to a personal request by an Israeli who identifies as Religious Zionist (we'll call him Yossi<sup>1</sup>) and who shared with me that after witnessing months of protests by Secular Zionists against the Judicial Reform, he found himself “hating” those individuals. To his credit, Yossi was sincerely troubled by his negative feelings, and sought my advice for a way to get rid of them. After giving him a verbal answer, I realized that I needed to formulate a more complete response that could be used by both Religious and Secular Israelis.

#### WHAT'S MY APPROACH TO THE JUDICIAL REFORM ISSUE?

The current struggle between Secular and Religious Zionists initiated by the proposed Judicial reform has been analyzed by two experts, Liel Leibowitz<sup>2</sup> and David P Goldman,<sup>3</sup> in two Tablet essays. In Chapter 9, we also examined the analyses of Israeli rabbis (Rabbi Doron Perez, Rabbi Jeremy Gimpel) and leaders (Netanel Ellinson, Menachem Rahat). The Judicial reform issue which began as a Knesset project has exploded on the national and international scenes and acquired existential dimensions that oppose two halves of the Jewish Israeli population. In my approach, I seek to dialogue with both Religious and Secular Israelis and to achieve that goal, I begin with the plea that Rabbi Moshe Taragin<sup>4</sup> issued to religious and secular Israelis:

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<sup>1</sup> It is not his real name!

<sup>2</sup> Liel Leibowitz, *Zionism's Moment of Decision*, April 19, 2023. <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/israel-middle-east/articles/zionisms-moment-decision>

<sup>3</sup> David P Goldman, *The Soloveichik Solution*, May 10 2023 <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/israel-middle-east/articles/rav-soloveitchik-solution>

<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Moshe Taragin, *The Sacred Partnership*. Jewish Link News April 4, 2023.

“Religious Jews may sharply disagree with secular Israelis over issues of religion, but we all share one common agenda and are all partners in one common historical project of resettling our land. The supreme value of Jewish peoplehood creates a sacred partnership, which should never be broken. It is precisely this issue which makes the current political climate so disturbing. Ignoring the merits or the drawbacks of the current reforms, they have clearly incited national strife and deeply fissured our national unity. There are severe practical dangers to social disunity—especially in a country constantly facing security threats.”

### **YOSSI'S REQUEST**

In his request, Yossi was looking for solutions to two problems: (i) to get rid of his group *sinat chinam* toward secular Israelis and (ii) to find ways to communicate with his office colleagues who are secular Israelis and challenge him because he is the only Religious Zionist in the office.

For Yossi, the Teshuva procedure for group *sinat chinam* described in Chapter 10 is useful to enable him to cease violating the Torah prohibition against hatred and to recover his empathy for secular Zionists. The main aspects of that procedure are included in the Addendum to this chapter.

To achieve his second goal, Yossi needs to learn how to dialogue with his secular Zionist colleagues and they also need to learn how to dialogue with him because as Rabbi Taragin wrote, this sacred partnership “should never be broken,” even though it has been “deeply fissured.” To rebuild “the sacred partnership,” Yossi and his secular Zionist colleagues need to regain respect for each other’s positions and for each other. To help them achieve these goals, this chapter provides (i) a background on the moral and genetic dimensions of politics, and (ii) practical steps on how to conduct a dialogue.

### **MORAL AND GENETIC DIMENSIONS OF POLITICS**

#### **All Politics Are Moral**

Psychologists who specialize in the study of morality have shown that, in general, there is a deep connection between politics and morality. When a secular political leader in any country

proposes a policy, he or she assumes that the policy is morally right, not wrong or morally irrelevant. Why? Because people tend to think of themselves as good and moral. The problem is that they do not take into account the reality that there could be an opposite view of what is moral.<sup>5</sup> This leads us to a key question: How does a secular person know what is moral?

### **The Six Moral Foundations**

Religious Zionists rely on the Torah as a foundation for their morality. Secular Zionists rely on their own moral judgments which are based on the six universal moral foundations.<sup>6</sup>

After studying cultures throughout the world, moral psychologists found that the various moral communities of the world share a common set of six core foundations that each community uses to build its own moral code. The following six modules are considered “innate”<sup>7</sup> and universal.

#### Care/Harm

These moral psychologists consider that the principle of Care is rooted in the universal need to protect children. This Care/Harm principle is essential to the liberal/ progressive outlook in its focus on protecting the rights and liberties of individuals and minorities. Any innocent victims are considered worthy of protection, whether or not they belong to their religious community or whether or not they are citizens of the country. For those who are politically or religiously conservative, the care/harm principle applies in a more restricted way. It includes members of the family, or of one’s religious community (not all the citizens of the world at once). In the end, both liberals and conservatives (secular and religious Israelis) use this principle, but they differ in the size or the breadth of the group that they include. This difference has huge consequences as shown below.

#### Fairness/Cheating

The Fairness principle originated with the idea that two-way partnerships yielded benefits.

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<sup>5</sup> George Lakoff, *Moral Politics* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2016), X.

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Haidt, “The Righteous Mind” (New York, Vintage Books, 2012), 64–69.

<sup>7</sup> By “innate” the authors don’t imply that these moral foundations are hard-wired in humans but only “pre-wired,” like the first draft of a book.

Within the liberal outlook, the fairness principle justifies concerns about social justice, economic equality, workers' rights, and rejection of those who do not contribute for example by paying their fair share of taxes.

### Loyalty/Betrayal

At a basic level, the Loyalty principle is part of the ethic of community. It is about recognizing who in the community is a "team player" and who is a "traitor." Loyalty is also relevant to self-sacrifice for the group or for the nation. Since the liberal stance tends to be universalist, it views this principle with a lesser priority than conservatives.

### Authority/Subversion

Like the Loyalty principle, the Authority principle is connected to the creation and maintenance of community. Those who value Authority build beneficial relationships within hierarchies (parents, elders) and with those responsible for order in society. Its characteristic emotions are respect and fear. This principle is adhered to more by conservatives than liberals as it appeals to support for the army and police. In the liberal outlook, the notion of Authority has a less prominent role because it assumes hierarchy and evokes the associated ideas of power imbalance and exploitation.

### Sanctity/Degradation

The Sanctity principle corresponds to our need to consider certain things untouchable (they are sacred). This principle allows us to consider some objects such as the Sefer Torah, or the graves of Sainly ancestors (Machpelah) or the National Flag sacred. This principle comes up in the context of discussions of the sanctity of fetal life.

### Liberty/Oppression

This principle reflects our need to be free from physical or other types of restraint. The Liberty foundation is relevant to the idea of oppression by anybody or any system that places unlawful restraints on others. In the liberal outlook, the Liberty foundation is used with the Care foundation to support social justice, to protect powerless groups in society, and to achieve political equality.

## **Religious and Secular Zionists Use Different Moral Foundations**

The above summary of the moral foundations shows that the liberal-conservative political divide can be understood using these six universal moral principles. For example, it explains that political polarization between Religious and Secular Zionists occurs simply because they use different moral foundations. Secular Zionists use mostly two or three foundations, principally Care and Fairness while Religious Zionists use all six foundations in their daily religious lives.

### Example # 1

Most religious or traditional Israelis have great difficulty understanding the universalist stance of several NGOs (such as New Israel Fund, J Street, etc..) supported by Israeli Secular Zionists. These NGOs invest their attention and resources (including foreign funding) to closely monitor all interactions between the IDF and Palestinians because of the significance they attribute to the moral foundations of Care and Fairness. These NGOs publicize the information they collect in Israel in the US to Jews and Non-Jews, as well as to the rest of the world, most of whom are ignorant of the context of daily living in Israel.

For example, on May 24, 2023, the President of J Street wrote:

*“Prime Minister Netanyahu’s far-right government is not only threatening democratic rights for Israelis, but also trampling the freedoms of Palestinian families in the occupied West Bank... On May 7, the government sent soldiers and bulldozers to demolish a Palestinian elementary school in the West Bank...*

*As Jewish Americans, we must call out these destructive policies....*

*From their anti-democratic judicial reforms to restricting religious pluralism within Israel to this cruel quest to stop Palestinian families building a future for themselves, these right-wing efforts to build an illiberal, anti-democratic Israel run counter to everything my parents and grandparents taught me about our Jewish values and vision for the Jewish homeland.”*

This perspective is shared by millions of American Jews.

### Example # 2

As we know, in Israel, men and women serve in the military after the age of 18. Members of the Haredi community are exempt from this duty when they make a full-time commitment to Torah

studies (religious women in Israel receive an exemption without a study requirement). Based on the Fairness moral foundation, secular Zionists feel contempt toward Haredi Israelis because they consider that the Haredi population does not contribute their fair share of support to the State of Israel (“they drain our resources, those we bring to Israel through our high-tech”). On the other hand, the position of Haredi Jews uses several moral foundations including Fairness, Loyalty (to the Torah), and Authority (of the Torah) to claim that dedication to full-time Torah study is also valuable to the State of Israel. In addition, they use the Liberty foundation to seek the right to be left alone and practice their Judaism as they see fit considering they are citizens of the only Jewish State in the world. In April-May, 2023, the issue of military service has re-emerged with more acuity as the Knesset is considering a new bill that would provide Haredi Jews an automatic military service exemption, a law which is opposed by Secular Zionists.

### *Moral Foundations Explain Divisiveness*

#### 1) Feeling Self-Righteous

The moral dimension of politics explains why Secular and Religious Zionists both claim “my politics are moral,” even though their political positions are quite different. Secular Zionists use two moral foundations, Care and Fairness, to feel more enlightened, more compassionate, and more attuned to injustice than Religious Zionists. They also feel “ownership” of their morality since it comes from their logical reasoning. That’s not the case with Religious Zionists who consider that their morality comes from the Torah. They cannot claim any “ownership” since the Torah belongs to all Jews who received it at Sinai. Also, they use all six moral foundations. A potential danger of the current situation is that both sides fall in the trap of feeling “self-righteous” because, if the correct politics confer moral superiority, then the wrong political views confer “wickedness.”

#### 2) False Perceptions

Another dangerous issue is that there are those in both groups who suspect that the other side plans to impose its social system on the country, using either the Knesset (for Religious Zionists) or the Supreme Court (for Secular Zionists). That perception of threat is based on lack of trust: it triggers the primitive brain which connects “factual dots” by adding harmful intent. As a result,



(ii) To the extent that political partisanship has a genetic basis, hostile attitudes toward political opponents have no place and should not be tolerated, especially in our society where we are sisters and brothers. Religious and Secular Zionist partisans should feel compelled to move toward understanding and tolerance since we are involved in “the sacred partnership of resettling our land.”

## **PRACTICAL STEPS**

### **Dialogue Requires Preparation: Fact Denial**

Experience has shown that when two people with very different political orientations meet and attempt to dialogue about their politics, they cannot be expected to exhibit civility because of the phenomenon called “cognitive dissonance” otherwise known as fact denial.

Studies with political partisans have shown that their brains have biases and reject any facts that clash with their loyalty to their ideology. The reason is relatively simple: it is painful for anyone of us to acknowledge facts that contradict our beliefs. To avoid the pain of a mental conflict, our brain engages in defensive maneuvers such as ignoring the facts presented to us. Therefore, even when you submit unassailable facts, you will not convince the other side; and the more truthful your facts, the more painful the emotional reaction they produce in your opponent. Since their emotions are stronger than their logical reasoning, they will reject your facts, and even your definitions of key words such as democracy, justice, equality, etc... That’s all we can expect from our human brains!

### **Urgent Goal: Building Empathy Skills**

Based on the above analyses and the assessment of Rabbi Moshe Taragin that “There are severe practical dangers to social disunity—especially in a country constantly facing security threats,” I believe that our most urgent task is to rebuild a minimum of empathy between Secular and Religious Zionists. There are several methods of building empathy skills and three approaches are described here:<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> This material is taken from Chapter 10 of my book entitled “Mending America’s Political Divide: What Science Tells Us About Solving the Political Hatred Between The Left and The Right” (by Rene H Levy, PhD, USA Peoplehood Press, Seattle, 2020).



### Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence means learning to identify the feelings, emotions (anger, fear, sadness, guilt, shame), thoughts and behaviors of others. It is like learning a new language. Initially, it is easier to learn to identify our own feelings and emotions by teaching our brain to label our own emotional reactions. We can also test ourselves by watching images of human faces expressing different positive and negative emotions, or by identifying emotions in lyrics or music of songs. The goal of this method is to become capable of conducting a self-audit of our emotional state at any time. Finally, to connect with others accurately, we learn to identify in them the thoughts and behaviors associated with these emotions because empathy is about the other person's feelings.

### Radical Listening

Radical listening is about transforming the way we listen. What do many of us do during conversations? Sometimes, even before the speaker begins, we formulate opinions based on appearances, or gender, or clothing, or other superficial aspect of the speaker. Then while the person is speaking, we think about how we will respond. In some cases, all we do is wait for them to finish in order to make our point, as if what the speaker says will not make a difference. While the other is speaking, our brain is full of chatter, planning the next step. While this approach is common in our era of multitasking, it is neither courteous nor fair. It amounts to a refusal to register what the speaker is saying. In the end, you have no chance to understand the perspective of the other because you are de facto "tuned out." Under the radical listening approach, you do not enter a discussion expecting to explain to the other or make them "see the light." The goal is to listen in order to gain knowledge. It means being quiet inside, with an exclusive focus on what the speaker is saying, on her/his intensity and body language even if he/she goes through the talking points of their ideology. You make eye contact and you do not interrupt the speaker, do not counter-critique, and do not judge. You try to figure out the emotional state and feelings of the speaker. You are sincerely open to the speaker's position, and when needed, ask follow-up

questions to discover what is important to them and to show that you heard her/him. Now, you are in a position to build a connection.

You derive several benefits from acquiring Radical Listening skills:

- You will find it easier to speak to other people no matter what their politics are.
- By listening attentively to the other, you become able to develop a meaningful response, discover alternatives, and narrow down choices, because you understand the speaker better.
- You will benefit from this skill in all your relationships outside of politics, within the family, or at work.
- You learn a key lesson: when other people speak, they are just reacting with the knowledge they have. That realization opens the door to empathizing with them.

### Conversation, Not Debate

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks<sup>11</sup> has suggested that to build a community that respects differences, what is needed is conversation, not debate. Conversation means the “disciplined act of communicating (making my views intelligible to someone who does not share them) and listening (entering into the inner world of someone whose views are opposed to my own).” This is not so in a debate where, by definition, one wins, and one loses. In a conversation, no one loses and both sides are transformed because they both learned to see the other (and themselves) from a different angle. In the end, while each side still adheres to its views, they know that, like it or not, it is useful to make some space for another perspective.

### Making Sense of Contradiction/Discordance

This principle represents a tool to address complex life situations which involve paradoxes or contradictions where two things may seem in conflict, and yet both contain part of the truth. The Contradiction/ Discordance approach takes up a complex problem and identifies various ways by which a solution may be reached. Such situations have been associated with

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<sup>11</sup> Rabbi J Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference* (London, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2003), 83.

the word “dialectics” which is the art of discovering what is true by considering opposite theories. That happens because in the real world, truth is sometimes distributed.

We, Jews, are very familiar with this method of analysis since it is found throughout the Gemara. When we consider the applicability of the political positions of the Right and the Left in Israel using the Contradiction/ Discordance principle, we find that, although they reflect different or opposite perspectives, they can both be beneficial for Israel, especially in the long run. The skill of holding together two divergent perspectives because each has a kernel of truth helps us become more tolerant of different political perspectives. It protects us from the danger of becoming blinded by our own views and seeking to obliterate the beliefs of others.

### Guiding Principles For Dialogue

I submit the following guiding principles to both Religious and Secular Zionists to facilitate dialogue and curb the intensity of group *sinat chinam* which has the potential to destroy any society from within.

- You accept others without expecting them to change their views because it is established that knowledgeable people can reach different conclusions from the same set of facts.
- People have valid reasons to hold their opinions because they are only reacting with the knowledge they have and the genetic makeup they inherited.
- Feeling threatened when others have a very different perspective represents just another trick of the primitive brain that should be disregarded.
- Expecting to persuade others to adopt your point of view is presumptuous.
- Acknowledging a contradictory opinion is not synonymous with agreeing with it.

- Acknowledging a conflicting viewpoint is not synonymous with betraying yourself.
- Finding middle ground is not equivalent to being fake or unassertive.
- Living with political disagreements becomes possible once you realize that we all decide the significance we attribute to our differences.

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### **ADDENDUM: RATIONALE FOR TESHUVA**

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Yossi, the following rationale for teshuva is based on the material of Chapter 10. It is a reminder that shows you how your teshuva which ends your chronic violation of the Torah prohibition and your dialogue with a secular Zionist colleague complement each other and turn you into a role model for Religious Zionists.

#### **1. You Violated Many Commandments**

- You are in chronic violation of the Torah prohibition against hatred. Your group *sinat chinam* makes this violation weighty since you harbor ill feelings toward thousands of Jews at once.
- You violated “Do not accept a false report (Shemot 23:1) because group *sinat chinam* is generated by propaganda and stories of hate regarding secular Zionists who oppose the judicial reform.
- You violated “*Lo Titgodedu*” (Devarim 14:1) since you contribute to a schism that breaks up the community in two camps.
- You violated “Judge your fellow Jew favorably (Vayikra 19:15)” because you did not allow for the possibility that secular Zionists are moral individuals who reacted with integrity based on the knowledge they have.

- You violated “*Banim Atem LaShem* ...You are children of HaShem your G-d.”<sup>12</sup>

“We are intended to be associated with HaShem in an extraordinary way...The individual Jew is meant to represent Godly ideals and behavior everywhere s/he goes.”<sup>13</sup>

- You violated “And you shall love your fellow Jew as you love yourself, I am G-d” (Vayikra 19:18) which is a “*Klal gadol BaTorah*.”

The above is a partial list which assumes that you were not involved in *rechilus* and/or *lashon hara* about secular Zionists.

## **2. Your Group *Sinat Chinam* Corrupted Your Avodat HaShem at Three Levels**

### (i) *Limmud HaTorah*

A person who learns Torah but does not rectify his/her middot is not considered to be truly engaged (*Osek*) in Torah.<sup>14</sup>

### 2. *Acceptance of the Yoke of the Heavenly Kingdom (Kabbalat Ol Malchut Shamayim)*

Any Jew harboring negative feelings toward thousands of Jews because they have a different ideology cannot claim that (i) he/she accepts HaShem as the King and absolute Ruler over him; or (ii) that he/she contributes to changing the world from a state of *HaShem Elokeinu* to a state of *HaShem Echad*.

### 3. *Avodat HaShem (Tefillah) With Lev and Nefesh*

Any Jew involved in group *sinat chinam* has serious *kavanah* issues to resolve: (i) key dimensions of tefillah, such as self-nullification, are corrupted; (ii) you cannot claim “I am offering to You, HaKadosh Baruch Hu, my body and soul—I am Your *korban*;” (iii) you are unable to serve HaShem with your “*nefesh*”<sup>15</sup> since you use your will to hate thousands of Jews.

## **3. Your Group *Sinat Chinam* Contributes to Increasing Anti-Zionism and Antisemitism**

Chapter 9 showed that the degree of antisemitism or anti-Zionism we experience is correlated with the intensity of group *sinat chinam* that exists within Jewish societies, including Israel. By

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<sup>12</sup> Dvarim 14:1-2

<sup>13</sup> Rabbi Mordechai Y. Scher, Thoughts for Re’eh 5770; <https://www.kolberamah.org/wp/2010/08/thoughts-for-reeh-5770/>

<sup>14</sup> Rabbi MD Kestenbaum Olam HaMiddos (Art Scroll Mesorah Publications, Ltd Rahway NJ, 2021), 25.

<sup>15</sup> Nefesh HaTzimtzum, Vol 1, G2:14, p. 410

curbing your group *sinat chinam*, you stop contributing to anti-Zionism targeting Israel. With teshuva, you begin re-building the “sacred partnership” and exemplify your “arevut” toward your people.

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### TAKE HOME MESSAGE FOR CHAPTER 11

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Dear Reader,

I felt compelled to write this book after countless encounters with people involved in various conflicts- familial, communal, managerial, who had resigned themselves to a sad existence harboring old hatreds.

One of the most promising signs of resolution was when someone came feeling genuine sadness because of the conflicts in their life. Such is the case of a gentleman from Israel, who felt despondent at the large political rift in society that trickled down into his workplace, with colleagues whom he cares for and respects.

The quest for Judicial reform in Israel has rapidly evolved into a dangerous and timely example of group *sinat chinam*. It has caused major upheaval in Israel since January 2023. What blasted it almost beyond recognition is that both sides became unable to respectfully dialogue with their opponents, or to accept that they have more in common with them than they care to admit. Those attitudes resulted in political tribalism that generated political hatred.

Experts in political science teach what may at first seem strange, namely that “all politics are moral”. It means that each political party believes they are a shining moral beacon while failing to understand or admit that there can be another moral way to achieve the opposite political outcome. This discordance can be explained with the Six Moral Foundations Theory developed

by moral psychologists. Using these Six Moral Foundations, I explain in detail how the situation in Israel has come to the current worrisome head.

An additional point that may surprise you is that recent studies intimate that political orientations have a genetic component! The ramifications of this finding flip our perceptions of the “other” upside down because both sides can only express the political orientations they inherited. Therefore, there is no possible justification for demonizing them.

Using the above science, several practical suggestions are provided:

- Dialogue Requires Preparation to avoid “cognitive dissonance,” otherwise known as “fact denial.”
- Our most urgent task is to rebuild a minimum of empathy skills to enable dialogue between Secular and Religious Zionists. A few methods are provided including Emotional Intelligence, Radical Listening, focus on Conversation not Debate, and using the Tool of Contradiction/Discordance. In addition, eight guiding principles for dialogue are provided.

When these practical skills are combined with a small dose of the commandment “*VeAhavta Lere’acha Kamocha*,” a revolution of respectful communication, tolerance and Divine acknowledgment becomes possible. These are all concomitant with a healthier, happier, more confident you, a Jew who has recognized the need to revive his/her relationships, *Bein-Adam-LaMakom* and *Bein-Ada- Lachaveiro*.

To paraphrase Rabbi Moshe Taragin: “when we view ourselves as God’s masterpiece, we remember that God chose us, spoke with us at Sinai and handed us a historical mission.”

You can be proud of your courageous journey toward the fulfillment of that mission!