

CHAPTER 2

VIOLATION OF THE TORAH PROHIBITION

The data captured in the Q & A sessions with many audiences revealed a paradox. On one hand, there are probably hundreds of thousands of Torah-observant Jews throughout the world who live with unresolved hidden hatreds, disrupted families, and splintered communities, in clear violation the Torah prohibition against hatred. On the other hand, there is a remarkable consensus among Chazal (including Rabbeinu Yonah, Rabbeinu Bachya, Sefer Hachinuch, Rav Chaim Vital, Orchot Tzaddikim, Chafetz Chaim, see below) highlighting the exceptional severity of violating the Torah prohibition against hatred. Rabbi Y.Y. Rubinstein made a similar point regarding the generation of the Second Temple:¹ “So, if the Gemara in Yuma says that throughout the second-Temple period Jews learned Torah, how did they appear to have missed the *pasuk* in *Vayikra* and its message, obligations, and implications? But indeed, it seems that either they missed it or they didn’t understand how crucially important the mitzvah was and how catastrophic the consequences of not absorbing its message would be.”

From my interviews with hundreds of individuals, I concluded that there are several reasons for this paradoxical situation. One reason is that most people were unaware of the profound spiritual consequences of violating the Torah prohibition against hatred which is a “*Lo Taasse MideOraita*.” I address this lack of awareness in Chapters 2 to 5 with an analysis of the impact of hatred on three mitzvot: *Limmud Torah*, *Kabbalat Ol Malchut Shamayim*, and Tefillah.

Another reason was given by Rabbeinu Yonah² who warned long ago that Jews tend to view sins that involve an action (such as eating forbidden fat or meat of a *tereifah* animal) as more significant, while they tend to view sins involving forbidden thought or forbidden speech as more trivial. Indeed, most people including several rabbis consider *sinat chinam* a very complex problem (see below). A third reason is that our people do not know how to use the solution

¹ Rabbi Yehudah Yonah Rubinstein in “Building Tomorrow” (Lakewood NJ Israel Bookshop Publications, 2018), 16.

² Rabbeinu Yonah, Shaarei Teshuvah (Mesorah Publication, Ltd, Brooklyn, 2019), Shaar 3:26.

proposed by the Torah and Chazal, namely “rebuking” the perceived aggressor, as explained below.

CHAZAL’S CONSENSUS ON SEVERITY

There is a remarkable consensus among Chazal regarding the exceptional severity of violating the Torah prohibition against hatred.

- Rabbeinu Yonah³ urged people in his generation regarding severe Torah prohibitions including *sinat chinam*: “there are many people who do not take upon themselves to guard against certain transgressions....they treat them like permissible behavior.”
- *Rabbeinu Bachya*⁴ considers hatred “the cause of all the sins mentioned in the Torah.”
- Sefer Hachinuch describes hatred in the heart as “the worst and most utterly despicable quality in the eyes of every intelligent human being.”⁵
- *Orchot Tzaddikim* writes about hatred: “this trait leads to many transgressions such as slander”...An extremely bad form of hatred is vain hatred, the type that destroyed the Second Temple. And even worse that this is hatred out of envy. It is fitting that one afflicts himself so that he can remove himself from these.”⁶
- Chafetz Chaim considers *sinat chinam* “much worse than any other sin”⁷ and provides several reasons.
- Rav Chaim Vital (Shaarei Kedushah II:4)⁸ teaches that hating another Jew is equivalent to hating G-d for every Jewish soul is but a fragment of the Creator’s “super-soul.” [Moreover since all Jews descend from the Patriarchs, one who hates a fellow Jew is casting aspersions on his enemies’ forbears, the Patriarchs, and thereby diminishes his own *zechut avot*, merit of the Patriarchs.]

The reason for this consensus on the severity of the Torah prohibition will become apparent once we analyze the impact of hatred on avodat HaShem (*Limmud Torah, Kabbalat Ol Malchut Shamayim*, and Tefillah).

³ Rabbeinu Yonah Shaarei Teshuvah (Mesorah Publications, Ltd, Brooklyn 2019), Shaar 1:8.

⁴ Rabbeinu Bachya, Encyclopedia of Torah Thoughts (Shilo Publishing House, Inc New York, NY, 1980), 448.

⁵ Sefer Hachinuch, Mitzvah 238

⁶ Orchot Tzaddikim (Feldheim Publishers, Nanuet NY, 1995), 134-135.

⁷ Chafetz Chaim, Ahavat Yisrael: chapter 2.

⁸ Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer, Shemoneh Esrei (Mesorah Publications, Ltd Brooklyn, 2009), 63.

SOME RABBIS DESCRIBED THE COMPLEXITY OF THE *SINAT CHINAM* PROBLEM

In general, people don't know how to begin tackling their *sinat hinam* problem and some Orthodox rabbis shared their feelings on this issue:

- "I can still recall the feeling of helplessness ... sitting there on Tisha B"Av and not knowing exactly what to feel guilty about. How do I find that hidden hatred and how do I practically uproot it?"⁹
- Why would I hate others for no other reason than that they are not me? What do I stand to gain from it? Yet the Jewish people have been roiled with such senseless hatred for millennia." "Why do we seem to have this predilection towards such obviously destructive behavior? Are we Jews really such an evil, spiteful lot?"¹⁰
- The result is that *sinat chinam* has proven to be quite an intractable and pernicious problem ...like a stain that simply defies repeated attempts to be removed, *sinas chinam* ruins an otherwise 'beautiful garment. "¹¹

THE TORAH SOLUTION (REBUKE) WAS NOT ATTEMPTED OR FAILED

Since the Torah prohibition focuses on any hatred-like feelings "hidden" in our heart, it requires each one of us to diagnose those feelings and deal with them as soon as possible since they constitute a potential violation of the Torah prohibition. However, members of my audiences reported that they were aware of their negative feelings but considered them justified because they felt that they had been unjustly victimized. Some expected the perceived aggressor to come to them and apologize. As indicated in last chapter, according to Chazal, the Torah solution is found in the rest of the *passuk* (Vayikra 19:17): "You shall rebuke your fellow and do not bear a sin because of him." It means that we have to approach the perceived aggressor to express our feelings, provide him/her an opportunity to respond, and hope that they would apologize. But we have to be careful not to embarrass him/her, in which case we violate the commandment "*and do not bear a sin because of him*" located in the same *passuk*.

⁹ Rabbi Label Lam <https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5773-devarim/>

¹⁰ Rabbi Dovid Rosenfeld <https://torah.org/learning/pirkei-avos-chapter2-16/>

¹¹ Rabbi Yehudah Yonah Rubinstein in "Building Tomorrow" (Lakewood NJ Israel Bookshop Publications, 2018), 16.

Most people in my audiences reported that their rebuke attempts had negative outcomes, especially with family members. They found it difficult to expose their vulnerability to the other party (especially in-laws) who may accuse them of overreacting or being overly sensitive. Second, they felt so hurt by their family member that they were unable to use soft language. Many felt that the attempt to rebuke the perceived aggressor could damage the relationship even more, so they gave up on the rebuke approach altogether.

REBUKE OF THE “PERCEIVED AGRESSOR” REQUIRES PREPARATION

Rebuke by the “hater” who feels victimized is unlikely to succeed unless he/she engages in introspection associated with dedication to truth (“*middat haemet.*”)

Introspection

Rabbi Zecharia Fendel¹² indicates that “There is a saying prevalent among “*baalei mussar*” (students of mussar) that the first principle in ethical instruction is “*daa et atzmecha*” “know thyself.” Introspection should yield a self-appraisal of one’s character traits recognizing strengths and weaknesses: am I peace-loving, considerate, compassionate, envious, selfish, greedy, haughty, or angry? The goals are to admit to ourselves that we possess negative traits and to learn to see ourselves how others see us. That is challenging because as humans, we find it difficult to find mistakes in ourselves. To achieve the goals of introspection requires dedication to truth.

Dedication to truth

The fact that introspection should be combined with the pursuit of truth was pointed out by Rabbi Abraham J Twersky: “pursuit of truth also means to pursue absolute honesty with oneself.”¹³ This requires special care because the “scale” we use to make self-judgments is our own mind, and our mind is distorted by our biases and desires.

How do we know that dedication to truth brings a person closer to Hashem?

¹² Rabbi Zecharia Fendel, *The Ethical Personality* (Hashkafah Publications, New York, 1986), 74.

¹³ Rabbi Abraham J Twersky, *The Enemy Within* (Shaar Press Brooklyn NY, 2002), 138.

The answer is based on the verse in the famous Tehillim (145:18) that we recite three times daily: “Hashem is close to all who call him, to all who call Him in truth.”¹⁴ For the Holy One Blessed be He, who is truth, draws near to all who call upon Him in truth. “And what is meant by calling upon G-d in truth? Freeing one’s heart of everything in the world and drawing near to the Holy One Blessed be He alone, so that one’s intellect grows stronger and is cleaving to the Celestial Radiance, and one’s mind yearns constantly for Him.”¹⁵ The closer we come to Hashem, the closer we are to truth and the more we identify with HaShem, the more truthful we become.¹⁶

*Orchot Tzaddikim*¹⁷ provided a gematria proof of the relationship between Hashem’s Name and Truth: When Moshe asked Hashem for His Name, Hashem responded “*Eheyeh Asher Eheyeh*.” Since the numerical value of “*Eheyeh*” is 21, the numerical value of “*Eheyeh Asher Eheyeh*” is the product $21 \times 21 = 441$, which is the numerical value of the word “*Emet*” which is “*Truth*.”

Also, Rav Chaim Kanievsky adds that “the Holy One Blessed be He, created everything except for the traits of falsehood and injustice....Man caused injustice and falsehood to be created because of his sins.”¹⁸

CONSEQUENCES OF HARBORING HATRED: “THE TZIZIT INCIDENT”

Let’s use a scenario to illustrate how to identify the multiple consequences of violating the Torah prohibition against hatred.

Cast of Characters

The cast of characters includes Shimon and David who belong to the same Shul:

- Shimon is CEO of a large company of dairy products founded by his grandfather. He considers himself modern-Orthodox and supports the Torah Day School as well as other Torah institutions. You, the reader, are Shimon and I will address you directly.

¹⁴ I learned from Dr Ariel Elkouby (Paris) that this verse is the only one in Psalm 145 that does not have the letter “Vav.” that links the two parts of each verse.

¹⁵ *Orchot Tzaddikim* (Feldheim Publishers, Nanuet NY, 1995), 397.

¹⁶ Rabbi Abraham J Twersky, *The Enemy Within* (Shaar Press Brooklyn NY, 2002), 137.

¹⁷ *Orchot Tzaddikim* (Feldheim Publishers, Nanuet NY, 1995), 395.

¹⁸ Rav Chaim Kanievsky *Orchos Yosher* (Messorah Publications, Ltd, Brooklyn, 2019), 1.

- David teaches at the Torah Day School. He just moved to the US last month from Israel with his family. Because of the high cost of rentals, David pays a reduced rent in a house owned by a member of the Day School Board. That's how David became Shimon's neighbor.

Incident

It was Thursday evening when you, Shimon, came to Shul to attend the Rabbi's weekly Shiur.

As soon as you entered, your new neighbor David said to you: "Hey Shimon, your tzizit are way too long, you could trip on them!"

You were surprised by this remark, did not respond, and kept walking to the other side of the Shul, as far as possible from David.

When you returned home, you did not share "the tzizit incident" with anyone but decided to avoid David when you come in and out of your house.

SHIMON VIOLATED FOUR ADDITIONAL COMMANDMENTS

Accounting of Shimon's Sins

Shimon, the processes of introspection and dedication to truth allowed us to identify four sins associated with your hatred:

- As soon as you heard David's comment on your *tzizit*, you reacted with feelings of resentment and animosity toward him. You then kept your nascent hatred hidden and decided to avoid him. In so doing, you violated the Torah prohibition "*Lo Tisna Et Achicha Bilvavecha*," "Thou Shall Not Hate Your Brother In Your Heart".

- Although David is a respected teacher and your neighbor, you did not give him the benefit of the doubt. You instantly judged him guilty of mocking you and your *tzizit* and you violated the Torah commandment *B'tzedek Tishpot Amitecha*, "*With righteousness shall you judge your fellow*" (Vayikra 19:15).

- As time went by, you avoided speaking to David repeatedly and kept a grudge, thus violating the Torah prohibition "*Lo Titor Et Bnei Amecha*," "*You shall not bear a grudge against the members of your people*"; (Vayikra 19:18).

- Since your behavior was neither gracious nor merciful toward David, you violated the commandment *Vehalachta Bidrachav* (Devarim 28:9), "*You shall walk in His ways*," as well as

the commandment “*Veahavta LeReecha Kamocha*,” “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Vayikra 19:18). The substance of these Torah commandments is discussed in Chapter 3. This chapter explores the Torah prohibition, while next chapter examines the violation of the above four Torah commandments.

FIRST CONSEQUENCE OF HARBORING HATRED: EMPATHY LOSS

The severity of violating this prohibition results from the role of the *yetzer hara* in the eruption of hatred described in Chapter 1. As the *yetzer hara* pushed your primitive mind into overdrive to produce nascent hatred, it immediately switched off your empathy. This loss of empathy has grave consequences. To appreciate them, we need a brief background on empathy and empathy loss.

What Empathy Is and What It Does

Empathy is “our ability to identify what someone else is thinking or feeling and to respond to their thoughts or feelings with an appropriate emotion.” This ability to read the thinking or feelings of others is innate, and different people have different levels of empathic capacity (see below).

Because there exists some confusion about empathy, it helps to recognize that there are three types of empathy: “Cognitive” empathy refers simply to understanding the mental states of other people, without any emotional involvement. “Emotional” empathy refers to sharing the emotional states of others (feeling their emotions). “Compassionate” empathy is of interest to us because it is closely aligned with what we call “*rachmanut*” (compassion) because it includes also showing concern to others with a desire to help them when they are in distress or in pain. Compassionate empathy functions as a strong person-to-person connector because two individuals with reciprocal compassionate empathy understand each other at cognitive and emotional levels and communicate very effectively. That’s how compassionate empathy optimizes social interactions between family members, friends, and coworkers. Since compassionate empathy connects us to others, its presence or absence reflects how much we focus on others or ourselves, respectively. Being empathic implies that we stop thinking about ourselves and we instead focus on the other.

Empathy Levels

Individual levels of innate empathic capacity have been measured with various scales such as the Empathy Quotient, EQ. In an adult population, EQ scores range between 0 and 6 and are distributed according to a bell-shaped curve. A small percent of individuals, at both ends of the curve, have either low scores (level 0-2) or high scores (level 5-6), while most of the population exhibits scores in the middle, ranging between 3 and 5. But this innate level of empathy may not always be available because empathy is sensitive to social context and can vanish very rapidly for various reasons, especially when we face threats or challenges.

Empathy Deficit Caused by Hatred

When hatred erupts, the hater experiences an empathy deficit similar to that of “zero empathy” individuals. People who lack empathy from birth (or because of brain injury) do not read their environment well. Those who exhibit empathy deficit disorders can become capable of committing crimes because they perceive other humans as inanimate objects and are unable to experience guilt or remorse. They tend to remain in a state of self-centeredness, may believe that others have hostile intentions toward them, and feel victimized easily.

“Achzariyut” (Cruelty)

Empathy deficits associated with hidden hatred (and *sinat chinam*) constitute a tragic consequence of violating the Torah prohibition. The loss of *rachmanut* can turn you into an “*achzar*,” a cruel person. Since compassion is a hallmark quality of *Bnei Israel*, harboring hatred excludes you from our mission to become closer to Hashem, as explained by Rav Shlomo Wolbe:¹⁹ “Our mission is to work on becoming close to Hashem and banish the perspective of “*achzariyut*,” cruelty—seeing others as foreign and alien to us. Our role is to uproot the “*el zar*” that exists within us.” The “*el zar*” is the *yetzer hara*, which is “a force that strives to create the opposite of Hashem’s design.”

Moral Exclusion

Another serious consequence of empathy deficits associated with hatred is called “moral exclusion.” It means that in addition to negative feelings such as dislike, avoidance, contempt, disgust, and loathing, the hater perceives the target as someone morally deficient (unkind, evil)

¹⁹ Cited by Rabbi Yehudah Yonah Rubinstein in “Building Tomorrow” (Lakewood NJ Israel Bookshop Publications, 2018), 26.

who is excluded from his or her “scope of justice.” The target is no longer of moral concern, they become undeserving and expendable.²⁰ That’s how a hater becomes physically and emotionally unable to fulfill several commandments in the category *BenAdam LaChavero*, in particular the obligation of mutual responsibility called “*arevut*.”

Loss of Arevut

You probably recall that fifty days after leaving Egypt, Bnei Israel arrived at the foot of Mount Sinai to receive the Torah and officially become one people. They encamped at the foot of the mountain “as one man with one heart.” At that time, they made a commitment of mutual responsibility, an expression used to describe this unique feeling of unity. At the moment of the formal covenant with HaShem, they had to be united because a covenant with individuals would not be meaningful. This was articulated by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks: “The covenant is more than a series of vertical commitments linking individual Jews with God. It is also a set of horizontal bonds linking Jews with one another in a collective responsibility.”²¹ At the most significant moment in the history of the Jewish people, the commitment to *arevut* was officially ratified. Rashi states the rabbinic principle in his commentary on Vayikra 26:37, “*Kol Yisrael arevim zeh lazeh*” All of Israel are guarantors for [responsible for] one another. The notion of connectedness through *arevut* is a fundamental dimension of Jewish life and was embedded in numerous facets of Halacha. Each hater excludes himself or herself from the obligation of *arevut* and severs the unity of the Jewish people.

CONCLUSION

Consistent with Chazal’s warning about the exceptional severity of violating the Torah prohibition against hatred, this chapter shows that such a violation is accompanied with violation of four additional Torah prohibitions:

²⁰ This modus operandi is used by terrorists to justify their hideous actions toward innocent people.

²¹ Jonathan Sacks, *One People? Tradition, Modernity, and Jewish Unity* (Portland, OR: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1993), 207.

- (i) *B'Tzedek Tishpot Amitecha*, "With righteousness shall you judge your fellow;"
- (ii) *Lo Titor Et Bnei Amecha*, "You shall not bear a grudge against the members of your people";
- (iii) *Vehalachta Bidrachav*, "You shall walk in His ways;"
- (iv) *VeAhavta LeReecha Kamocha*, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

In addition, this chapter analyzed the loss of compassionate empathy (*rachmanut*) that occurs as soon as hatred erupts. It showed that by creating a deep psychological distance between two Jews and destroying their sense of mutual responsibility, the *yetzer hara* achieved dual goals: (i) deterring a hater from doing Hashem's will and (ii) destroying the potential for unity and peace among Jewish sisters and brothers.

TAKE HOME MESSAGE FOR CHAPTER 2

Dear Reader,

Based on my research, conducted with audiences as I lectured about *Sinat Chinam*, baseless hatred, there are **hundreds of thousands** of Torah-observant Jews across the world who live with hidden hatred and broken family or community relationships.

This is an appalling and tragic fact. And it is likely true for two simple reasons: People tend to view mitzvot that involve an action as more significant. It follows, then, that it is easier to stumble on a commandment with no action attached, where one must refrain from an emotion such as hatred that erupts spontaneously. It doesn't feel as wrong if you didn't NOT do what you were commanded not to do.

When you feel that someone has wronged you, you might also feel that they have brought your feelings of hatred upon themselves. They made you feel vulnerable and inadequate. You are hurt and angry, but since you are not taking active vengeance out on them, they kind of deserve your silent treatment. They are the aggressor, and you are the victim.

In addition, you reckon that even if you tried to talk to them about it they would either mock you or tell you to stop taking things so seriously. Therefore, you give up on the Torah-recommended solution which is to “rebuke” them. We can agree that rebuking someone is a delicate art, and not everyone is equipped with the proper skills. Especially when emotions are involved.

To take all this out of the theoretical realm, I have composed a tangible scenario to illustrate my point. As you examine it, feel free to plug in different names and objects to make it feel more relevant to you. In order for this book to have its desired effect, it must reflect real life as accurately as possible. It needs to feel REAL. Because it is all too real.

David and Shimon in the scenario are you and me. Interactions like theirs where a trivial comment yields hatred, happen every day. We must study the story, examine its consequences and then apply its messages.

As the *yetzer hara* pushed David’s primitive mind into overdrive to produce nascent hatred, it immediately switched off his empathy. David’s loss of empathy (loss of *rachmanut*) is a grave consequence of violating the Torah prohibition. Without empathy, David perceives Shimon as an object, as someone morally deficient (unkind, evil) who is excluded from his “scope of justice.” His target, Shimon, is no longer of moral concern. Since compassion is a hallmark trait of *Bnei Israel*, the empathy loss associated with harboring hatred excludes David from our mission to become closer to Hashem.

“*Kol Yisrael arevim zeh lazeh*” means that all of Israel are guarantors for [responsible for] one another. This connectedness through *arevut* is a fundamental dimension of Jewish life. It is embedded in numerous facets of Halacha. By excluding himself from the obligation of *arevut*, a hater like David destroys the potential for unity and peace among Jewish brothers and sisters.