

CHAPTER 7

GROUP HATRED IS THE MOST DANGEROUS TYPE OF *SINAT CHINAM*

This book will now take you on a different journey, that of the monstrous, group sized dimension of *sinat chinam* called group *sinat chinam*. This type of *sinat chinam* targets our unity (*achdut*), our fraternity, solidarity, and our fate and mission as a people. If you wonder, why it is so easy for Torah-observant Jews to fall into toxic behaviors that threaten our survival as a people, it simply means that you underestimate the resourcefulness of the yetzer hara. As indicated before, never doubt that the Yetzer Hara is a real thing with adaptable cunning strategies that paralyze us into inaction. How so? It utilizes and hijacks our natural sense of belonging to groups that are essential to our survival, especially in the Diaspora. It fuels group competition by injecting meaning in our group identity in such a way that it becomes tribal with a strong sense of “us vs them” that degenerates into group hatred. That hatred is impersonal which means that you lose your empathy at once for thousands of Jews you don’t even know. These divisive forces overwhelm any sense of peoplehood¹ that comes from your daily prayers, and this makes group *sinat chinam* the most dangerous type of hatred for our people. To understand why, we need to look inward and understand the “what”, why, and when of hatred. This understanding is deemed essential for Diaspora Jews and indispensable for Jews living in Israel.

COMMON BELIEFS ABOUT *SINAT CHINAM* IN GENERAL

Many sincere and learned Torah-observant Jews shared with me their beliefs about *sinat chinam* such as (i) *sinat chinam* is a more severe violation than the three cardinal sins of idolatry, immorality, and murder,² and (ii) it was prevalent among the last generation of the

¹ Peoplehood is defined as “a sense of family, belonging, connection, and caring that can seem almost tribal in appearance and behavior” in the book by Erica Brown and Misha Galperin, *The Case For Jewish Peoplehood: Can We Be One?* (Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, 2009), 2.

² The Talmud (Yoma 9b) contains the statement “But [during the time of] the Second Temple, we know that the people occupied themselves with Torah, mitzvot, and acts of kindness.” The cardinal sins of idolatry, immorality, and murder were responsible for the destruction of the First Temple.

Second Temple. But they felt that they lacked a personal connection with that type of *sinat chinam* “since they had never experienced it.” The only hatreds they were familiar with had been caused by individuals who perpetrated some hurt or injustice that impacted their lives. They also shared that they mourn the destruction of the First and Second Temple (between the 17th of Tammuz and the 9th of Av) every year because we have a duty to identify with the sins of our ancestors in order not to repeat them. Nevertheless, they were unable to put their finger on the occurrence of *sinat chinam* in their daily lives.

THE “WHAT, WHY, AND WHEN” OF HATRED

What of Hatred

Hatred is considered a complex human emotion. Experts in this field have found that there exist two broad types of hatred: interpersonal (or personal) hatred and intergroup (or group) hatred: “hate can be seen in relations between nations and ethnic groups, between warring religious factions, or in individuals that come to hate others in their private lives.”³ Group hatred is quite different from the personal hatred discussed in the previous chapters. It refers to hatred between members of different groups generally motivated by group characteristics such as race, color, religious belief, or political orientation. In this domain, our Rabbis were light-years ahead to today’s scientists because most scientific knowledge about group hatred was developed after the veil was lifted on the orchestrated killings of the Nazi death machine,⁴ and after other recent genocides in the Balkans, Rwanda, and the Sudan.

Why of Hatred

To understand group *sinat chinam*, we must also consider the “Why of hatred” because that’s the dimension of hatred that our Talmudic Sages considered when they introduced the notion of *sinat chinam*, namely a hatred that is unwarranted. Their statement in Yoma 9b caught our people’s attention and became a buzz word. At the same time, they identified the fundamental cause of the destruction of the Second Temple and they warned future generations that the

³ R J Sternberg and K Sternberg *The Nature of Hate* (Cambridge University Press, New York, 2008), 12.

⁴ Robert J Sternberg, *The Psychology of Hate* (American Psychological Association, Washington DC, 2005), ix. He was also past president of the American Psychological Association.

most destructive human emotion called “*sinah*” could erupt within a holy nation for reasons that tragically are “*hinam*,” unjustified or unwarranted. Such a notion is by itself counterintuitive. Even more counterintuitive is the fact that such hatred could live in the midst of Torah, *mitzvot*, and acts of kindness. Those teachings were not only new but revolutionary, true “*chiddushim*.” By coining the expression *sinat chinam*, our Rabbis warned us to systematically assess the risk/benefit of any hatred-like feeling, as soon as we become aware of it. They also taught that when it comes to hatred toward any Jewish or sister/brother (*achicha*), we should instinctively ask the question: is it *chinam* or warranted? The answer to that question requires self-awareness, a self-assessment, and self-understanding. With their warning, our Sages taught that since *sinat chinam* led to the destruction of the Second Temple, the Third Temple will not be built until we become able to protect and maintain it by curbing and eradicating group *sinat chinam*.

When of Hatred

The “When” of hatred is critical because it explains how hatred becomes *sinat chinam*. Personal hatred is not an all or none phenomenon. It has phases. Chapter 1 indicated that when personal hatred first erupts, it is a mixture of negative feelings we called “nascent hatred.” However, when nascent hatred is left unattended, it builds itself up over time and evolves to full blown hatred.⁵ In addition, unlike other emotions that are short-lived, hatred remains active in time because the primitive brain turns up our memory mechanism so that every detail of the original triggering incident is etched deeply in a hater’s mind.

GROUP SINAT CHINAM: HOW DOES IT COME ABOUT?

Group Belonging is a Basic Need

People are inherently social beings and have a natural desire to belong to groups. A group is defined as a number of people who identify and interact with one another. A group can have any size, and people form groups for many reasons such as age, race, cultural, religious, political beliefs, or shared interests. As humans, we are social creatures, and as Jewish humans, we are

⁵ For this reason, some authors consider hatred a “syndrome” rather than a single emotion.

extremely social creatures. Our synagogues in the U S constitute such groups. The famous psychologist Abraham Maslow built a hierarchy of the five essential human needs. Not surprisingly, the fundamental physiological needs such as eating, drinking, and sleeping are first, and the need for personal safety and security (from war or abuse) is second. The third essential need is group belonging. It means that group belonging is not a hobby (like chess or sports) but a fundamental human need that ranks before other important needs such as the need for esteem and respect of others.⁶ Consistent with that finding, scientists found that humans are known to survive and thrive better if they are social rather than isolated, which is not surprising!

Biology of Group Belonging: Role of Oxytocin

In addition to its psychological aspects, group belonging has a biological, hormonal, dimension. Oxytocin is a hormone produced in our brain that is well known for its role in enhancing bonding between mother and baby at birth. It also plays an important role in group belonging and tribal behavior. Several studies have shown that oxytocin enhances bonding between adult individuals who belong to the same group leading scientists to conclude that “Oxytocin may be the pivotal means biology provided to shift the individual’s focus [.....] from being a lone wolf to being an included and appreciated group member.”⁷

To establish the role of oxytocin, scientists went further: they administered it and demonstrated its effects on group bonding: “Intranasal administration of oxytocin (vs. placebo) increases in-group favoritism, lying for one’s team, conformity to in-group preferences, and aggressive protection against threatening outsiders.” But these effects of oxytocin are not ubiquitous:⁸ oxytocin does not “bond us to humanity in general,” it bonds us “to our partners and groups, so that we can more effectively compete with other groups.”⁹ It increases our trust vis-à-vis members of our group while making us more defensive towards members of the competing group.

⁶ <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>

⁷ CK De Dreu and ME Kret, *Biological Psychiatry*, 2016; 79:165-173.

⁸ A word of caution is indicated here: these findings have been misunderstood in media reports which labeled oxytocin the “love drug” because oxytocin administration improved cognitive empathy in autism spectrum disorder.

⁹ Jonathan Haidt, “The Righteous Mind” (New York, Vintage Books, 2012), 271.

GROUP BELONGING HAS INHERENT AND UNSUSPECTED RISKS

Definitions of Bias, Stereotype, Prejudice

A bias is tendency or preference towards a particular perspective which interferes with the ability to be objective.

A stereotype is a preconceived idea (often simplistic and inaccurate) that attributes certain characteristics to all members of a group.

Prejudice is a preformed judgment (generally negative) against people based on their group membership. While stereotypes are related to thinking, prejudices are more emotional in nature.

Group Identity And “Us vs Them”

Group belonging has two dimensions, group identity and group competition. The Polish Jew Henri Tajfel who lived in France during the Second World War was captured by the Germans until the end of the war. When he returned, he introduced the notion of “group identity”. To maintain their identity, groups systematically compare themselves to other relevant groups, and, understandably, these comparisons lead to group competition. Also, once people identify with a group, the group commands loyalty from its members. As a result, group members favor those who belong to their group (called in-group) and may discriminate against members of competing groups (called out-group).

Consistent with Tajfel’s work on group identity, more recent neuroscientists discovered that human brains are naturally wired for comparisons, competition, and even harboring negative stereotypes toward out-group members. We have a neuro-circuitry for tribal behavior that classifies a person as “us” and not “them” within 170 thousandths of a second of first seeing that person. These reactions to our perceptions are so fast that they take place without our awareness, leading to the observation that “we are primarily the products of thinking that happens below the level of awareness.” “The impulse to form group identities and favor in-group members has a neurological basis.”¹⁰

The Drive for Meaning

¹⁰ It was documented not only in children but in newborns.

Research has also shown that while groups may compete for resources, they also compete for abstract notions such as ideology, religious beliefs, and meaning. Another Holocaust survivor, Viktor Frankl introduced the notion that, for humans, the search for meaning in life is a basic human drive.¹¹ Meaning is uniquely significant to humans because (i) our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are shaped by meaning systems that we create, and (ii) the primitive brain blindly interprets our meaning systems as critical to our survival.¹² That is why we perceive group differences based on meaning as threats which can trigger group hatred.

Tribalism

Group belonging has several built-in, inherent, dangers. When normal group belonging is associated with strong group identity, it feeds on our intuitive binary instinct of “us versus them” which is based on fear and operates subconsciously. That is how group belonging evolves into tribalism.

In recent years, “tribalism” has been used to describe situations where people are overly loyal to their own group. Tribalism is fueled by competition between groups and the desire of individuals to be part of something bigger than themselves. Some believe that tribalism is propelled by either an inferiority complex or a superiority complex.

Experts teach that “when groups feel threatened, they retreat in tribalism. They close ranks and become more insular, more defensive, more punitive, and more us-versus-them.”¹³ They exhibit a single-minded goal where they put their group above every other consideration. Tribalism distorts factual information, and that’s why tribal group members reject facts that conflict with their tribal beliefs. Such a mindset leads to intolerance and creates a fertile ground for group hatred. Their desperate attachment to their group may even lead them to self-sacrifice for the tribe against other tribes/groups.

Scientists found that the tribal instinct is very strong:¹⁴ using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), scientists have scanned people’s brains” and found that “..group identification

¹¹ Viktor Frankl

¹² Meaning systems provide us with our personal sense of meaning and purpose. See R W Dozier, Jr. Why We Hate (Contemporary Books McGraw-Hill, New York, NY; 2002),10-13.

¹³ Ibid., 8-9.

¹⁴ Ibid., 39.

is both innate and almost immediate” leading them to the conclusion that “humans aren’t just a little tribal. We’re very tribal, and it distorts the way we think and feel.”¹⁵

SINAT CHINAM FROM GROUP BELONGING

If you wish to truly appreciate the dark side of group belonging, it is essential to understand how normal, innocuous, group belonging turns into baseless hatred.

Group Hatred is Baseless Because It Is Impersonal

In interpersonal hatred, there is a basic commonality of humanity between the hater and the subject of hate. They are peers, or former friends, or family members. For example, if you hate your brother-in-law because he insulted you or cheated you in the proceedings of an inheritance, you don’t wish him well, but it’s unlikely that you will rejoice to hear that he died in a car accident because you would not want your sister to become a widow and your nephews and nieces to become orphans and suffer. That commonality is highlighted by the choice of the word “*achicha*” in the Torah prohibition. Therefore, because of this commonality, a hater has the potential opportunity to verify the truth of his/her claim to having been victimized or to understand what happened that lead to feelings of hostility. This type of “truth test” is absent in the hatred between groups. A group lacks specific physicality to which we can personally relate. A group is essentially impersonal, an amalgam of people who compete with us or wish to harm us. In addition, members of the in-group demonize and have contempt for out-group members simply because they belong to the outgroup.¹⁶ Those are the unsuspected and harmful characteristics of group hatred.

Group Hatred is Baseless Because It Can Be Manufactured By Propaganda And Stories Of Hate

Propaganda

Group hatred can be manufactured at will with propaganda. Let’s first agree on what is meant by propaganda. Today, because the dissemination of information involves the inclusion of

¹⁵ Amy Chua, *Group Instinct and the Fate of Nations* (Penguin Press, New York, 2018), 39-41.

¹⁶ According to Viktor Frankl, the search for meaning is a basic human drive. That drive makes us vulnerable to interpreting differences in meaning as threats to our survival and triggering hatred (as explained in upcoming chapters). Since meaning systems proliferate in any large human population, conflicting meaning systems can trigger violent strife (see R W Dozier, Jr. *Why We Hate* (Contemporary Books McGraw-Hill, New York, NY; 2002),10-13.

falsehoods, propaganda is defined as a deliberate attempt to shape perceptions and attitudes and direct the behavior of others to achieve the intent of the propagandist.

You may wonder how that is possible. It is because of propaganda's power of persuasion. It was discovered long ago that the behavior of people can be influenced and even controlled when we give them false beliefs. This happens because of the way our brain works: the brain is easily influenced because it is not efficient for our brain to be systematically skeptical about everything we hear. To function in real time, our brain prioritizes efficiency over accuracy, and that's why we are programmed a-priori to believe whatever we hear. Since group hatred has no truth test, group hatred can spread easily with nothing more than hearsay. These characteristics make group hatred a pure version of *sinat chinam*.

Stories of hate

"Hate arises from stories."¹⁷ "Why do we even create stories about hate?" Because "we seek to maximize the amount of difference we perceive between ourselves and those we hate. Such differences help to justify the hate. In addition, to find meaning and autonomy, people may tend to exaggerate differences. And when people's self-esteem is threatened, the tendency to seek to restore it by exaggerating small differences may be increased....people take the role of the "good" victim, and the hated object has the role of the "bad" perpetrator."

Stories of hate are very effective because they utilize themes that are simple and work such as:

- we are victim of an injustice: "the stronger the injustice, and perhaps the more humiliating and damaging it is perceived to be, the stronger the appeal of stories of hate."¹⁸
- the hated enemy is impure.
- the hated enemy is immoral or must be eliminated on moral grounds (this is called "moral exclusion.")
- the hated enemy is trying to control you.
- the hated enemy thwarts or destroys our destiny.
- the hated enemy is not only your enemy but also an enemy of G-d.

¹⁷ Robert J Sternberg, *The Psychology of Hate* (American Psychological Association, Washington DC, 2005), 78.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

What makes group hatred baseless is that these stories of hate are powerful “cliches”. “The power of stories is that their perception becomes, for the individual experiencing the stories, reality. The individual typically does not question whether a given story is true. For him or her, it simply *is* true.”¹⁹

For Torah-observant Jews, that type of animosity is unacceptable because:

- it violates many Torah commandments (let alone Mussar teachings!) as shown in Chapter 10.
- It has no basis.
- It is fabricated with nefarious intentions.
- It’s reach is limitless since it can involve millions of individuals at once, and can destroy a whole society from within, as described in the next chapter.

TAKE-HOME MESSAGE

Just like there exist two types of hatred, interpersonal hatred and group hatred, there exist two types of *sinat chinam*, personal *sinat chinam* and group *sinat chinam*. While personal *sinat chinam* destroys friendships and families, group *sinat chinam* could destroy whole communities in the Diaspora and, *chas veshalom*, our people assembled in the Land of Israel. Group *sinat chinam* is particularly treacherous because it begins with group belonging and Jews have not been warned that what seems a basic, innocuous, human need indispensable to building our communities contains within it the potential to destroy our nation. All group hatred is inherently baseless because it is impersonal and can be manufactured at will by propaganda and stories of hate. To survive, Jews must be aware of the slippery slope that begins with a harmless synagogue membership can degenerate into tribalism, group hatred, and turn into a lethal poison-pill for our people.

TAKE HOME MESSAGE FOR CHAPTER 7

¹⁹ Ibid., 98.

Dear Reader,

In Chapter 1, we introduced the basic notion that there exist two forms of *sinat chinam*, Individual *Sinat Chinam* and Group *Sinat Chinam* that mirror the two known types of hatred, individual hatred and group hatred. This notion is so fundamental that this entire book has been divided accordingly: Chapters 2 through 6 focused on Individual *Sinat Chinam* while Chapters 7 through 11 will focus on Group *Sinat Chinam*.

While these two forms of *sinat chinam* are different, they are both included in the Torah prohibition against hatred. This chapter shows that group *sinat chinam* is the most dangerous because personal *sinat chinam* destroys friendships and families, while group *sinat chinam* destroys communities in the Diaspora, and it can, *chas veshalom*, be lethal to our people in the Land of Israel.

What makes group *sinat chinam* so dangerous?

Group *sinat chinam* is particularly treacherous because it begins with an innocuous social phenomenon called group belonging which is a human need indispensable to building our communities. While our Torah and our *Chachamim* have warned us of its dangers, the data I collected showed that a majority of Jews do not know that something natural like group belonging contains lethal risks for our nation. This chapter addresses that need.

Humans are social creatures for biological reasons, because of the role of a hormone called oxytocin. As Jewish humans, we are *extremely* social creatures. Social science (which is just now catching up with our *Chachamim*!) teaches that groups develop their identity and tend to compete using an “us versus them” paradigm of “in-group” versus “out-group.” This binary mode of thinking has inherent dangers: when groups feel threatened, they revert to tribal mode using our built-in tribal instincts that make us shun outsiders who are perceived as aliens or hostile. That reaction devolves into group hatred.

It is essential to know that group hatred has two characteristics that turn group belonging into *sinat chinam* (here also, we recognize the footprint of the Yetzer Hara which harnesses our primitive brain!).

(i) Group hatred is inherently baseless because it is impersonal which means that you lose your empathy at once for thousands of Jews you don't even know! Unlike individuals, groups lack

physicality: the out-group becomes an amalgam of people who compete with us or wish to harm us. As soon as we stop relating to members of the out-group as people, we risk falling into dangerous waters of ostracizing, mocking, and God forbid, dehumanizing them. Members of the in-group demonize and have contempt for out-group members simply because they belong to the outgroup. This behavior violates multiple Torah commandments. It is aggressive, shameless, and immoral. Unfortunately, that's not all!

(ii) Group Hatred is also baseless because it can be manufactured at will by propaganda and stories of hate.

Why is that?

It's because it was discovered long ago that the behavior of people can be influenced and even controlled when we give them false beliefs. This happens because of the way our brain works: the brain is easily influenced because, to function in real time, our brain prioritizes efficiency over accuracy. As a result, we are programmed a-priori to believe whatever we hear, and group hatred spreads easily with nothing more than hearsay.

To survive, Jews must be aware of the slippery slope that begins with a harmless synagogue membership can degenerate into tribalism, group hatred, and turn into a lethal poison-pill for our people.

Chapter 7 was designed to help you check yourself and your community in examining the potential for group belonging to become toxic and assess the need for alterations in community norms or behaviors.
