

# A HATE WORSE THAN DEATH

*by Rabbi Yehudah Prero*

## Asara BeTeves

### A Hate Worse Than Death

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The Talmud (Yoma 9b) discusses the causes for the destruction of the two Temples. "Why was the first Bais HaMikdosh destroyed? Because of three [evil] things which prevailed (during that time): idolatry, immorality, bloodshed." The Gemora continues "But why was the second Bais HaMikdosh destroyed, seeing that in its time they were occupying themselves with Torah, [observance of] mitzvos, and the practice of charity? Because baseless hatred was prevalent at that time."

The Netziv (Meromai Sadeh Yoma 9) notes that, historically, some of the problems that were prevalent during the time of the first Bais HaMikdosh existed during the time of the second Bais HaMikdosh as well. Specifically, we see both in Talmud (Avoda Zara 8b) and in the writings of Josephus that murder was rampant during the time of the second Bais HaMikdosh. That being the case, why is "baseless hatred" cited as the reason for the destruction of the second Bais HaMikdosh, if murder, the cause of the destruction of the first Bais HaMikdosh, was a problem then as well?

In the times of the second Bais HaMikdosh, the "murderers" of the time did not feel that what they were doing was wrong. They did not consider their murderous actions as transgressions. Rather, they viewed them as appropriate, and even a "mitzvah!" And why was that the case? When these people saw their brethren committing various transgressions, they said to themselves "These people are Sadducees; these people are apostates who deny the validity of the Torah and the supremacy of G-d. These people are rebellious and must die, as they legally deserve such!" Were these "righteous" murderers correct? No.

In truth, when these people saw their brethren committing various transgressions, the only thought that should have occurred to them was that the sinners were just that: sinners. They were people whose desires led them to sin. Their act of sinning contained no overt philosophical statement, nor was it an act of outright rebellion. What caused this grave error in judgment? Baseless hatred. If true

love had existed amongst the nation of Israel, if the fellowship we are supposed to feel with our brethren had existed, these murders would never have happened. There would be no way that anyone would unjustly rationalize the death sentence of another. Because baseless hatred was prevalent, people justified murder. Baseless hatred, therefore, as the root cause of the murder, is appropriately singled out in the Talmud as the cause for the destruction of the second Bais HaMikdosh.

The time of the second Bais HaMikdosh was a time that the Talmud describes as one when people were occupied with Torah, mitzvos, and acts of kindness. Yet, there was still baseless hatred. There was a dedication to performing mitzvos and studying Torah. There were acts of kindness being performed. But there was an extremely serious and pervasive problem that negated everything else: baseless hatred. Baseless hatred not only existed in a community where people were dedicated to Torah, mitzvos and kindness; it caused people to kill others - wrongly - in the name of Torah. Clearly, baseless hatred is dangerous. To this day, we have no Bais HaMikdosh as a result of the destruction that occurred because of baseless hatred.

We fast on the Tenth of Teves because it marks the beginning of our sorrows - the first event in a chain which resulted in the eventual destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and the exile of the nation of Israel. As the Netziv mentioned, the sinful actions that "caused" the destruction of the first Bais HaMikdosh existed in the time of the second Bais HaMikdosh as well. However, in the time of the second Bais HaMikdosh, the sinners did not believe that they were sinners. The Rambam writes in the fifth chapter of Hilchos Ta'aniyos (The laws of Fasts) that we fast on days that calamities occurred to us "because it can serve to arouse our hearts and to open ourselves to the paths of repentance. It serves as a reminder of our wicked conduct and that of our ancestors which resembles our present conduct, and therefore brought these calamities upon them and upon us." The sorrows that started with the Tenth of Teves have not yet ended. The words of the Netziv should not be lost upon us.

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The author has Rabbinic ordination from Mesivta Tifereth Jerusalem, NY.