

GROUNDING ENMITY

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

*Do not hate your brother in your heart...*¹

Be'er Yosef: Three positions are offered by the gemara² regarding a person who has first-hand knowledge of evil deeds committed by his friend. The first forbids that person from testifying against the evildoer in court. Since no second witness is available to corroborate his testimony, the court cannot possibly act upon his report. Effectively, it amounts to nothing more than lashon hora.

A second position adds that it is permissible, however, to hate this evildoer. The last position maintains that it is more than permissible. It is a mitzvah to hate him.

Tosafos are puzzled by a different gemara,³ dealing with the mitzvos d'orayso of unloading and reloading an animal laboring under a shifted load. Generally, halachah dictates that unloading takes precedence over reloading when both opportunities present themselves at the same time. Besides the service to the owner struggling to get back on his journey, unloading alleviates the pain of the animal that has fallen under the weight of its burden. It is therefore the preferable mitzvah to perform when there is an opportunity to assist only one of the two animals in distress. If the two animals are owned by two different people, however, the calculus changes. If the animal to be unloaded belongs to a friend, while the one that has already spilled its load and now waits to be reloaded belongs to an enemy, we are instructed to attend to the enemy's animal. The gemara explains that forcing ourselves to act against our natural inclination to deny help to an enemy is a more important objective than alleviating the pain of an animal.

The gemara refuses to accept that the Torah speaks of an "enemy" who should not be hated. After all, our pasuk forbids hating another Jew! The Torah would not address itself to violators of the Law. Rather, says the gemara, the Torah's preference for assisting the animal of an enemy deals with an enemy who is supposed to be hated - the evildoer of the passage in Pesachim.

Tosafos there ask: If the owner of the animal is known to the would-be assistant to be an evildoer, why should the latter learn to oppose his nature not to help? He is supposed to hate him! Tosafos answer that the Torah requires him to oppose his nature so that the hatred that he feels should not turn into "complete hatred." If he goes so far as to act on his (justifiable) feelings of hatred, the other fellow will sense this, and reciprocate the enmity. This, the Torah does not want.

We are puzzled by all of this. If the Torah sees the danger in allowing the hatred of the evildoer, and wishes to keep it hidden from view, why does it bother requiring a partial hatred altogether? What function does it serve? Wouldn't it make more sense to ban the hatred altogether?

One explanation might be that the Torah wishes that we inoculate ourselves against the harm done to ourselves in simply witnessing evil. Rambam⁴ terms any intentional sin⁵ committed in the presence of observers a chilul Hashem. By nature, we respond on some level to what we see. When we see evil committed, some of that evil corrupts our inner selves. It follows that when others observe our sin, we are guilty not only of the transgression itself, but of cheapening Hashem's word in the eyes of the observers. Hashem's Name is thus desecrated.

Because we are affected by the evil we observe, we are instructed to feel hatred for the evildoer - simply to resist that corruption! Directing our revulsion to what we have seen, the sight is rendered less harmful to us.

If this analysis is correct, we can understand Tosafos. Our concern is the evil, not the evildoer. We need to actively dissociate ourselves from the deeds, not the doers. This is the partial hatred that the Torah requires: one that pushes back against the evil we have observed, but does not degenerate into hatred for the individual. To oppose our tendency to hate the perpetrator as well, the Torah instructs us to reload the animal of our enemy.

Look carefully at our pasuk, and you will see that the word for "heart" is levavecha, with the letter bais doubled. Elsewhere,⁶ the gemara takes this word to allude to multiple hearts - the yetzer tov and the yetzer hora. In our pasuk, the Torah tells us that even where there is good reason to hate the malfeator with our "good" heart, i.e. the yetzer tov, we are enjoined from hating him with two hearts. We must ensure that we do not come to hate him fully, i.e. with the cooperation of our lesser nature of the yetzer hora as well.

R. Yisrael Salanter would rush to find some favor he could do to anyone who had wronged him. He explained that he was simply fulfilling the Torah's commandment to attach ourselves to the ways of Hashem.⁷ He showers us with chesed at the very moment we wrong Him! At the very moment that we sin against Him, He sustains us, and enables us to be able to act against His will! We ought to follow His example, said R. Yisrael, by doing chesed to those who offend us.

From the Torah's treatment of the sinner's animal we can cull a strategy to deal with people who have hurt or offended us. Here as well we should not allow our justified resentment to turn into fuller hatred. A good way to accomplish that is to seek out ways to treat the other party with chesed, which will offset the hatred in our hearts. At the same time, it may place the entire relationship on firmer footing. The other party will take note of the chesed, and reciprocate with love and kindness of his own.

Sources:

1. Based on Be'er Yosef, Vayikra 19:17
 2. Pesachim 113B
 3. Bava Metzia 32B
 4. Yesodei ha-Torah 5:10
 5. Rambam adds the requirement that the aveirah be performed contemptuously. However, it is clear from the gemara upon which the Rambam bases his words that a chilul Hashem is created whenever others learn from his evil behavior.
 6. Berachos 54A
 7. Sotah 14
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