

MORE GENEROUS THOUGHTS

by Rabbi Label Lam

Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes of the Children of Israel saying: This is the thing that HASHEM has commanded: If a man takes a vow to HASHEM or swears an oath to establish a prohibition upon himself, he shall not desecrate his word; according to whatever comes from his mouth shall he do. (Bamidbar 30:2-3)

Amazingly a person can create obligations to act and make restrictions in his own behavior that are as binding as any other explicit commandment in the Torah. A slice of watermelon can become as forbidden as a slice of bacon with one roll of the tongue. It's worthwhile taking some time to admire how powerfully invested we are with the gift of speech.

The wisest of all men, King Solomon writes, "Blessings to the head of the righteous but (chamas) violence will cover the mouths of the wicked. (Mishlei 10:6)

The Vilna Gaon explains that since the righteous person constantly sees goodness in others and blesses them he becomes the object of blessing by The Almighty. The habit of the wicked on the other hand, is to search for and express fault and blame in others. He therefore brings curses upon his own head.

The Vilna Gaon justifies the word "violence" "chamas" based upon its use in the describing the reasons for the "great flood", "Because the earth is filled with violence-'chamas". What was the violence of that time? He explains that society was infested with minor acts of theft but the verbally violent reactions of the ones who were stolen from was the source of the ever so destructive-"chamas".

Similarly, Rabbi Matisyahu Solomon offers a bluntly sobering explanation of the phenomenon of "baseless hatred" which our sages tell us is the underlying reason for the destruction of the 2nd Temple and the length of the subsequent exile. Imagine a teacher is trying to gain the attention of a student in his class. The child is playing with some toy inside his desk and he is warned time and again. Eventually the teacher cuts off the arm of the student. The parents and the principal are mortified. The teacher explains that he was playing with things inside his desk during class time. Everyone would agree in this absurd case that the teacher stepped over all bounds of acceptability, no matter how he may try to explain his behavior. Sure the kid was not innocent but he didn't

deserve to lose a limb.

So says Rabbi Solomon that sometimes a person has a real claim against another. He was slighted or cheated or damaged in some way but that does not justify hating him in his entirety or frowning at and complaining about his family and wishing them ill. All that would be overkill. It requires a sophisticated and surgical approach not to condemn the whole of a person or his clan because a single albeit legitimate point of contention.

That's the definition and the dynamic of the debilitating disease called "baseless hatred". Not that it is entirely unwarranted but that the limited license to complain spills over and floods the arena of the "unwarranted". Instead of being a source of blessing and goodness for others we are ever tempted to kick and curse inviting further reasons for unhappiness.

The Vilna Gaon explains why the blessing is to the "head" of the righteous, "Because of the principle that HASHEM considers a well intended thought as a deed already done, the moment the person thinks to lend his blessings to another, he himself is immediately showered with blessings." When considering what different kinds of worlds we might come to occupy based only upon the organs of speech, our minds are therefore put on serious notice to generate more generous thoughts. Text Copyright © 2004 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).