

# IT'S TIME TO STOP TALKING

*by Rabbi Aron Tendler*

We dream of redemption and we dream of a new world order. We dream returning to Yerushalayim, rebuilding the Bais Hamikdash, and the ingathering of the exiled. We dream of a redeemer who will unify the nations beneath the single banner of G-d as taught to the world by His chosen children. We dream of prosperity, good health, long life, and security. We pray for all these things, at times we cry for them, and if a guarantee could be given, we would even pay for them. Yet, are we prepared to change for them?

Chazal told us that there were reasons why we were exiled from our land, why the Bais Hamikdash was destroyed, and why we are still in exile bereft of the Bais Hamikdash and the wonderful wishes we hope, pray, and cry for. Sinas Chinum - unwarranted hatred, was and is the reason for the present world order. The Gemara states that any generation in which the Bais Hamikdash is not rebuilt is judged as a generation in which the Bais Hamikdash was destroyed. That means that if the generation of its destruction was accountable for Sinas Chinum then all subsequent generations (including our own) are accountable for Sinas Chinum. Simply put, redemption, world peace, and the rebuilding of Yerushalayim depend on the generation healing from Sinas Chinum and engaging in the reverse - Ahavas Chinum - unwarranted love.

Before transitioning to the Parsha, let us properly define Sinas and Ahavas Chinum. The word Chinum means "for free - without payment - without intent of personal gain." It does not mean "without reason." Ahavas Chinum means, loving someone because they are, not because they have given or will give us something. Of course there is Ahava that is and should be motivated by the flow of give and take. Friendships and family ties, acts of generosity and kindness, all create a setting of cause and effects wherein which love can and should flourish. However, that is not the kind of love that we expect or suggest outside of those exclusive relationships. Ahavas Chinum suggests a level of love and appreciation that is appropriate toward a stranger, someone for whom we do not have any other cause to feel or care for. It describes a love that should be the starting point of every relationship. It is the minimum, not the maximum. In fact, those who equate Ahavas Chinum with the kind of Ahava expected of friends and family are either acting inappropriately with their family and friends or inappropriately with strangers. In relation to the friend they are not doing enough and in relation to the stranger they might be doing too much.

On the other hand, Sinas Chinum means unwarranted hatred and resentment. Obviously, there might be reasons to have strong emotions against someone else; however, much of our time is

spent in activities that are hateful and resentful against individuals who do not deserve our hatred and resentment in any way. Sinas Chinum is unwarranted hatred because we choose to act hatefully. We are not motivated by strong emotions of hurt or betrayal; rather, we elect to be hateful and attempt to justify our actions one way or another.

Ahava should just be while Sinah should never just be. Not loving someone demands cause and justification; however, passivity and non-action is not the same as hatred. For someone to justifiably hate or do hateful acts demands the objective scrutiny of Halacha at its most advanced level. It is the active engagement of Sinas Chinum which keeps us in exile, not the passive disengagement from doing acts of Ahavas Chinum to strangers. Ahava advances the geulah while Sinah hinders the geulah.

If we truly desire redemption, the rebuilding of Yerushalayim, and the ingathering of the exiled, it behooves us to identify how we engage in Sinas Chinum and hinder what we profess to want more than anything else. Some hateful acts are obvious and as we do them we know we should not. Unfortunately, there are others that have become so common place that we do not think what we are doing as we do them and we never take responsibility for the extraordinary harm we cause. Specifically, I am referring to Lashon Harah. Lashon Harah is Sinas Chinum personified. We speak it, we justify it, we enjoy it, and we never take responsibility for the harm it wreaks in the lives of its subjects.

The Gemara in Arachin 15b states that the Hebrew word Metzora is a contraction made up of the two words "Motzei and Raah." The Metzora is a person afflicted with Tzarras, and the Gemara is letting us know that the Metzora was so afflicted because he or she was Motzei Raah - perpetrated evil - by speaking Lashon Harah. This week's Parsha presents the involved laws of the Metzora and the process he must engage in to rejoin the body of society from which he was temporarily expelled.

As we have discussed in previous issues, Tzarras was a physical ailment motivated by sin, not bacteria or virus. I do not know whether the afflicted itched or were discomfited so that salves and medications were of value. We do know that the diagnosis of a Kohain rather than a doctor was required and that Teshuvah, time, and exclusion from society were the only prescribed therapies. The Metzora was rendered Tameh (unpure) by the Tzarras and his purification demanded Teshuvah besides the sacrificial protocol commanded in the Torah. Mostly, the Metzora had to confront himself and the realization that he had engaged in Sinas Chinum causing inestimable damage to his intended and unintended victims and society as a whole. Amends had to be made as best they could recognizing that it is impossible to put the genie back into the bottle once he has been let loose.

Lashon Harah is the personification of Sinas Chinum. Most often the subjects of the slander have not harmed us directly. They may or may not have harmed others but our part in perpetrating hatred is

believing what we heard and sharing it with others. Why believe, and worse, why tell? What motivates us to share the juiciest and vilest news with others? And unfortunately, the juicier and viler the better to tell! Does it make us seem better than they? Are we glad when others are hurt and brought low? Do we win points with our friends that somehow we are in the know and therefore more important and vital? Let's be honest with ourselves. The subjects of our stories never need know that we were the ones who defiled their lives and privacy. Somehow we are emboldened by the anonymity of our actions. Somehow we are able to justify that the news is the news and in the world of the 21st century everyone is entitled to know "what's going on." Or are we?

The tenth Ani Maamin states that we believe with absolute faith that the Creator knows everything. On the one hand it establishes G-d's credentials for the next Ani Maamin that we believe with absolute faith that the Creator punishes and rewards. In order for G-d to be an absolutely truthful judge Who punishes and rewards He must know everything there is to know about every single case. He must know what happened and why it happened. He must know the effect the crime had on others and what effect any consequence will have on the perpetrator and all others. Only G-d Who knows everything can be that truthful judge. On the other hand, the tenth Ani Maamin says to us, "You do not have to know everything." We are not supposed to judge each other. Just the opposite! We are minimally supposed to extend to each other Ahavas Chinum which suggests we are each inherently flawed but valuable and therefore very much the same as each other. If we judge each other negatively we must in turn see ourselves and judge ourselves the very same way. Besides, even the insufferably self-righteous among us must accept that reward and punishment are G-d's purview. We do not have to concern ourselves with punishing each other or protecting society. There are judges and enforcement agencies chosen and hired by society to do that job so we do not have to be judge, jury, and executioner. And even the critics and skeptics among us who decry society's failing state of judiciousness and accountability must accept that no one ever escapes the absolutes of the eleventh Ani Maamin. What escapes society never escapes G-d.

Lashon Harah harms beyond measure. Regardless of the truth, Lashon Harah is Sinas Chinum. It is an act of unwarranted hatred because we choose to share the stories, act hatefully, and harm others for no justifiable reason. Our gain in doing so is only negative and the consequences to all others, the subjects and the listeners, hurtful beyond measure.

Wishing, dreaming, hoping, praying, and even crying for the coming redemption and the rebuilding of Yerushalayim is both expressive and admirable, but they will not make it come true. There is only one way to bring Mashiach. We must stop engaging in Sinas Chinum, stop speaking Lashon Harah, and minimally treat everyone how we would like to be treated. How important must it be to Hashem that we do not speak Lashon Harah if He willingly destroyed His own home, exiled His beloved children, and devoted almost two whole Parshios to the affliction of Tzarras and the plight of the Metzora?

The question still stands, "We pray for all these things, at times we cry for them, and if a guarantee

could be given, we would even pay for them. Yet, are we prepared to change for them?"

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