

Baseless Love?

During the days of mourning for the Temple, we must rectify the reason for the destruction. Our sages teach that the destruction of the Temple and the final exile came about due to baseless hatred. Two great sages from the previous generation – the Rebbe Rayatz, the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe and Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook – explained in similar terms that the Temple was destroyed due to baseless hatred and it will be built with baseless love.

Baseless Love?

The term “baseless love” generates some questions:

People with a more critical nature say that we have to love for a good reason – we love someone because of his good character traits, because he is learned or because he performs mitzvahs. However, they claim, love for a person who is not worthy can cause damage. Love creates connection and if we love someone who is not worthy, we are liable to learn from his lack of direction or from his negative action, as in the verse in Psalms “Those who love God hate evil.”

People with a more loving nature will counter that there can be no such thing as baseless love, for even the most “empty Jew is as full of mitzvahs as a pomegranate is full of seeds.” There are many good reasons to love everyone, they claim, and thus, love is not baseless but is always completely well-founded and justified.

The Hebrew term for baseless love is *ahavat chinam*, which can more accurately be translated as “free love.” The proponents of a more stringent approach claim that there are no free lunches and that the source of free things is apparently not in holiness. (This can be learned from the explanation of the sages regarding the complaints of the Israelites in the desert: “We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt for free.” The sages say that the Israelites slaved for their food. They meant that the food in Egypt came “free of *mitzvot* –“ bereft of spiritual effort).

“Love that is Dependent Upon Something” Good

Let us try to understand the depth of the words of the sages. The source of the concept “baseless love” is in the words of the *mishnah*: “Love that is not dependent upon something” (the Hebrew word for “something” in this phrase is “*davar*”). The example given in the *mishnah* for love that *is* dependent on something – which will ultimately dissipate – is “the love of Amnon and Tamar,” which was dependent upon lowly, negative, self-centered lust. Love that is not dependent upon something, however, is not even dependent upon positive and holy things that justify the love. As such, it is love that is completely free.

The holiest “thing” (*davar*) for a Jew is *dvar Hashem*. The concept “*dvar Hashem*” has three primary meanings: “*Dvar Hashem* is Jewish law; *Dvar Hashem* is prophecy;

Dvar Hashem is the End of Days.” Love of Israel can be dependent upon the most important and sanctified “something” in each of these three meanings:

Love of Israel can stem from the observance of “*Dvar Hashem* is Jewish law.” God commanded us to love our fellow as ourselves. This is a “great principle in the Torah” and a God-fearing, Torah observant Jew will thus love every Jew.

Love of Israel can also be generated from “*Dvar Hashem* is prophecy” – from an inner, sort of holy sense of smell that perceives another person’s concealed potential, which justifies loving him. A person who nurtures sensitivity to the concealed virtues of others senses that it is worthwhile to love them and reveal those virtues – to “love God’s creations” and from that place, to “bring them close to Torah.”

Love of Israel can also come from redemption awareness, “*Dvar Hashem* is the End of Days.” A person who understands that the redemption is contingent upon the love of Israel and the rectification of baseless hatred, tries to love every Jew with all his heart. Once again, it “pays” to love Jews, for, by loving Jews, we will bring Mashiach.

“Love that is not Dependent Upon Something”

The redemption is contingent on baseless love – “love that is not dependent upon something” – not even the holiest thing. This type of love of Israel is not a *mitzvah*. It is not dependent upon “*Dvar Hashem* is Jewish law,” (for those rigorous in Jewish law can find many reasons and explanations for why, according to Jewish law, the directive to love one’s fellow Jew does not pertain to a particular individual). Instead, this baseless love is an inner urge that does not come from an external directive. It is also not dependent upon the concealed potential in every Jew. It is love for a Jew with no visible virtues. (On the contrary, it is not the ability to see the virtues in another person that evokes love, but rather, it is the love for another person that opens our eyes to see his virtues). Baseless love is not even dependent upon the redemption that will come in its wake. A person who loves Jews because of a “holy incentive” to bring the redemption, will not succeed in bringing the redemption by means of this love.

The true love of Israel is not dependent upon anything. It is founded upon the fact that the heart of Israel is truly one. Just as I do not need reasons to love myself, so I am essentially and absolutely connected to my fellow Jews. This feeling of being one, connected heart is highlighted during times of trouble, which cause us to unite and break down the barriers between us. Thus, it is specifically during the time of mourning for the Temple that we can strengthen our essential love of Israel – love that is not dependent upon anything, baseless love that will bring the redemption.