

RH2 Sermon:
"On Hatred, Anger, & Enemies"
Rabbi Lisa Malik
Temple Beth Ahm-Year 1-2011-5772

(Show **yellow ribbon**.)

This yellow ribbon is fraught with significance. It was given to me on June 25, 2011, when my family and I were walking back to our apartment in the Baka section of Jerusalem. On that sunny Shabbos morning, I felt especially giddy and spiritually uplifted after services led by Rabbi Adam Frank & Cantor Ahuva Batz at **Moreshet Yisrael**, the Conservative synagogue where some of you davened on the TBA trip to Israel a few years ago.

But my mood shifted from light-hearted to somber as I passed by the corner of Balfour and Gaza streets, across the street from the Prime Minister's residence, where the parents of Staff Sergeant **Gilad Shalit** have set up a tent filled with posters, flags, and portraits of their son. Aviva and Noam Shalit were surrounded by a dozen people sitting in a semi-circle on plastic chairs. It looked like a shiva house, only worse. Because there was sense that this was a healing process, that it would be over in a few days.

On that balmy June day in Jerusalem, the Shalits and their supporters were distributing yellow ribbons to commemorate the 5th anniversary of Gilad's captivity.

The last time Gilad's parents saw him, he was only 19 years old, just a few months shy of his 20th birthday. The Shalits' lives have not been the same since **June 25, 2006**, when their son was kidnapped by **Hamas**.

Hamas. This word is one that is all too familiar to us. It is the name of the militant Palestinian Sunni Islamist terrorist group that has proudly claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of Gilad Shalit. It has also taken 'credit' for countless suicide bombings in Israel over the past 20 years & for the recent slew of rocket attacks in the Israeli communities known as the 'Gaza Belt,' including Ashkelon, Sderot, & S'dot Negev. If not for some of the shelters constructed by funds collected through Operation Lifeshield, hundreds of more Israelis might have been killed by Hamas rockets in Southern Israel, just in this past month alone.

Since the establishment of this group in 1987, the **word Hamas** has become synonymous with "terrorism." **But what does the word actually mean?**

In Arabic, the word means "**enthusiasm.**" But it is also an acronym of the Arabic phrase "**Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya,**" which means, "Islamic Resistance Movement."

But "*hamas*" is not just an Arabic word; it is also a Hebrew word that means "**violence, injustice, cruelty, or oppression.**" "*Hamas*" is a word that goes back to biblical times. It appears in the Torah, the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Jonah, and Psalms, as well as dozens of other places in the Tanach.

For example, in Parashat Noach (Genesis 6:11, 6:13), when God decides to destroy the world with a flood, it is because God looks upon the human inhabitants of the world and is deeply disappointed to find that the world is filled with "*hamas.*"

In its **biblical** contexts, the noun "*hamas*" means "**violence, wrongdoing, ruthlessness, or wickedness.**" The term "*sinat hamas*" refers to "**hatred**, characterized by violence."

Unfortunately, "*sinat hamas*" is all too prevalent in our world. And it manifests itself, not only in the Middle East, but in America, as well. And it has manifested itself not only in epic proportions like September 11 or in other smaller-scale terrorist attacks, but also in the hate crimes that occur on a daily basis throughout this country. /It can be scary to be the object of others' hatred. Many Jews in America, in Israel, and in other places around the world feel vulnerable and exposed because they are the target of this "*sinat hamas*." / But whether or not we feel frightened or threatened by Anti-Semitism, Anti-Zionism, or Anti-Americanism, we look askance at those who hate us.... perhaps because our **Jewish tradition places an extremely negative value on hatred.**

"Sinat hamas," and the related concept, **"sinat chinam,"** are considered **anathema in Judaism**. On Yom Kippur, when we confess our communal sins, we will recite the "*Vidui*," that includes a litany of wrongdoings for which we want to repent. We will pound our chests repeatedly during this communal confessional, as we express regret for our transgressions and say "***Al Chet She-Chatanu.***" Look at the 2nd "*Al Chet*" on **page 441**. One of the sins that we want to expunge from our lives is "***sinat chinam,***" translated here as "**causeless hatred**". The **Talmud (B. Yoma 9b)** teaches that ***sinat chinam*** was the underlying reason for the **Destruction of the Second Temple**.

Sinat Chinam was also the cause of the assassination of **Gedaliah ben Achikam**, shortly after the Destruction of the First Temple. After King Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and exiled the Jewish people to Babylonia, he permitted an impoverished remnant of the people to remain in the Land of Israel and he appointed Gedaliah as their governor. Out of a sense of **envy and hatred**, a fellow Jew, named **Yishmael ben Natan**, murdered Gedaliah ben Achikam. This Sunday, October 2, we will be reminded, as we are every year on the Fast Day, ***Tzom Gedaliah***, of **what can happen when people in the same community hate each other.**

In another Talmudic tractate (**B. Sanhedrin 105b**), the Talmud teaches, **"Sinah m'vatelet shura shel g'dulah"**

Hatred can cause us to disregard the rules of proper conduct & to nullify our sense of goodness and greatness. Hatred is an expression of narrow-mindedness.

In another rabbinic text, **Pirkei Avot (2:11)**, Rabbi Yehoshua teaches that, "hatred of one's fellow human beings" ("*sinat ha-b'riyot*") drives one from the world."

~~~~~

Yet, we do have evidence in some of our Jewish sacred texts that seem to indicate a sanctioning of hatred in mainstream Jewish tradition. As much as our Jewish tradition frowns upon hateful violence, some biblical texts do seem to condone hateful feelings.

For example, one of the proverbs in the Book of Mishlei (**Proverbs 11:10**) is, **"U-v'avod r'sha-im rinah"**

**"When the wicked perish, there are shouts of joy."**

~~~~~

And the Torah singles out the evil tribe of **Amalek**, those who massacred some of our ancestors during the Exodus from Egypt. We are permitted and even commanded to hate Amalek. On *Shabbat Zachor*, the Shabbos before Purim, we read the following words from **Parashat Ki Tavo (Deuteronomy 25: 17-19)**, "*Zachor et asher asah lecha Amalek b'derech tzetcha mi-Mitzrayim.*"

"Remember what Amalek did to you when you were on your journey from Egypt. They surprised you when you were hungry and tired, coming from behind and massacring all of your stragglers. They didn't show fear of God. Therefore, when God gives you victory over all of the enemies who surround you, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not ever forget (what they did to you)."

It is from this biblical passage that the Rabbis derived the custom of making noise with **Purim** graggers. When *Megillat Esther* is chanted, we are all encouraged to use our noisemakers to express our negative feelings & to blot out the name of **Haman**, who was a descendant of the tribe of Amalek.

~~~~~

Similarly, in **Exodus Chapter 15**, in **Shirat Hayam**, the Song of the Sea, the Israelites express joy over the downfall of another enemy, the Egyptians,

**"Moses and the people of Israel sang to Adonai, saying,**

***Ashirah l'Adonai ki ga-oh ga-ah. I will sing to Adonai for God has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider God has thrown into the sea.*"**

~~~~~

So how are we to resolve this tension in our tradition?

On the one hand, Judaism seems to condemn hatred. On the other hand, Judaism seems to sanction the hatred of our enemies.

~~~~~

A **resolution to this tension** may lie in another biblical text. In ***Parashat Kedoshim***, in the **19<sup>th</sup> chapter** of the Book of **Leviticus**, we learn that in order to be a holy people, we have to refrain from hating others in our hearts,

***"Lo tisna et achicha bilvavecha."* (Lev. 19:17)**

The Torah does not say, ***"Lo tisna,"*** **"Do not hate."**

Rather, the Torah teaches, ***"Lo tisna et achicha bilvavecha"***  
**"Do not carry around hatred in your heart."**

We may not be able to control our instinctive feelings. However we can control whether or not we carry a grudge in our hearts against people whom we dislike.

When we carry around our hatred in our hearts, seething with hateful anger, it is like carrying around a hot coal. It burns. It often hurts the one who is carrying it even more than it can potentially harm the one who is the object of that hatred.

**Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach z"l** came to the US from Austria as a teenager, a refugee from the Nazis. Ever so often, he would go back to Austria and Germany to give concerts and people would ask him, **"How can you go back there and give concerts?! Don't you hate the Austrians and the Germans?! Don't you hate them after what they did to you?! "**

And this is how Reb Shlomo would respond to anyone who asked him this question,

**" I only have one soul.**

**If I had two souls, I would gladly devote one of them to hating the Germans and Austrians full-time.**

**But I don't.**

**I only have one soul & I'm not going to waste it on hating."**

**Hateful anger is a choice.** Sometimes we choose to torment the one soul we have by filling it with hatred, holding on to that hot coal with all of our might, in the foolish hope that it may someday hurt our enemy, while all the while, it is only hurting us. All the while, it is our own soul, the only soul we have, that is writhing in torment because of the hatred that we choose to carry around.

In **Tales of the Hasidim**, Martin Buber cites **Rabbi Pinchas**, who once taught, **"Anger makes one's soul impure."** And in the **Talmud, in Masechet Pesachim 113b**, we learn, **"Those who are given to spiteful anger, their life is no life."**

~~~~~

Just as **it can destroy individuals, hateful anger can also destroy households and communities.** *Sinah* (hatred) and *kaas* (anger) are the antithesis of "*shalom bayit*," "peace in the home."

Without "*shalom*" in the "*bayit*," a household no longer feels like a home. Without "*shalom*" in a "*Beyt Knesset*," a synagogue no longer feels "*haimishe*" or "homey." When there is divisiveness that is fueled by hateful anger in a community, when individuals put their personal needs and desires ahead of their sense of commitment to the greater good, communities can fall apart.

On Shabbat & holidays, when we put the Torah back in the Ark, we sing the prayer, "***Etz Chayim Hee***," which includes the words from the Book of Proverbs 3:7, "***D'rachayha darchey noam v'kol n'teevotayha shalom.***"

"[The Torah's] ways are pleasant and all of its paths are peace."

A midrash on this biblical text (**Yalkut Shimoni, Yitro, 273**) teaches that God would not give the pleasant and peaceful Torah to our ancestors until they stopped fighting with each other and until the hateful dissension in their midst was replaced with "*shalom bayit*." In the words of the midrashic text,

"Bikesh HaKadosh Baruch Hu liten Torah l'Yisreal b'shaah she-yatzu mi-Mitzrayim v'hayu chalukum elu al elu."

The Holy One sought to give the Israelites the Torah when they first left Egypt, but there was contention between them.

"K'she-bau l'Sinai, hushvu kulam agudah achat."

"But when they arrived at Mount Sinai, their factions disappeared and they became united as one group, committed to peace and to other common goals and values."

The opposite of peace, *sinat chinam*, causeless hatred, is what destroyed the Second Temple in Jerusalem in the year 70 C.E. **It also has the power to destroy temples in our own day and age.**

~~~~~

**But, you might ask, how can we prevent ourselves from hating? !**

It's **not so easy to turn off our feelings.** And, even if we feel that we have the capacity to do so, we may resist turning off those feelings because **we don't want to appear phony or inauthentic.**

~~~~~

Fortunately, our tradition provides us with some guidance on how to deal with hatred, as well as other aspects of our Evil Inclination, the ***yetzer ha-ra.***

In Pirkei Avot, **Ben Zoma** teaches,
"Eyzehu gibor? Ha-kovesh et yitzro".
"Who is strong, mighty, and heroic?
The one who subdues his Evil Inclination."

From this text, we learn that we do not need to destroy our *Yetzer Ha-ra* altogether. Rather, we should just learn to subdue it, to exercise some self-control. We can subdue our *yetzer ha-ra* inclination to hate by acknowledging the feeling of hatred, by owning up to that feeling, and then choosing not to act upon it.

~~~~~

**Avot De Rabbi Natan**, a midrashic commentary on Pirkei Avot, takes this teaching one step further by saying, "*Eyzehu gibor? Ha-oseh sono ohavo.*" "Who is strong, mighty, & heroic? The one who can **turn his enemy into his friend.**"

So, if we're supposed to strive to befriend our enemies, if we are not supposed to act upon our hatred, and if we're not allowed to let the hatred of our enemies stew within our hearts, **what are we supposed to do with these feelings?** After all, we're only human.

~~~~~

Close your eyes and think about someone who makes you so angry that you see red, someone whom you really hate..... or someone whom you really hated in the past.

Even if you are generally a nice and loving person, there may sometimes be a person or group of people who really drive you crazy and who bring out some of your most unbecoming human instincts, including "*sinah*," **hatred**.

Jewish tradition provides us with a perfect outlet for this aspect of our *yetzer ha-ra*. Judaism provides us with the perfect opportunity to take the hateful anger that we feel and get it off of our chests and out of our hearts.....without harming our enemies in the process.

~~~~~

**What is that perfect outlet?**

**It is called by many names: "prayer," "*davening*," "*tefillah*," "worship," "services."**

Some of the *tefillot* in the Jewish prayer book enable us to express our anger and hatred in a safe environment. Many of the prayers we recite put our own feelings into words. And, by putting those feelings into words, *davening* can give us the comfort of knowing that others felt the same way that we do.

*Davening* is a vehicle that gives us the opportunity to express our deepest darkest hateful feelings- to ourselves and to God.

We live in a world that is filled with hatred, peopled with adversaries. Our *tefillot* give us the courage and strength to live in such a world. Our prayers give legitimacy to our darkest feelings, enabling us to feel that we are not alone.

Praying also reminds us that God is with us, giving us the confidence that the One who thwarted the designs of the Israelites' enemies in the past can stand with us when we feel that are the targets of others' hatred and anger or when we feel anger or hatred towards others.

*Davening* also reminds us that **there are others** who came before us, as well as others who might be sitting right next to us in *shul*, who felt or who feel what we feel- fearful or angry because others hate us, or hating others and feeling the need to express this emotion and re-channel it in a context that is not destructive.

~~~~~  
The **12th blessing in the weekday Amidah (known as *Birkat HaMinim*)** can serve as a source of catharsis for us. This *bracha* gives legitimacy to our feelings of hatred towards our enemies, enabling us to purge these emotions from our hearts and souls,

"*V'la-malshinim al tehi tikvah*".

"Frustrate the hope of those who malign us..... May all of the enemies of Your people be swiftly destroyed. And may you swiftly uproot, crush, subdue, and humble them in our time. Blessed are you, Adonai, who destroys enemies and humbles the arrogant."

~~~~~

And, when we recite **Psalm 6** during *Tachanun* on weekdays, we have another opportunity to remove the burden of hatred from our hearts by saying, ***"Yashuvu v'yibahalu kol oyvai. Yashuvu yevoshu raga."***

**"May all of my enemies go away & be humiliated in an instant."**

Psalm 6, like the 12<sup>th</sup> blessing of the Amidah, expresses **the hope and prayer that our enemies would be destroyed.**

---

But this is just **one way of expressing our hatred during our prayers.** In the daily Siddur, as well as in the High Holydays *Machzor*, there are a **variety of other responses that our Jewish tradition offers for dealing with "enemies" and with our own deep-seated feelings of anger and hatred.**

-----

On every **Shabbat, holiday, Monday and Thursday morning**, when the Torah is read, we include the following words from **the Book of Numbers 10:35** when we **take the Torah out of the ark**,

***"Kuma Adonai.v'yafutzu oyvecha v'yanusu misanecha mipanecha"***

**"Advance, Adonai. May Your enemies be scattered & may Your foes flee before You."**

This prayer expresses the feeling, **"I wish my enemies would just disappear or go away"**

-----

Then there are those prayers that express the wish that **our enemies would just stop hating us or, at least, stop treating us so badly**

Included in the personal petition at the end of the Amidah are the words,

***"Hafer atzatom v'kalkel mach-she-votam"***

**"Oh God, if anyone devises evil against me, nullify their ideas and frustrate their evil designs."**

-----

And then, finally, another response to our enemies that is articulated in the concluding paragraph of the Amidah,

***"V'limkallelai nafshi tidom"***

**"To those who malign me, may I not pay attention to them. May I be silent when they curse me."**

By saying these words, we are expressing the **wish that we could just ignore our enemies**.

This Jewish response to hatred teaches us that we cannot control how our enemy feels about or acts towards us; we can only control our own actions and reactions to our enemies.

We may not be able to eliminate the feelings of hatred that we have towards our enemies, but at least we can subdue these feelings by verbally expressing them in our prayers.

These last two liturgical responses to hatred that I just described are articulated in the personal petition that immediately follows "*Sim Shalom*" or "*Shalom Prayer*," the blessing for peace." And this section of the Amidah service concludes with the words,

***"Oseh Shalom bimromav hu yaaseh shalom, aleynu v'al kol Yisrael.***

**"May the One who makes peace in the heavens make peace for us and for all of Israel.**

In the very same section of the Amidah that provides two ways of dealing with **hatred**, we express the most basic of Jewish values, the value of **peace**.

**Sure, in an ideal world, we wouldn't have any ENEMIES. As Jews, we are taught not to HATE others; we hope to live in PEACE with our neighbors. *Halevai* there would be no such thing as HATRED or ENEMIES in the world.**

**Unfortunately**, terrorist groups like **Hamas** are fueled by **HATRED**. And some of the people whom we encounter in our daily lives seem to thrive on hateful feelings as well.

**Fortunately**, at the end of the Silent Amidah, we have the opportunity to express the hope and prayer that **our enemies will stop hating us**, or, that if they continue to hate us, that we have the strength to **ignore them**.

These might sound like futile hopes and implausible ways of dealing with our **ENEMIES**. But, perhaps when we recite these words in the Amidah, we can remove some of the hatred from our hearts, and get these terrible feelings off of our chests, striving to **subdue our own hateful anger in some way**.

**Acknowledging** that we sometimes feel HATRED and **expressing** this emotion in our prayers is sanctioned and encouraged in Jewish tradition. However, **HATRED** that is harmful to others or that is self-destructive is considered repugnant.

Even if we continue to be the object of others' anger and hatred, **may we find solace in expressing our own negative feelings towards others in the safe context of prayer**.

And **may we find the courage to continue aspiring for the ideal of peace**- in our personal relationships, in our households, and in our communities:

***Oseh shalom bimromav,***

***Hu yaaseh shalom***

***aleynu v'al kol Yisrael***

***v'imru.***

***Amen.***