

The Weekly 'Hi All' by Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld

Va'etchanan 5783

Among the many books authored by the towering tzadik, the Chafetz Chayim, there is one about which "attention must be paid". The pamphlet is titled Ahavas Yisroel. It contains five short chapters in less than 10 pages (in the printed edition) all focusing on one theme: the insidious sin of sinat chinam, baseless hatred. His reason for dedicating a special booklet on this one subject is clear. The Talmud (Yoma 9b) states that the cause for the destruction of the Second Beit HaMikdash was this very offense. That we are still in Exile, in an unredeemed state, means that sadly we have not as yet repented from this toxic sin, nor have we repaired the terrible damage it has inflicted upon every generation since ancient times. The Chafetz Chayim attempted to address this issue by analyzing the causes of sinat chinom and offering his wise counsel as to how to remedy this ethical illness. What this venerable sage has written for his generation is no less relevant for ours.

In the 3rd Chapter of Ahavas Yisroel, the Chafetz Chayim identifies the root cause for baseless hatred as KIN'A - jealousy, envy, coveting what is not yours. We feel animosity - a

baseless hatred - towards others who are perceived to have more than we have, not only materially, but intellectually as well. And even more, not only are we envious of the wealthy and brilliant, but we are covetous of the righteous and saintly as well. Because we feel that their wealth and success, their intelligence and virtue, threaten our own self-esteem and expose our inferiorities - real or imaginary - by comparison, we choose to "cancel" their existence by indulging in sinat chinom, because our resentful emotions are simply senseless and ridiculous.

Because such baseless hatred has the capacity to mushroom into words of lashon hara and slander, and worse, into acts of vengeance and violence, the Chafetz Chayim pleads with us to seriously consider acting upon some very worthwhile suggestions in an effort to neutralize this terrible yetzer hara of sinat chinom. Space does not permit a lengthy discussion of this matter, but a recent essay by Rabbi Y.Y. Jacobson does address the sin of LO TACHMOD (not to covet), one of the 10 Commandments as recorded in our Parsha. His insight is most valuable and, when internalized, can go a long way in uprooting the sin of sinat chinom.

"The tenth and final of the Ten Commandments recorded in this

week's portion reads: "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife; you shall not covet your neighbor's house, nor his field, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, and anything that belongs to your neighbor." (D'varim 5:17). The structure of the verse seems strange. In the beginning, the Bible specifies seven things we should not covet: "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife; you shall not covet your neighbor's home, nor his field, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his donkey." But then, at the conclusion of the verse, the text states: "And anything that belongs to your neighbor." Why the unnecessary redundancy? Why not just state at the onset "You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor", which would include all of the specifics? And if the Torah does not want to rely on generalizations and wishes to specify details, why does it specify only a few items and then anyhow revert to a generalization, "And anything that belongs to your neighbor"?

"In Hebrew, the word employed for "anything" and "everything" is identical, KOL. Hence, the above verse can also be translated as, "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife; you shall not covet your neighbor's house, nor his field, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, and everything that

belongs to your neighbor." By concluding the verse with these words, the Torah is not just instructing us not to covet anything of our neighbor, but also helping us achieve this difficult state of consciousness.

"How could you demand from a person not to be jealous? When I walk into your home and observe your living conditions, your cars, your bank accounts, and your general life style, how could I not become envious? The answer is, "Do not covet everything that belongs to your neighbor." What the Torah is intimating is that it is indeed easy to envy the home and spouse of your neighbor, his servants, his ox and donkey; yet the question you have to ask yourself is, do you covet 'everything that belongs to your neighbor'? Are you prepared to assume his or her life completely? To actually become him? You cannot see life as myriads of disjointed events and experiences. You can't pluck out one aspect of somebody's life and state: 'I wish I could have had his (or her) marriage, his home, his career, his money...'

"Life is a holistic and integrated experience. Each life, with its blessings and challenges, with its obstacles and opportunities, constitutes a single story, a narrative that begins with birth and ends with death. Every experience in our life represents one chapter of our singular, unique story

and we do not have the luxury to pluck out a chapter from someone's story without embracing their entire life-journey.

"When you isolate one or a few aspects of someone else's life, it is natural to become envious. But when you become aware of "everything that belongs to your neighbor", your perception is altered. Do you really want to acquire everything that is going on in his or her life? So, the next time you feel yourself coveting the life of the other, ask yourself if you really want to become them. Ralph Waldo Emerson was correct when he observed that 'envy is ignorance.'"

And, if we may add, that "ignorance" can metastasize into *sinat chinom*!

May HaShem give us the strength and wisdom to spare us the "ignorance" and the poison of this KIN'A! 🙏