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Knowing How to Lovingly Disagree

Question: Throughout the millennia, we have awaited the coming of Mashiach. Of late, people who are Torah observant are talking about hastening the geula (redemption). I heard that Rav Kook wrote that this requires AHAVAT CHINAM (love without a specific reason) among all members of Klal Yisrael (the Jewish Nation). How can each of us cultivate AHAVAT CHINAM and learn to disagree as Hillel and Shammai¹ did?

Answer: Our inclination is to agree with you wholeheartedly and unconditionally. However, to be intellectually honest, we can agree only wholeheartedly, but not unconditionally, as we will explain.

There is little question that AHAVAT CHINAM is an extremely important concept to implement. This phrase was adapted from SINAT CHINAM (baseless hatred), which, according to

the gemara,² was responsible for the destruction of the second Beit HaMikdash. Hatred of our brethren may be baseless. However, love for our fellow is not without foundation. The Torah requires it,³ and it is logical to love one who shares with us history, destiny, and (hopefully) values.

Rav Kook apparently (coined or) popularized the phrase, expressing his conviction that just as SINAT CHINAM caused destruction, AHAVAT CHINAM is the antidote that will promote healing and rebuilding.⁴ This forecast certainly gives us the impetus to demonstrate AHAVAT CHINAM. However, we trust that love for members of Klal Yisrael also exists for its own sake, as a mitzva and as the natural feelings of one with the right mind-set, which Rav Kook certainly intended. Rav Kook epitomized AHAVAT YISRAEL and showed much love even to his ideological opponents (to the “right” and the “left”), even while many of his colleagues took a more combative approach.

Nevertheless, we would be doing Rav Kook and ourselves a disservice if we thought that he never had harsh words to say about a fellow Jew. As a leader, he at times spoke out sternly

¹ Two prominent early *Tanna'im*, who disputed many critical issues but maintained respect for and good relations with one another.

² *Yoma* 9b.

³ *Vayikra* 19:18.

⁴ *Orot HaKodesh*, III, p. 324.

in public against those who had gone over the line, thus warranting such a response.⁵ He certainly retained his love even as he rebuked.⁶ The same is true of Shammai, Hillel, and their academies. The mishna⁷ relates that despite their far-reaching disagreements regarding family status, they cooperated with each other so that their children would be permitted to marry those not in question within the other camp. The gemara⁸ attributes the pasuk of “the truth and the peace you shall love”⁹ to the affection between the two. However, there are sources¹⁰ that speak about harsh tactics that one side took against the other when they thought the consequences were pressing.

How does one know when to employ the tolerant approach and when the forceful one? We do not know fully, but allow us to share some guidelines.

1. One should not hypocritically take a harsh approach when it affects a personal interest and a mild one when it affects “only” HaShem’s interests.¹¹

2. One should take into consideration the possibility that his views are not necessarily 100% correct or that the other side is 100% wrong.

3. One should exhaust other options and pray that he will not need to take steps that can trigger conflicts and for the wisdom to act effectively and sensitively.

4. One should weigh the damage that conflict might cause, which is usually far greater than the average person realizes.

5. As is attributed to Rav Kook, it is better to err on the side of AHAVAT CHINAM than on the side of SINAT CHINAM.

We hope that these principles help (or at least do not hurt) and that we will soon be able to hear Eliyahu HaNavi’s solution to the dilemma of balancing the aspiration for peace with the need to “fight” for ideals.

Eretz Hemdah gives a participatory Zoom class - **Behind the Scenes with the Vebbe Rebbe** - an analytical look at the sources, methodology, and considerations behind our rulings, with **Rav Daniel Mann**. Contact us to join - info@eretzhemdah.org

^{5.} See, for example, *Otzrot HaR’iyah*, p. 1137.

^{6.} Also, see the Ramban’s introduction to his commentary on the Torah.

^{7.} *Yevamot* 13b.

^{8.} *Ibid.* 14b.

^{9.} *Zecharia* 8:19.

^{10.} Including *Yerushalmi Shabbat* 1:4.

^{11.} See the strong words of admonition in *Sanhedrin* 103b.