

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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BH

THE SUMMER OF BASELESS HATRED

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I fear that when we look back on this summer, we will call it the Summer of Baseless Hatred. The rhetoric and deeds of so very many people and groups seems to have spun out of the realm of rationality that I thought we might review just how destructive such ranting and raving can be:

Rabbi Yochanan ben Torta said: We find that the Altar in Shiloh was destroyed because the Jews of the times disgraced the festivals and desecrated the holy offerings.

We have found that the First Temple was destroyed because the Jews of that time worshipped idols, committed adultery and committed murder.

But regarding the destruction of the Second Temple, we know that the Jews learned Torah, practiced mitzvot and gave tithes as commanded and that they behaved in all the proper ways. [So why was the Second Temple destroyed?] It was destroyed because the Jews of that time loved money and hated one another with a baseless hatred (sin'at chinam). This teaches us that baseless hatred is as bad as, or worse, than idolatry, adultery and murder. (Y. Yoma 1:1)

Discussion Questions:

The big three sins-idolatry, adultery and murder-are universally proclaimed throughout rabbinic sources to be the three worst. Yet we see here, that baseless hatred is worse. We saw in Peah 1:1, that gossip is worse. So let's put it all together.

1. Gossip, avarice and baseless hatred can take even the most virtuous, law-abiding society rip it apart. So how are we going to help our community, our country and the global community come to their senses and see that brinkmanship and hostile talk are really, truly destructive?
2. Why is it so easy for people to say, "I'm just talking...I'm not doing anything"? How can we convince them talking is doing?
3. How can we restore restraint and politeness to public dialogue? Do you think part of the problem is the anonymity of the internet, that allows flaming? Or has humanity always gone through these cycles of reason and rage?

Let's start pulling things together, folks!

