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בס"ד

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR FATHERS THE FIRST STEP OUT OF THIS GOLUS

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By Harav Y. Reuven Rubín Shlita

The Nine Days bring with them tragic reminders of the darkness of our Golus. A lovely family in Eretz Yisroel sits down for a Friday night meal, their hearts alight with simcha as they prepare to celebrate the Sholom Zachor of a grandson. The door is thrown open and a ruthless terrorist forces himself in, intent on wreaking savagery. Knife in hand, he slaughters three innocent Yidden. No reason, just total hatred. Blood splatters the room, lives extinguished, Klal Yisroel is thrown into mourning once more; the cycle of hate goes on. Thousands attend the funerals; words can't touch the pain, we have offered up yet more sacrifices on the altar of Kiddush Hashem. Yidden seek comfort and meaning yet again, hearts heavy with the realization that nothing seems to make sense.

“If we can turn away from our own hate, we can move forward and earn the hope of our redemption from this darkness”

The wider world? Well, not a word. No headlines, nothing. The silence is astounding. Jewish blood isn't even worthy of a few words, no, the world has other things to talk about. Jews being slaughtered is “old” news.

We suffer in a world that has no place for us; the Diaspora continues, no end in sight. We are all in Golus. No matter where we find ourselves, the life we live is deficient. We can never be at ease, the default position of Golus is to feel some loss.

As we all know, this state started with the destruction of the Beis Hamikdosh, the main reason for which was *sinas chinam*, or baseless hatred. Tzaddikim point out that the image that comes to mind when we hear the words "baseless hatred" is usually one of rampant, wanton violence, yet the precise definition of the Hebrew phrase "*sinas chinam*" leads us in a different direction altogether. The word *chinam* is more accurately translated as "free of charge" or "at no cost" in a monetary sense. Hate can often be born from nothing, something so small it doesn't seem to be of any consequence. Yet, from such actions whole worlds of hate are unleashed.

Klal Yisroel was guilty of this sort of hatred. It started on a small scale, with insecurities or misunderstandings that got out of control. Because of this hate we were driven into Golus, and have suffered from other's hatred ever since.

How can we find an antidote for all this? Tzaddikim tell us, *Ahavas Chinam*, baseless love.

Our Mishnah tells us:

He (Rebbi Akiva) would also say: Beloved is man, for he was created in the image of Hashem; it is a sign of even greater love that it has been made known to him that he was created in the image, as it is says, "For in the image of Hashem, He made man" (Bereishis 9:6). Beloved are Israel, for they are called children of Hashem; it is a sign of even greater love that it has been made known to them that they are called children of Hashem, as it is stated: "You are children of the L-rd your G-d" (Devorim 14:1). Beloved are Israel, for they were given a precious article; it is a sign of even greater love that it has been made known to them that they were given a precious article, as it is stated: "I have given you a good purchase; My Torah, do not forsake it" (Mishlei 4:2).

We are so blessed, we know who we are and what this means in terms of responsibility. Hashem loves us, and has given us His Torah. The same Torah that declares that we must love one another. It is a mitzvah incumbent upon every individual to love every member of of Klal Yisroel, as it says, "*v'ahavta l'rayacha kamocho.*" Anything that you would want others to do for you in Torah and mitzvos you should do for them.

Just as hatred starts with small little points of friction, so *Ahavas Yisroel* can start with small everyday acts of kindness. A smile, a gesture of recognition, anything that shows just how much each of us is worth, can ignite a rush of kindness. Many of our loved ones feel alone, they go through life with a feeling of despair. We are often guilty of just not seeing

others' pain; instead we build walls of self-satisfaction as a defence. Think of the child who isn't accepted in any school, or the teenager who has questions that only love can answer. Golus chokes us from within, and slaughters us from without.

We seek distractions, exotic holidays, fancy food, ever more luxurious simchas, everything and anything, so as not to stop and think what it is we are really meant to be doing. Everyday squabbles expand, children learn from their elders that it's okay to hate others who are not like them. Families split over nothing, the rate of divorce grows beyond anything we have ever experienced. Kids are leaving us; nothing seems to make sense. Yet, we argue and fight, like children in a playground.

The Mishnah whispers its truth:

“Beloved is man, for he was created in the image of Hashem; it is a sign of even greater love that it has been made known to him that he was created in that image...”

As the Pnei Menachem ztl was wont to say “alla Yieden Zenen Hielig” All Jews are Holy... we are created in the image of Hashem means we are to act in a G-dly fashion here on earth. There is no greater love for Klal Yisroel than that of Hashem. Acting as *kaveuchal*, the Eibishter, by loving one another and performing unlimited acts of kindness, as He does for us at every step of the way, can be the first step out of this Golus. If we can turn away from our own hate, we can move forward and earn the hope of our redemption from this darkness. The antidote to the hate we experience from outside just may be found in the mitzvah of loving one another from within.