

Envy vs. Jealousy

Category: Bereishis, Vayeshev

What type of anger is appropriate?

The Menorah Book

Nowadays, there is a public menorah at the City Hall or town square of many cities and towns—and many cities and towns have more than one menorah, as well as Chanukah parties and events throughout the town.

But 30-40 years ago, this was not a widespread sight at all.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Rebbe pushed and encouraged the display of public menorahs. Every year, the Rebbe would speak about it and demand action.

In 1986, as Chanukah drew to an end, the Rebbe instructed everyone to send in pictures of their Chanukah activities so that an album could be printed. “It’s a mitzvah to promote those who do mitzvos,” the Rebbe explained.

And indeed, all the shluchim, the emissaries, sent in photographs. The result was a book, “Let There Be Light.”

But the following year, it got even better. The Rebbe once again instructed shluchim to send in their menorah pictures, and a second photo book—this one cleverly using the second half of the verse about light as its title: “And There Was Light.”

When you compare the photos of the two books, it’s simply “night and day.” The photos in the first album show things like a private Chanukah party in a private home with a little menorah burning on the dining room table. In the second album, however, you’ll find a photo of a towering public menorah in the middle of the city, with hundreds of Jews celebrating the holiday around it. This change can be seen in almost every city and every picture in the book.

Now, what did the Rebbe really accomplish?

In this week’s Torah portion, we read the sad story of Yosef getting sold as a

slave. It all starts with his brothers being jealous of him. But why were they jealous of him? Over what? Anyone know?

What caused the brothers' jealousy was actually their father Yaakov himself.

Yaakov caused his sons to be jealous of their brother Yosef because he gave Yosef a colorful coat—so “his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, and they hated him,” as the verse tells us. The simple fact that Yaakov gave Yosef special treatment caused them to be jealous of him.

As the Talmud (Tractate Shabbos 10:2) tells us, “A person should never treat his son differently than his other sons, since because of the two-sela colorful coat that Yaakov made for Yosef and not for his brothers, his brothers were jealous of him, and the matter persisted and our ancestors ended up going down to Egypt.” In other words, the Talmud blames the entire Egyptian Exile on the favoritism that Yaakov showed Yosef.

Here we can ask a simple question: Every parent knows that you can't treat one child better than the other children—because it causes jealousy and hatred among the children. This is something everyone understands, simply because it's simple logic. Our Patriarch Yaakov certainly knew this! He had to know that such behavior could cause hatred among his children. So why did he really do it?

We'll get to that soon.

But right now it's important to point out that this story is not the first time we find jealousy in the Torah. In the Torah portion of Vayitzei, we also read about jealousy. When Leah gave Yaakov several children and Rochel remained childless, the Torah (Bereishis 30:1) tells us explicitly, “Rochel was jealous of her sister”—about which Rashi tells us something interesting: “She was jealous of Leah's good deeds, saying, ‘If she weren't a better person than me, she would not have merited children.’”

The Best Jealousy

As a general rule, jealousy is a dirty thing, as the Mishnah in Ethics of the Fathers tells us, “Jealousy... removes a person from the world.”

But there is another type of jealousy. It's not when a person is angry and upset

and hurt and offended that the other person has something that he or she does not, but rather, its when he or she wants to have the same thing too—but in a good way. As a matter of fact, with this type of jealousy, the person is actually happy for the other person.

This kind of healthy jealousy is what the Talmud (Tractate Bava Basra 22b) means when it says, “Scholars’ jealousy increases wisdom.”

In English, there are two words for the emotion called jealousy. One word is envy. The other word is jealousy itself. One is negative and the other one can motivate a person to positive action. Jealousy expresses an evil streak within a person—when a person wants to possess something that belongs to another person. Envy, on the other hand is when a person feels, “I envy you that you have so much discipline when it comes to daily exercise” and so on. This feeling motivates the person to try harder—it gives him the motivation to do more, to work harder, to get to those same places that his friend is at.

In the story of Rochel and Leah, what Rashi is really telling us is not that Rochel couldn’t stand that Leah had children, but just the opposite—she was envious of Leah’s good deeds. She said to herself, “If only I had done the same good things, I would have also merited children.”

It was this envy that the Rebbe exploited for his Chanukah campaigns all through the years in which the Rebbe begged and urged that the mitzvos of Chanukah be promoted in every city and town. Indeed, it helped a little bit. But when the Rebbe ordered that an album be printed, and every shliach’s friends from all over the world saw how big his menorah was and how many people had come to his Chanukah party, every shliach got the biggest motivation and push possible.

And so, in the album printed the next year, everything was different.

The Rebbe said this point explicitly, quoting from this week’s Torah portion about Reuven, who tried to save Yosef by first throwing him into the pit so that he could “return him to his father”—about which the Midrash says, “If Reuven had known that G-d would write about him in the Torah how he tried to save Yosef from the brothers, he would have personally carried Yosef on his back to their father.” The Rebbe commented that even the great Reuven, who certainly tried hard to rescue Yosef, would have done much more had he known that his efforts would be made known in the Torah.

This explains why Yaakov gave Yosef a colorful coat.

Yaakov knew very well that it would cause jealousy—but that’s exactly what he wanted to cause. He wanted Yosef’s brother to be envious of him. He wanted scholars’ envy among his sons. He wanted the brothers to see that he drew Yosef closer to him, so that they’d want to be like him too.

But what exactly did Yaakov want them to learn from Yosef? What was so special about Yosef that Yaakov loved so much and tried so hard to get the other brothers to mimic?

In Yaakov’s family, there were two categories of family members. Yaakov had four wives: Rochel, Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah. However, two were full-fledged wives and the other two were *maidservants*, a different category of wife that doesn’t exist today. Of these four wives, there were 12 children—but eight of them came from Rochel and Leah, the wives, and the remaining four came from Bilhah and Zilpah, the maidservants.

Rashi tells us that what happened was that the sons of Leah would “belittle the sons of the maidservants, calling them slaves.” They looked down at the maidservants’ kids as second-class citizens—but Yosef, the young orphan “raised by Bilhah as if she were his own mother,” couldn’t take it. And so he was nice to them.

And it was this conduct that Yaakov wanted the brothers to learn from Yosef—so he drew Yosef closer, giving him the colorful coat to convey the message that he expects a different type of behavior from Leah’s sons.

The problem that we Jews have of treating other Jews as almost second-class citizens perhaps began back then—but it has repeated itself in various forms throughout all the generations. The entire Chasidic movement came about just to change the approach popular at the time, in which scholars looked down at simple Jews as second-class citizens and didn’t talk to them at all.

Even today, sadly, there are Jews who think that because they keep mitzvos, they are more loved and important to G-d than other Jews who currently don’t.

Along came the Baal Shem Tov, and later, the Rebbe, and taught the world that every Jew is beloved to G-d. And to the contrary—a Jew who was raised without a

religious background is what halachah, Jewish law, calls a Tinok Shenishba “kidnapped baby.” And so when he does even one single mitzvah, it causes G-d great joy, and G-d indeed loves this Jew.

On the other hand, the scholarly and educated Jew is expected to do much more. From him, G-d expects behavior that suits his education, especially if this individual knows in his heart of hearts that he hasn't yet reached his potential. Therefore, a Jew who does not regularly keep Torah and mitzvos can give G-d much more joy than with his one mitzvah than a Jew who grew up in a religious household.