



Beware the Dangers of Jealousy

Yosef's brothers regarded him as the usurper of their roles in the Jewish nation. So when Ya'akov sent Yosef to report on their welfare, they saw it as an opportunity to defend themselves against this threat. They feared he would defame them to Ya'akov, and that they would be banished, just as Avraham banished Yishmael and Yitzchak banished Esav.

In their view, Yosef was a *rodef*, a pursuer who threatened both their physical existence and eternal roles as the founders of the Jewish people. The brothers were so convinced they were justified, they sat down to eat bread without any pangs of guilt after selling Yosef. Their common meal was in effect a celebration of their unity and harmony now unhindered by Yosef's evil designs. Even years later, when they searched their pasts for any sins that could explain a series of apparently tragic events, they could not come up with anything other than their failure to be more merciful.

Though the brothers felt fully justified, the Torah reveals to us that their misperception concerning Yosef was not simply an innocent mistake. Coloring their judgment was a slight trace of jealousy. The Sages tell us that jealousy removes a person from the world. This means, in part, it removes one from the world of reality and causes one to view people and incidents in a distorted fashion.

Since the brothers' deed was tainted by jealousy, both they and future generations had to suffer the consequences. Rabbeinu Yona finds an echo of the hatred of Yosef's brothers in the causeless hatred for which the Second Temple was destroyed.

With this understanding of how one imperfection in character can

have such long-range effects, we can understand a difficult statement of the Sages. When Rebbe Yochanan ben Zakkai's students went to visit him on his deathbed, he began to cry. His students asked him why he was weeping. He answered that if he were brought before a mortal king who could be appeased or bribed, and whose decrees extended only as far as the grave, he would wail. How much more so now he was soon to face the judgment of G-d, Who cannot be appeased or bribed and Whose punishment is eternal.

When Rebbe Yochanan ben Zakkai went out to meet the Roman general Vespasian during the siege of Jerusalem, he was allowed to make certain requests. He asked that: (1) the Sanhedrin be permitted to continue in Yavne, (2) Rabban Gamliel be spared (and hence the line of the *Nesi'im* be preserved), and (3) a doctor be provided to heal Rabbi Tzaddok, who had fasted 40 years to avert the destruction of the Temple.

Before his death, Rebbe Yochanan ben Zakkai was beset with doubts as to whether he had acted properly. In his rigorous self-scrutiny, another explanation of why he erred came to him. He had opposed the zealots, who led the rebellion against Rome. But the zealots had ignored his opinion and forced the issue by burning all of Jerusalem's food supplies. The destruction of the Temple and exile of the Jewish people was an apparent vindication of Rebbe Yochanan ben Zakkai's stance since the zealots could hardly claim a Divine sanction for a policy that failed so miserably.

On his deathbed, Rebbe Yochanan ben Zakkai worried that perhaps subconsciously he had not asked for

the Temple to be spared out of a fear there would then be no clear proof he had been right. And he suspected that his own honor – offended by the zealots' refusal to heed his decision – might have influenced his request. If that were true, and as a consequence, the Temple was destroyed, would he not have merited eternal death?

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It is incumbent upon us to learn the devastating effect of jealousy

The Talmud tells us that Rebbe Yochanan ben Zakkai's suspicions were unfounded. He was innocent; the Temple was destroyed by a Heavenly decree. Yet we can learn from Rebbe Yochanan's concern as to the power of subtle traces of honor, desire and jealousy in distorting one's decisions.

It is incumbent upon us to learn the devastating effect of jealousy and hatred from the sale of Yosef, even in its subtlest forms and even in the greatest of people, so we can strive to conduct ourselves in a manner befitting the Jewish people, and may we merit seeing the ultimate reunion of Yosef and his brothers when *Mashiach ben Yosef* will be sent as a harbinger of *Mashiach ben David*.

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