

JEALOUSY

by Rabbi Daniel Travis

When [Yosef] told [his dream] to his father and brothers, his father scolded him and said to him, "What kind of dream did you have? Do you expect me, your mother, and your brothers to come bow down to the ground before you?" (Bereshith 37:10)

Yaakov's response to Yosef is somewhat disturbing. Why did Yaakov criticize Yosef so harshly if Yosef was his dearest son? Although Yaakov knew that Yosef's dreams were true, he attempted to dispel his other sons' jealousy, by pretending to doubt the truth of the dreams.¹

Why would Yaakov, whom we know as the pillar of truth in this world, resort to painting a false picture of reality, simply to avert a jealous reaction? Arousing the jealousy of others is always a dangerous thing, and one can never know how far the ripples of jealousy will travel. For this reason, one must be extremely wary of saying anything that might become a cause for jealousy. The reason Yehudah - and not Yosef - was chosen to be king of Israel was that Yosef aroused the jealousy of the people with whom he lived. This flaw was serious enough to cause him to lose the leadership status that was meant to be his.² Especially with regard to Yosef's dreams, Yaakov's fears were fully justified.

On an earlier occasion, after leaving Lavan's house, Yaakov utilized a similar tactic. When he first met Esav, he understood that Esav was probably still angry that Yaakov had taken his blessings. If Esav heard that Yaakov had become wealthy in Lavan's house, it would only add fuel to the fire of Esav's jealousy. Yaakov thus told Esav that he possessed "a cow and a donkey,"³ although in reality he had been blessed with much wealth and many possessions.⁴

On a practical level, if someone asks us about our financial situation and the answer might cause him to envy us, it is best not to reveal to him all the facts. If we find ourselves in a situation in which we can think of no way to avoid telling him everything, it is permissible to tell him that our assets are less than they actually are.⁵

Footnotes:

¹ Or HaChaim on Bereshith 37:10.

² Abrabanel, Bereshith 48:23.

³ Bereshith 32:5.

⁴ Midrash Tanchuma, Vayishlach 3.

⁵ This is the ruling of Rav Eliashiv, cited in Titein Emeth L'Yaakov

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