

THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 11:16

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Jealousy doesn't only come down to wanting the things others have that we don't, it also touches on coveting more subtle things -- like the respect they enjoy and the honor they're accorded. For while it's very "possible for a person to subdue his yearnings for possessions," still and all, "the need for respect is more compelling, as it's simply impossible for a person to endure feeling beneath others".

In point of fact, many have lapsed in this area -- many famous and infamous individuals, as well as the lot of us (see the incidents of Jeroboam ben Nevat's jealousy toward David cited in Sanhedrin 102a; of Korach's jealousy cited in Bamidbar Rabbah 18:2 and in Zohar 3 p. 13a; and of Saul's jealousy of David mentioned in I Samuel 18:7-9).

Indeed, as Ramchal puts it, "the yearning for respect tugs at your heart more than any lust or longing in the world", as the more sensitive among us know only too well. In fact, if honor and respect weren't an issue for you, he says, "you'd be satisfied eating whatever you could get (rather than demanding delicacies), you'd dress just to cover your nakedness (rather than to impress others), you'd live in a house that would only protect you from the elements (rather than in one that costs far too much), livelihood would come easily to you (since you'd take any job you're qualified for, despite the title and tasks), and you wouldn't try so hard to become wealthy (which demands so much)".

(And indeed, it's the need to strive so hard that could lead to your fostering and feeding all sorts of the kind of untoward desires we mentioned earlier on as well.)

But we don't take this easier, albeit less elegant path. Why? -- just "so as to not to seem lowlier or of lesser worth than our friends".

Just notice "how many people allow themselves to starve, or they denigrate themselves by taking charity just not to have to work at something that isn't prestigious enough in their eyes". Yet hadn't we been taught that we're to "love labor" (Pirkei Avot 1:10), to "strip carcasses in the market-place rather than say, 'I'm a great man' (and deserve more than that!)" (Pesachim 113a); and that "one should rather do work that's foreign to him than have to depend on other people" (Baba Batra 110a)?

"The point of the matter is that the desire for honor is one of man's greatest stumbling blocks" Ramchal asserts. And "it's impossible for him to be a faithful servant of his Creator as long as he covets self-respect", since he'll undoubtedly "have less respect (left over) for G-d". So we'd all need to be free of this trait if we hope to achieve true innocence.

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