

# MORE TEMPTING THAN A TWIZZLER

*by Rabbi Dovid Green*

Jealousy, desire, and honor take the man out of the world. (Chapters of the Fathers)

One explanation of the above mishna is that jealousy, desire, and honor escort a person throughout life even till the boundary of life. These are the driving forces that subconsciously motivate us. When the coroner fills in "cause of death" it is probably one of these three forces at play if not all three. "Jealousy" is the emotional challenge we face in confronting the success of others. "Desire" is the internal struggle we have with our own impulses and appetites. "Honor" is the struggle between the superior forces within us, and the entire universe (G-d included) in the struggle for absolute autonomy.

Let's play the coroner on the "Korach Case". What caused this greatly intelligent, rich, famous and powerful figure to suddenly fall so quickly from his lofty pedestal?

Jealousy is a social disease. It comes from a blurring of lines between self and other and between real needs and perceived wants. An episode of deadly and seemingly innocuous jealousy arises from an external stimulus, for example, somebody gets something, that we don't have yet and suddenly we feel deprived. Till my neighbor redid the kitchen, I didn't know how small and woefully inadequate my cooking facilities had always been. In the frustrating case where a particular item or position is in short supply, then the jealous person is more interested in sabotaging the other who makes him feel or look bad. We only feel jealous for things that are within range of achievement, for example, if you graduated in the same class as someone who has now "made it big" in some way.

Take the case of the two women who came to King Solomon. How did he know that if he attempted to slice the baby only the real mother would step forward? He understood, with his great wisdom, that jealousy was working hard here. The false claimant, who had lost her real baby, was bothered by the other mother's good fortune. She was less interested in possessing the child and more interested in dispossessing the real mother.

Korach claimed that Moshe and Aaron usurped leadership. He considered himself equally worthy and wanted to be the high priest instead of Aaron. He claimed that the people don't need leaders but he really wanted it for himself. Does a room filled with Torah scrolls require a mezuzah? Does an all blue garment need a thread of blue? Do we really need leadership? This was his rhetoric! "We the people...", but he really meant "me".

One Shabbos night at the table I gave out some "Twizzlers" to each of two of my boys for knowing the answer to a few challenging questions. They felt good about the accomplishment and about the reward. One boy gobbled his licorice in a moment and the other held his high and waved it as a flag.

In a moment of lapse I heard a smack and a cry. I didn't see what happened but I was able to piece it together immediately. One boy was chewing. One boy was crying and holding half a "Twizzler". I asked the attacker why he had stolen half of his brother's candy. It didn't take him a moment of thought to answer cleverly but wrongly, "I didn't steal. I was sharing!" As a father, I had to explain a basic distinction that "Sharing" is when you give something away voluntarily but when you take something against a person's will that is called "stealing".

In his own sophisticated way Korach was not trying to dethrone Moshe and risk discrediting the authority of Torah. He was only seeking to share the power and influence that he thought belonged rightfully to him. Such a great man was pulled out to sea by the undertow of jealousy.

King Solomon tells us; "Stolen water is sweet." (Proverbs). We all know that water is not sweet. However, if that water belongs to someone else, watch out. It may be dangerously attractive, and more tempting than a "Twizzler"!

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