

SUPERIORITY COMPLEX

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"Guard yourself, lest you forget HaShem your G-d, not to keep his commandments, judgements, and enactments, which I command you today. Lest you eat and be satisfied, build nice houses and live in them... and you become haughty, and forget HaShem your G-d who brought you out from Egypt, from the house of slavery... and you say in your heart, my own might and the strength of my hand have made me all of this wealth." [Dev. 8:11-12, 14, 17]

The Talmud [Tractate Sotah 5a] derives from this that there is a commandment not to be haughty. Any time the Torah uses a language such as "Guard yourself, lest...", Rebbe Avin taught in the name of Rebbe Il'a that this is a warning concerning a negative commandment - in this case, not to forget G-d. When the Torah continues "... and you become haughty, and forget HaShem your G-d...", the Torah is telling us that the one inevitably leads to the other.

Rabbi Shmshon Raphael Hirsch takes this a step further, saying that arrogance is in and of itself the beginning of forgetfulness of G-d. The Talmud Sotah also records in the name of either Rav Chisda or Mar Ukva, that G-d says concerning anyone with the trait of haughtiness, "He and I cannot coexist in this world." Why? Because the arrogant individual is so full of himself that he loses his recognition of all higher authority - including The Higher Authority.

We spoke about needless hatred a few weeks ago, and Rav Eliyahu Dessler points to haughtiness as the root of that "hatred for nothing" that brought about the destruction of our Second Temple. How can hatred be utterly without provocation, truly "for nothing"? Because an arrogant person can be so dedicated to reaching the "top" that he can hate others, unable to accept another person being in a higher or more esteemed position.

Rav Dessler further explains how appropriate it was that the Romans should destroy that Temple and take us into exile [Michtav MiEliyahu, v3 p215-216]. The Romans, according to our tradition, are descended from Eisav and Amalek, the latter being the nation that first came out to fight the Jews in the Sinai Desert. They represented the ultimate in "my own might and the strength of my hand," for they did not come on behalf of any idolatry, but only on behalf of themselves - claiming the ability to fight against G-d.

A haughty, arrogant individual fails to recognize that all that he or she has received is a gift from G-d.

So if other people have not received the same privileges, this hardly justifies the development of a "superiority complex" which one could easily argue is just as harmful as its opposite (while arrogant people are often successful, I've yet to hear someone praised for the great size of his ego).

And so it goes - if we walk around under the impression that the sun rises and sets for us alone, is this so far from the belief that we control the world - we, and not G-d?

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The author is the Director of Project Genesis.