

NO ONE IS COMPLETELY IMMUNE FROM ENVY

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

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Hashem commanded Moshe to anoint the sons of Aharon, "as he anointed their father" [Shemos 40:15]. The Meshech Chochmah [Rav Meir Simcha of Dvinsk] provides us with an insight on the expression "as he anointed their father."

The Meshech Chochmah says that when Moshe was instructed to anoint Aharon as the Kohen Gadol [High Priest], he had absolutely no problem doing that. In fact, Moshe had felt bad that he, as the younger brother in the family, had, in a sense, usurped the leadership role in Israel that rightfully belonged to his older brother, Aharon. Moshe was therefore consoled and even relieved that G-d commanded him to anoint Aharon in the unique leadership role of Kohen Gadol.

But, says the Meshech Chochmah, Moshe hesitated when anointing his nephews the sons of Aharon

as Kohanim. The implication of this anointing was that Aharon's sons would succeed their father in the perpetual role of Jewish leadership ensconced in the priesthood. Perhaps, says Rav Meir Simcha, Moshe Rabbeinu felt a tinge of jealousy at this point. Moshe Rabbeinu had no assurance that his sons would inherit his position and in fact they did not. For this reason, G-d had to emphasize to Moshe "anoint them AS YOU ANOINTED THEIR FATHER." Just as you anointed Aharon with a fullness of heart and graciousness, so too you should put aside any twang of jealousy and likewise anoint his sons.

I find this teaching of Rav Meir Simcha very instructive. Certainly we cannot superimpose our petty human emotions onto Moshe Rabbeinu. However, we learn from this insight that even the great Moshe Rabbeinu can be tested by this experience of jealousy. Jealousy is such a basic human emotion and so much a part of the human condition that even Moshe Rabbeinu must be reminded, "Moshe, don't be envious and don't let jealousy get the better of you."

Jealousy is a destructive character trait. It has ruined people's lives. As the Mishneh teaches "it drives a person outside of the world" [Avos 4:21]. Jealousy can make a person crazy and drive him to do the most ridiculous, hateful, and spiteful acts.

The Medrash Shmuel on Avos says that the Satan came to two people. One person was a tremendously jealous individual who could not tolerate anyone having something that he did not have. He was envious of everything and everyone. The second person was a gluttonous and omnivorous person with an insatiable appetite for more and more and more. He ate whatever he could.

The Satan came to the two of them and made them an offer. One of them could pick whatever in the world he wanted. However, whatever the person who was given the right to choose would pick, his companion would get double the quantity of that same item. This was a real dilemma for such people. The envious person knew he would not be able to live with his companion receiving twice as much as he received. The gluttonous person knew he would never be satiated as long as the other fellow had twice as much as what he was given.

The jealous person was given the option of choosing. He chose that Satan gouge out one of his eyes.

The Medrash teaches us that a person can become so consumed and so warped by his jealousy that he will have his own eye gouged out, just so that someone else will have both eyes gouged out. This is how the Medrash Shmuel explains the statement in Avos that jealousy, lust, and the pursuit of honor drive a person out of this world.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter

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