

So Yaakov said to his sons, “Why do you make yourselves conspicuous?” (42:1)

In the *Talmud Taanis* 10b (cited by *Rashi*), *Chazal* explain Yaakov *Avinu*'s words. Those who possess grain when the whole countryside is starving surely catalyze envy and ill will on the part of the descendants of Yishmael and Eisav, who were the neighbors of Yaakov and his family. Yaakov *Avinu*'s rhetorical question has been the motif of many Jewish leaders who admonish their fellow Jews not to *shtech ois di oigen*, “pierce the eyes of their gentile neighbors,” by flaunting their good fortune. Regrettably, this issue has remained over time, and has demanded constant reiteration.

This idea applies whenever one's actions may provoke envy on the part of another fellow. *Horav Meir Tzvi Bergman, Shlita*, relates that his father-in-law, *Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl*, went out of his way to circumvent any issues of envy. Once, one of his grandchildren gave birth to twin boys. The revered great-grandfather was, of course, asked to be *sandek* at their *brissim*. While it is well-known that the custom is not to serve as *sandek* for two brothers, the *Rosh Yeshivah*, nonetheless, accepted the role of *sandek* at both *brissim*. The reason was so that, when the boys grew up and one would comment to the other that their great-grandfather had been his *sandek*, the other brother would not feel a sense of jealousy. This indicates the great sensitivity of the esteemed *Rosh Yeshivah*.

The *Steipler Gaon, zl*, writes that if one seeks to be successful in an endeavor, he should conceal both himself and the endeavor as much as possible. A notable individual causes envy (in some people); envy causes an *ayin hara*, evil eye, which can lead to a lack of success. It is related in the name of *Horav Shlomo Zvihel, zl*, that he was acutely aware that once he became well-known in *Yerushalayim*, this fame caused him spiritual damage.

An acclaimed Torah scholar, who had undergone a number of tribulations, visited the *Steipler* to ask his sage advice and to seek his blessing. The *Steipler* told him, “Your fame is causing you to have these troubles. Everything has its limits, and this will also end shortly.” Indeed, the *Steipler* once attributed a serious bout of illness to the fact that an American *Rosh Yeshivah* had authored a volume of Torah *chiddushim* (original insights), in which he had cited the *Steipler* a number of times, using reverential accolades. We must learn to realize that every accolade engenders envy, and envy is a poison we can do without.