

Now Yisrael loved Yosef more than all of his sons since he was a child of his old age... so they hated him ... so his brothers were jealous of him. (37:3,4,11)

The controversy that ensued between Yosef and his brothers was much deeper than sibling rivalry. Certainly, it was understandable that their father favored the son born to Rachel *Imeinu* after years of barrenness. Yosef was an exceptional young man who studied Torah with his father and had much in common with him. Under normal circumstances, they would have overlooked their father's love for Yosef, but they felt that Yosef was a *rodef*, pursuer, who was bent on destroying them and assuming their spiritual position. They simply could not ignore this. Nonetheless, we wonder how the brothers questioned the *daas Torah*, wisdom derived from the Torah, of their father, Yaakov *Avinu*. Once Yaakov determined that Yosef should be treated royally, it became his *p'sak*, halachic decision. He honored Yosef with the *kesones pasim*, multi-colored tunic, as a sign of his favored status. As such, the brothers should have accepted Yosef's authority. To respond with animus was non Torah-like. Indeed, everything that Yosef did became a justification for their hatred.

Some commentators suggest that the brothers actually were prepared to tow the line and accept Yosef. It was Yosef's flamboyant behavior that prevented the realization of this acceptance. *Rashi* notes Yosef's involvement in enhancing his physical appearance. This was not appropriate behavior for the one whom the Patriarch designated to have special status. With status comes responsibility. Yosef was not acting responsibly. Furthermore, his negative reports to their father concerning his brothers' behavior and lack of adherence to Torah law certainly did not endear him to them. Despite all this, we would be hard-pressed to look so askance at Yosef to the point that his life would have no value. In other words, such hatred that would generate a ruling of execution is unusual – especially for such spiritually exalted and morally refined men as Yaakov's sons. Apparently, Yaakov saw greatness in Yosef. Why did they not agree with their father?

The answer lies in the words, *Va'yikanu bo echav*, "His brothers were jealous of him." Jealousy blinds a person. A jealous person sees what he wants to see. Clarity of vision, lucid perspective, becomes blurred when viewed through a lens tainted with jealousy. What was once clear becomes absurd. What was straight suddenly becomes crooked. The situation has not changed. His vision has become distorted. Jealousy engulfs a person like a wall that is impenetrable. He is unable to hear anything positive about the other person. His heart is unable to feel compassion towards him. His mind is unable to cognitively see him in a positive light. The jealous person is cursed – self-cursed. The brothers could neither hear nor see anything positive concerning Yosef. They were jealous.

The *Pele Yoetz* writes that the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, attempts to convince a person that no other can compete with him in wisdom and good deeds. He is in a class all to himself. Therefore, when he discovers someone else who is either on a level with him or better than he is, he becomes obsessed and filled with envy, to the point that he cannot function until he is back on top in a class

to himself. One might think that the best way to circumvent envy is to eradicate honor, such that people are treated the same regardless of position, financial standing, pedigree, etc. They attempted to do this in the city of Lodz, Poland. *Baruch Hashem*, they were blessed with a wise, holy *Rav*, *Horav Eliyahu Chaim Meisel*, *zl*, who showed them the fallacy of this approach.

The main *shul* in which the *Rav* davened had a procedure for the disbursement of *aliyos*, being called up to the Torah on *Shabbos*. The *Rav* always had *Shlishi*, the third *aliyah*. *Shishi*, the sixth *aliyah*, went to a *Dayan* or a distinguished, learned member of the *kehillah*, congregation. *Maftir*, the closing *aliyah*, was designated for a *chassan* whose wedding would take place in the coming week or someone who had *yahrzeit*, celebrating the anniversary of the passing of a parent.

The other *aliyos* were allocated to members of the congregation. The position of *gabbai*, the one who handed out the *aliyos*, was not an easy one. Often more than one *chassan* or *yahrzeit* sought *aliyos*, and distinguished guests were always visiting. It became a challenge to satisfy everyone. In addition to the usual demands placed upon the shoulders of the *gabbai*, the issue was exacerbated when one of the members, who was by nature a boor, uncouth and vulgar, became very wealthy. With his new-found wealth, he purchased a wardrobe fit for a king. He insisted on changing his seat in *shul* from the back to the *mizrach*, up front on the eastern wall (a place reserved for *rabbanim* and the most distinguished members of the community). He flaunted his wealth and spent it in an effort to arrogate himself over others.

One *Shabbos*, he walked over to the *gabbai* and announced, "Today is my birthday. I insist on an honorable *aliyah*, befitting my station in life." The *gabbai* replied respectfully, "*Mazal tov* on your birthday. May you live a long, healthy life. I am sorry to inform you, however, that there are no "honorable" (the *gabbai* knew exactly what this boor wanted) *aliyos* remaining. It is a busy *Shabbos* with a few *yahrzeits* and *chassanim*." In his coarse manner, the fellow countered, "Heaven help you if you shame me in front of the congregation! I expect no less than *shishi* (the *aliyah* reserved for the *Dayan*)." The *gabbai* did not respond, because one does not debate an oaf. He went about his business, and he proceeded to call the fellow to the Torah for *chamishi*, the fifth *aliyah*. (It is important to emphasize that in a *kehillah* such as Lodz, which was a premier Jewish community, every *aliyah* was honorable.)

Hearing his name and noticing that he had not received the *aliyah* that he had demanded, the man seethed. He walked up slowly to the lectern, and, with fire in his eyes, walked over to the *gabbai*, raised his hand, and slapped him forcefully across the face! The *shul* was in an uproar. Men were outraged. The *gabbai* was a highly respected member of the community. To be so denigrated just for doing his job was contemptible. It took some time for the *shul* decorum to return to normal. (I assume the offender stormed out of the *shul*. Such people never remain long enough to face the music. They leave that to their subordinates.)

On *Motzoei Shabbos*, the *gabbaim* (there was more than one) came over to *Rav Eliyahu Chaim's* home to plead their case. Something had to be done to ensure that never again would such an

outrage occur in their shul. “Do you have a plan?” the *Rav* asked. “Yes,” they replied. “We have an idea about how to prevent this travesty from ever occurring again. We think that all *aliyos* should be the same except for the *Rav’s shlishi*. All other *aliyos* would be given out based on need – not honor.”

The *Rav* listened and contemplated. Finally, he spoke: “It is frightening that people come to *shul* for the purpose of receiving honor, but it is even more frightening if they cease to seek honor in the *shul*.” The *gabbaim* stared at the *Rav* dumbfounded. They were not sure to what he was alluding.

“There is no question,” the *Rav* began, “that the pursuit of honor is disgraceful, especially if it leads to slapping the *gabbai* out of anger. Sadly, however, we are all in one way or another subject to the pursuit of honor. One wants an *aliyah*; another wants a front seat; yet another seeks a title or an award. If we do not give people honor in the *shul*, they will seek it elsewhere, in places where it is inappropriate for a Jew to enter. Better we should contend with such issues in the *shul* than have it ‘farmed out’ to places of disgrace.”

This was the perspective of a *gadol*.