

“When he zealously avenged My vengeance among them.” (25:11)

Defining the word *kinah*, jealousy, righteous indignation, Rashi writes, “Any form of the word *kinah* in the Torah refers to the individual who settles a score to avenge the vengeance of a matter.”

Rashi is teaching us a profound lesson. The fact that all of the references in the Torah to the word *kinah* refer to vengeance, settling a score, implies that even when one person is jealous of another, when one neighbor has a nicer car than another, it is not just simple jealousy; rather, it is vengeance. How are we to understand this? What did my neighbor do to me that I would want to take vengeance? If anything, a person feels hurt, he feels pain that he does not have what his neighbor has. How is this hurt transformed into vengeance?

Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita, posits that in order to understand Rashi’s comment, it is necessary to delve into the human psyche, to examine the nature of an individual who is envious of another person. What motivates this jealousy, and how does it reach the point of envy? First, we must take into account the anomaly that seems to stand out concerning the character trait of jealousy. In regard to every other form of lust or craving, one seeks gratification of this urge. If he does not receive this pleasure, he is distressed. His distress, however, only concerns the pleasure which he did not obtain. As soon as he is availed this pleasure, his mood reverts to its original state. Not so in regard to the character trait of jealousy. When one is jealous of someone for something that he possesses, the focus of his envy immediately transfers from the object he desires to the person who possesses it. He begins to envy and then hate him – even after he has also acquired the same object. He might now own the object, but the hatred that preceded this ownership is still dominant.

In other words, a number of steps establish the foundation of jealousy. First, one observes an object in someone else’s possession for which he has a desire. He says to himself, “My friend has something that I do not have.” Second, he says, “I also deserve such an item. He is no better than I.” In the third step, he feels that, indeed, he is more deserving than his friend to own the item in question. Now that he feels that he is more deserving of ownership than his friend, he begins to imagine that, in truth, this object should have been his in the first place. He now wonders, “What is he doing with my object?” Finally, he gets carried away by his imagination and becomes angry that his friend “stole” his object. “What he has is really mine!” He now becomes enraged at the individual who “used to be his friend” and seeks vengeance – from him. This is the meaning of Rashi’s statement: the word *kinah*, commonly translated as jealousy, contains in it an overpowering component of vengeance. This is human nature.

Horav Solomon notes that, regrettably, the nature of many people is to be contentious and vengeful throughout their lives. They want to be on top; they seek public acclaim. If someone else receives the public recognition they feel belongs to them, they become agitated and distressed. This leads to *lashon hara*, disparaging speech and slander. This is their revenge. This soothes their anger.

Not only do they speak lashon hara, they want to listen to it – anything, as long as it belittles and disgraces the individual who is the subject of their envy. Envy is the root of lashon hara.

This is not a new phenomenon. There is nothing novel about this thesis. Probably, the only novel element is that someone had the courage to state it, to focus upon an ill that plagues our society. Jealousy, hatred, slander, vengeance – all are expressed because our friend has something that we would also like to have. It never enters our mind that perhaps we do not deserve it, or that we did not work hard enough for it. No one ever looks at it this way. We always feel that everything either belongs, or should belong, to us. If someone else has what we feel we should have had, then they must have taken what is ours!

Is there a cure for the disease called envy? Orchos Chaim l'HaRosh writes that envy is a sickness for which there is no cure. Mesillas Yesharim writes that envy is the result of ignorance and foolish thinking. The envious person gains nothing; the person whom he envies loses nothing; the only one who loses out is the one who envies. Envy is particularly severe if one sees a competitor being successful. Envy is lethal; it is irrational. That fact does not seem to stop anybody.

The Ohr Yechezkel explains the seriousness of the ailment called envy by explaining that the individual does not realize that he is sick. The envy eats at him until he becomes filled with hatred. Is there no hope? There is one chance for a cure – emunah, faith in the Almighty. If a person infuses himself with the idea that whatever he will ever have is from Hashem and that no one can ever take away from him what is rightfully his, he will be cured of envy. Indeed, one who is envious of another person is, as Horav Chaim Vital z.l., says, a moreid b'Hashem, one who rebels against the Almighty. He challenges Hashem's decision concerning who should have and who should not have. The Rambam writes that in the days of Moshiach there will be no wars, no hunger, no jealousy and no envy. There will be an abundance of good, and people will lack nothing. They will be involved in only one endeavor: to know Hashem, to develop a deeper knowledge of His greatness. How interesting it is, says Horav Solomon, that the only tikun, improvement, needed in the hearts of the Jewish People to bring about a period in which we will warrant that the world will be filled with a profound knowledge of the Almighty is to abrogate envy from our midst. Unfortunately, this “only thing” seems to keep eluding us.