

You shall not desire your friend's house... or anything that belongs to your fellow. (5:18)

In *Pirkei Avos*, the *Tanna* underscores the egregious nature of envy. *Hakinah, v'hataavah, v'hakavod motziin es ha'adam min ha'olam*, "Jealousy, lust and glory remove a man from the world." The sequence of these deficient character traits intimates that envy has garnered first place. Indeed, it all starts with envy, moves on to lust and self-aggrandizement. The triple crown removes a person from the world – or, perhaps, each one has a negative effect on a person. Regardless, we see that *kinah* is the worst of the bunch. When one is obsessed with the possessions which his friend has, he may be provoked to act in a manner atypical and unbecoming to his nature.

Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl, suggests that not only is envy a harmful character defect, but the individual who is guilty of envy is, at the end of the day, quite foolish. After one digests everything that his friend has amassed and then takes into consideration the price he paid for them, pending the travail that has accompanied his good fortune, he realizes that he really has nothing about which to be jealous.

A person who lives in his three bedroom apartment with his wife and ten children observes his neighbor with whom he sits at the same table in *shul*, whose family is much smaller, living in a villa in which each child has his own bedroom the size of his entire apartment – he will become envious. "Wow, if only I could have such a villa, I would fill every nook and cranny. Why does he need such a large home?" As the person stands outside gazing hungrily at the villa, his list of complaints continues to grow. "Why him – and not me?" is the gist of his grievances. Wait, however, let him now take into account a few issues which might even the playing field.

First, is he fully aware that the man and his wife have serious *shalom bayis* issues? Domestic harmony is for this couple an unrealized dream – or nightmare. This is only the beginning. The man is over-extended, owing money to everyone, the butcher, the baker, the grocery store, not to count school tuition. No camp will accept his checks. It is either cash or no entrance. Indeed, even his cash is suspect. His two "sweet" children are far from sweet. The tension at home has taken its toll on their emotions. They are not doing well in school, and friends are a high premium for them.

So, is there really a reason to feel envious of the fellow with the beautiful villa and shallow, miserable life? At this point, the famous dictum attributed to the **Admor m'Ropshitz, zl**, is very apropos: "If everyone were to place their *pekel*, package, of troubles into a large circle, we would all rush to retrieve our own *pekel*."

The story is told that a man was once waiting in line to enter the office of the *Yismach Yisrael*, **Alexander Rebbe, zl**. While waiting, he noticed something that struck him as unusual. The poor people entered the *Rebbe's* office, handed him the *kvittel*, card on which they had written their

requests, and they came out almost immediately. In and out: a couple of pennies for *pidyon*, redemption money, a quick blessing, and, “next in line.” The wealthy people, however, would enter the *Rebbe*’s room and spend quite some time engrossed in conversation with the *Rebbe*. The supplicant became enraged. True, this is the way of the world; the wealthy receives preferential treatment, but he would never have expected this to occur with the holy *Alexander Rebbe*. This was something that could be expected in a bank when a large depositor enters, and the entire staff – from the president down to the tellers – all come forth to greet him.

He could not keep his incredulity to himself. When he entered the *Rebbe*’s room, he immediately shared his feelings. The *Rebbe* understood the man’s consternation and, with a benevolent smile and extreme patience, explained to the simple man why the wealthy people took much longer for their entreaties to be discussed. “Believe me,” the *Rebbe* began, “my time is very valuable. I have much to achieve with the short time I have for myself. I must learn and maintain my devotions, but I allot a certain amount of time to listen to the requests of Jews in need and attempt to ameliorate their concerns and offer them blessings.

“When a poor man enters my office, I immediately know what is on his mind. I know what he has and how much he is missing, and I attempt to offer him my blessing. When a wealthy man enters my room, smiling, feeling good about himself as if he does not have a care in the world, I begin to extract from him the real motivation for him to come for my blessing. ‘How is everything?’ I ask, to which he replies, ‘Wonderful, could not be better.’ ‘Truly?’ I ask. Is there nothing that is bothering you? Is your family well? How about your business? Are you faring well with your partner?’ With each question, another layer of the false façade of happiness is removed, until he blurts out that his business is going down; his partner has deceived him; he and his wife are not on the same page concerning how to raise their children. Therefore, their children have serious issues. After some time, I have been able to reveal the real reason for his visit. You must realize that it takes time to reveal that the wealthy man is himself quite poor.”

So, what is there about others that provokes our envy?