



Perceptions • Teves 7, 5786 • December 27, 2025 • Issue #2128

IT IS such a part of who we are, but shouldn't be. Even "healthy" competition can be a dangerous thing because it can and often does lead to *unhealthy* competition. You'd have to be sure that you don't have a jealous bone in your body before you could know that the sense of competition you feel is the safe kind.

We are told that jealousy rots our bones and that we should be happy with our portions, regardless of how much bigger someone else's might be. But it is so hard not to be jealous of someone at some time, especially in a society that not only supports competition, but wags a lot for it.

Jealousy is so primordial that it was the cause of the very first infraction, which was murder. Kayin killed his brother Hevel out of jealousy. How many jealous-based murders have happened since then? Rachel and Leah were jealous of one another, and it wasn't very appealing, especially at such an important juncture of Jewish history. It was the jealousy of the Yosef's brothers that led to all the pain and confusion of the last two *parshios*.

But, like a lot of bad traits, jealousy has a good side as well. When it's on behalf of God, which means to right some wrong

and protect truth, it is not only justifiable, it is praiseworthy and rewarded:

Pinchas ben Elazar ben Aharon HaKohen has turned My anger away from the children of Israel by his zealously avenging Me among them, so that I did not destroy the Children of Israel because of My zeal. Therefore, say, I hereby give him My covenant of peace. (Bamidbar 25:11-12)

But that's the tricky part, isn't it? The Romans killed in the name of their gods, the Christians in the name of theirs, and the Arabs still do it on a regular basis for their version of God. You have to be perfectly right about that, or what might seem like a noble and honorable act becomes, tragically, plain murder of other humans. You might as well just be a kamikaze pilot crashing your plane into the enemy for the sake of national honor.

When it comes to the jealousy of Yosef's brothers, it is hard to know exactly what kind it was. We're told, on one hand, that the brothers were great people beyond our reproach. On the other hand, their own shock and shame at Yosef's revelation seems to indicate that even they had to admit that they were gravely wrong in their judgment of their brother. That can't happen when you are sincerely jealous only for God.

Unless, of course, that god is competition and the rewards it brings to the winners. For example, sports has not been known to bring out the best in people and, in many cases, it brings out the worst. By worshipping those who excel at something and rewarding it the way society does with obscene amounts of money and ridiculous levels of fame, you leave room for tons of mistakes. You certainly don't push competitors to be noble human beings.

Given the long and often negative role jealousy has played in

the history of mankind, including in the Torah, it is safe to say that if you need to compete against anyone, compete against yourself. Define yourself by your own personal greatness, and not by the standards of others who may be more interested in entertainment than your well-being.

So, take the time to figure out what your portion in life actually is, and learn to be happy with it. At the very least, it will keep you out of trouble. And the very best, it will bring you ongoing joy and peace of mind, and make you an example of the right way in life for others.

Now available: “Enlightened: The True Light of the Holiday of Light,” available through Amazon.

Good Shabbos,

Pinchas Winston