



IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR FATHERS
DON'T FALL PREY TO THESE TRAITS
Avos Perek 4 Mishna 28
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Sometimes things get out of hand: words are exchanged, feelings get hurt and arguments go too far. Families are miniature worlds, and keeping the peace can sometimes feel near to impossible. In the wider world peace is an elusive commodity without which wars often break out. In families, wars can also erupt, more often than not over minor issues that in the bigger scheme of things are infinitesimal. In the intimate world of family, sensitivities can run deep and hurt can be extremely raw. Why family rifts are so soul-destroying can often be traced to small fissures of misunderstanding that are in truth the fault of both sides.

The Mishnah tells us:

Rabbi Elazaar HaKappar said: Jealousy, lust, glory remove a man from the world.

Family is the laboratory where so much of who we are is created. We all carry baggage and family members grow up with us and subliminally know our sensitivities. We are our most vulnerable in the family circle; they mean everything to us, their validation is vital.

“Don't let others decide who you are; your task is to follow Hashem's will, leaving the harmfulness of insecurity behind”

Jealousy, lust and glory are all traits that indicate our deepest weaknesses. It is in this arena where our worst behaviour often plays out.

The amount of tzoros I hear from sweet Yidden that find themselves caught up in family drama is heartbreaking. Family is meant to be a safe place, the centre from which one seeks warmth and acceptance. Unfortunately, all too often it becomes a battleground and this truly does take one out of this world. Life is a dim place when you feel hurt by those with whom you feel closest.

All these challenges are tests that are part of Hashem's will through which we are meant to refine ourselves. The traits which the Mishnah enumerates are pitfalls which twist us and create a spiritual blindness. When faced with these challenges we have a choice: we can give no quarter, stand our ground, and be in pain, or we can show some humility, and allow for others' shortcomings. Jealousy in all its forms is a manipulative poison that corrupts the most wonderful soul. We all have insecurities; being jealous just projects them onto others' imagined attainments.

True faith in Hashem means knowing that no one can take from you what is destined for you to have. Hashem knows what's in your best interest, and turning green eyed over others is just a disastrous tool of the yetzer hora. Lust is jealousy unleashed in a particularly harmful way, in which the neshoma becomes darkened by the basest of thoughts. Glory, or kovod, is the product of a superficial mind thinking that the honour of the material world will give them satisfaction.

Falling prey to these traits is a tragic misstep driven by impulse and insecurity. It is in truth a façade; none of these bring satisfaction, only further pain and exclusion. The world the Mishnah speaks of is where real life exists, filled with simchas hanefesh. This can never be obtained when you wallow in anger. The truest satisfaction is in the knowledge that you are able to stave off these vapid thoughts and seek refinement in working towards your true tikun in this world. It will be this that will give you a life alive with happiness and accomplishment.

Gutta Yiden explain that the world is a complicated place, and that each neshoma is similarly complex. This is Hashem's plan, and we can't ever really understand the totality of one another. Living close as we do with family is a testing ground. We are confronted with situations just begging to be misunderstood, taken the wrong way, or seen with a jaundiced eye. The temptation to take umbrage and become defensive is there at your fingertips. Just stop for a moment before rage takes you over and ask yourself: does any of this matter? Isn't your loved one also a complicated soul? Don't others deserve the same generosity of understanding you feel you deserve?

The reasons why we find ourselves embroiled in family disturbances are many, and it's not possible to thoroughly go into them on this page. It's all this complication, all those feelings, all the sense of needing, culminating in one moment or another of mishandled words and actions.

I have had the merit to see some of the giants of spirit of the previous generation. Their simple humility, their constant seeking of peace and fulfillment for others astounded me then, and even more so now. As one grows older one can't help but feel the sorrow for those who fall into the traps that life sets for them.

I know I can type these words, and pray that they give some guidance and understanding. In the end though, it is down to each of us to work it all out. We are here this one time. How we grow is the task we were put here for. Please don't allow your soul to be "put out" of this world. Yes, you can live many years and be angry and bitter. Sure, we have all been hurt, but the Torah gives us hope. Don't let others decide who you are; your task is to follow Hashem's will, leaving the harmfulness of insecurity behind.

My phone rings all the time with calls from good people who are broken by family matters that they can't find a way out of. It is easy enough for me to tell them it is all a test and this is your nisoyon. But that's not enough and I know it. We have to allow others to talk things out, give them support, and show them they are not alone. By supporting one another we can stay in this world of opportunity with chances to grow and bring nachas to Hashem.