TENTH COMMANDMENT: What Is The Opposite Of Envy?

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Yesterday we explored the concept of “evil eye” and explained that the attitudes we have towards others in regards to envy or generosity are defined in Hebrew with expressions associated with the eyes. The “bad eye” (□□□ □□□) describes a lack of generosity or selfishness; the “eye of the wicked” (□□□ □□□) defines envy and jealousy; a “beautiful eye” (□□□ □□□) refers to the qualities of goodness and material detachment; and a “good eye” (□□□□ □□□) defines altruism and nobility of character.

Let us focus in this last concept, “a good eye” to understand better the phenomenon of envy.

□□□□ □□□: Envy is a recurring theme in the Tora. Ironically, almost all the brothers in the book of Bereshit, Genesis, from Cain and Abel to Yosef and his brothers, struggled at some point with envy. Feelings of envy appear in matters related to birthright, to parental attention for children, or competing for Divine attention.

The first brothers who succeeded in completely avoiding the phenomenon of envy are at the same time the last brothers who appear in the book of Bereshit: Ephraim and Menashe, the sons of Yosef. Ya’aqob Abinu blessed his grandson Ephraim before Menashe, who was the firstborn and should have been blessed first. Menashe accepted his grandfather’s choice, which had practical implications; the text does not indicate that he reacted badly or had any resentments toward his younger brother’s success. Thus the book of Bereshit begins with fratricide, one brother killing the other, and slowly progresses into fraternal harmony. In terms of overcoming envy, what could be better than accepting the success of the other?

In the next book of Tora, Shemot, we encounter Moshe and his older brother Aharon. HaShem reveals Himself to Moshe and orders him to deliver Israel from Egypt. At one point HaShem also instructs Moshe for Aharon to join him and assist him. At that point, the Tora expresses what will happen when Aharon

meets Moshe: □□□□□ □□□□ □□□□, “And he [Aharon] will see you and he will rejoice in his heart”. It is important to note two signiciant aspects of this episode. First, the Tora is preparing its readers to understand that we are talking about feelings related to envy / altruism. Although no “eyes” are mentioned, the Tora uses a verb associated with sight: “And he shall see you.” Second, Aharon will rejoice “in his heart,” that is, internally, not as an external formality but in a truly genuine way.

Additionally, it is crucial to recall that Aharon was the older brother. Perhaps today we do not give much importance to this detail of birth, but in those times the elder brother was expected to be the natural leader of the family. And when this order was not preserved, the family harmony was on the verge of collapse. Aharon as the older brother should have been appointed as the leader who would set Israel free. Instead, his role was now to be his younger brother’s assistant, his shadow. However, not only did Aharon have no misgivings, and accepted his new role (as happened with Menashe), but Aharon also rose to a higher level: he was happy, joyful, for his younger brother’s assignment as a leader. And his joy was neither protocolar nor forced. It was a totally sincere and unconditional joy.

This is □□□□ □□□, “the good eye,” the ability to rejoice over the success of others.

The “good eye” is the attitude completely opposed to envy. In fact, it is the best and most effective antidote against all the evils of envy. But having a “good eye” is not easy or very common, since it requires a very high level of spirituality and material detachment. Do you know people like that? It is uncommon to find many people with this type of altruism. Achieving this level of generosity can take a lifetime of hard work in the refinement of our character. But the effort is worth it, since mastering the virtue of a “good eye” is the best guarantee of a happy, elevated and fulfilled life.

Tomorrow, BH, we will finish our analysis of the Tenth Commandment “Do not envy” and we will see how we can gravitate towards the “good eye” level.