TENTH COMMANDMENT: Three ideas to overcome envy

1. Ostentation.
Envy can not be completely eradicated. But there is something we can do to minimize envy, or at least not to encourage it. We can behave with "humility" and act in the opposite way that a consumerist society proposes: avoiding exhibitionism of our material goods. We can refrain from boasting about the expensive vacations we take, and showing off the parties we celebrate or the clothes we wear, or in the car we drive. Learning to show less than what we have, is a valuable habit that is worth cultivating. I'm not referring here to living with austerity, which is a personal choice, but to avoid exhibitionism. I have the right to enjoy what HaShem allowed me to gain through my honest effort. But still, and especially in front of others, I must behave modestly and humbly, and never look down at those who have less than me. Especially, not falling into the trap set by consumer society, which encourages us to impress others and arouse their envy.

2. Which way should I look?
If envy is a natural instinct, impossible to eradicate, at least it must be channeled in a positive way. As we have already explained, there are areas of life in which envy, far from being negative can help us grow. For that, we must learn where to look. There is a pasuq (verse) of the Tora, which although it refers to an issue unrelated to envy, serves as a mnemonic reference on this sensitive subject. The Tora says that HaShem is our God, and that there are no other gods either "in the heavens and above, nor on earth and below." Let's apply this idea to the area of envy. "In heavens" means in spiritual subjects: knowledge, integrity, relationship with God, etc. In all these "heavenly" subjects, I must look upwards, that is, I can and must compare myself and "envy" the one who is better than I. Envy / admiration in these areas is the best incentive to stimulate our own growth. Also, I should aspire to have friends who are better than me in the

“heavenly” areas. Watch them, admire them and “envy” them in a way that would lead me to imitate them.

On the other hand we have, “On earth, below” in earthly affairs, in all that has to do with material subjects, I must look down, that is, I must compare myself with the one who has less than I. If I have 10, I should not look at the one who is 15 and envy him or her. That attitude will only lead me to feel miserable and frustrated. I must look at those who have less than I do. I must think that Barukh HaShem (Thank God!) I have 10, which is much more than 9, 8 or 7. And when I compare myself with those who have less than I, I suddenly value much more what I have.
We must adopt the habit of “orienting” our eyes up or down, as we are talking about matters that concern the material or the spiritual.

3. Emuna.
Finally, the most important habit to overcome envy is Emuna, faith in HaShem. There are several levels of faith in God. First, of course, is the belief in Him, and all the theological and philosophical aspects related to His existence. Then, part of the Jewish faith is also to know that HaShem “masbia lekhol hai ratson”, feeds and maintains each one of His creatures according to His will, that is, to His determination. Emuna means the “acceptance” that HaShem is ultimately the one who determines how much we would have materially. In the context of envy, “Emuna” refers to this very high level of faith. To know that despite our maximum labor efforts, HaShem has the last word: He decides how much I earn, how much I have and how much I have left. And it is He who determines how much my neighbor makes and how much my neighbor has. Knowing, recognizing and accepting, for example, that if He wanted to, and despite my tremendous efforts, I could have much less than what I actually have (if □”□ I get sick, or I have an accident, etc.). Knowing that HaShem is in charge, must inspire me with a great inner peace, He gives me what He considers that I deserve and need, and I accept it in peace. This thought is an integral part of the Jewish faith.

One last idea: Knowing, acknowledging and accepting that HaShem “is in charge” is exactly the message of the First Commandment. If the reader remembers it, we explain it as follows: “I, HaShem, I am your God”, means: “I, HaShem, I am in charge of you, as demonstrated by having set you free from Egypt, the house of bondage.” And if HaShem is in charge of what I have and what my neighbor has, envying my neighbor puts in doubt my belief in Him, or my faith in His justice or His judgment. To envy is to challenge the premise that ultimately HaShem is “Eloqekha”, my God, our God.

In this way we now conclude our learning of the Ten Commandments, seeing that the Last Commandment brings us back to the First, thus closing an important circle of Mitsvot that we must constantly remember.

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