



“IF I CAN’T HAVE IT...”

Chanie Wolf

Of course, I didn't think I was doing it. But I was. Feeling overwhelmed and inadequate, wondering how “everyone else” was managing to do “everything” and only I wasn't keeping it all together, I started making excuses: They were certainly lacking in other areas. Surely it was all coming at a price I was virtuously choosing not to pay. The people I found intimidating were of course not being honest with themselves about their needs and limitations. Although I do believe it is true that there are far fewer “superwomen” than we believe there are, and that there is always so much we don't know about others' lives, my “explanations” served as a convenient substitute for simply facing the truth: There may be some people who handle life better than I do. Maybe they have better time management skills or a higher frustration tolerance; maybe they work more quickly or are better at multi-tasking. Perhaps they are more adept at having a positive attitude. And no, none of that felt very good.



In his conclusion to Hilchos Melachim,¹ describing the laws concerning Moshiach, the Rambam describes five key changes that will define the Era of Redemption: “In that Era there will be **neither famine nor war, neither envy nor competition**, for good things will flow in abundance and all the delights will be [as freely available] as dust. **The occupation of the entire world will be solely to know Hashem...**”

Of all world ills, it is illustrative that the Rambam focuses on envy and competition as two key issues—on par with famine and war—that will be resolved by Moshiach. Apparently, these universal human traits and habits are fundamental to the nature of *galus*, and victory over them is an essential expression of *Geulah*. And since the Rebbe teaches us that the General Redemption is brought on by each of our personal redemptions, our efforts to “live *Geulah*” in these areas must be vital. And they must be possible.

So, let us take a hard look at envy and competition. Please join me as we explore the not-very-attractive voices and feelings that lurk within us, with the goal of transforming them and bringing Redemption to ourselves and to the world.

Envy, the Rebbe explains, is the feeling; competition is the action that expresses it.² Envy is defined as “painful or resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another, joined with a desire to possess the same advantage.”³ It can be a quality, possession, or desirable attribute; it may be related to the essential needs of life such as health, sustenance or children or to broader needs such as success, support or prestige. It can be something the other has worked hard to achieve, or a talent they have been blessed with as a free gift.

Whatever it is, we want it. Seeing that another has it makes us more aware of what we lack—even if we have never noticed or cared before. And that hurts.

Pain is a very unpleasant feeling. It hurts to want or need something and not have it. Unfortunately, it is human nature to magnify the pain with suffering of our own choosing, by focusing on toxic thoughts: *It isn't*

fair. Why do others deserve it and not me? If only... then I could live a normal life. If I can't be the best, then I am a nobody. And so on. We turn life into a competition, where we must have or be at least as much as everyone else—or more. Our happiness and self-esteem depend on it. And before we know it, our pain at what we perceive to be lacking has turned into anger, resentment and even—gasp—hatred. All directed at the individual who has that thing we want. As Rabbi Elazar HaKapor teaches in *Pirkei Avos*,⁴ envy is one of the three things that “drive a person from the world.”

Though this may sound extreme, it is actually very common for envy to be expressed in one of the following ways:

We become angry at the individual who “has” for not sharing his or her advantage with us, as if they owe it to us. Like the mass socialist uprisings of workers resentful of the success of business owners, demanding their “fair share” by redistribution of these individuals’ wealth, we tell ourselves that we are entitled to that which the other has.

Another tendency is to wish that the other just wouldn't have it either. If I can't have it, let no one have it! As the *Reishis Chochmah* teaches:⁵ “The ‘negative eye’ of the students of Bilaam means that one is jealous of what his friend has, and would prefer to have little as long as his friend would have the same.” Sad but true: rather than *fargin*, we may begrudge the other his or her good fortune. This is often noticeable in the area of accomplishments, where rather than being motivated to achieve more than the other, a jealous individual may secretly wish for the other to fail, even actively trying to undermine his success.

And then there is my trusty option of judgment. Trying to cope with our self-pity at “not having,” we mentally reframe the advantage of the other as a character flaw. We might, without evidence, decide that the successful individual is power-hungry, the smart student is arrogant, the wealthy person is a spoiled brat, or the one blessed with beauty is vain. We may dismiss accomplishments

1 Mishne Torah, Sefer Shoftim, Hilchos Melachim 12:5

2 Likkutei Sichos 27 p. 237

3 Merriam-Webster Dictionary

4 Avos 4: 21

5 Sha'ar Anavah 1: 28



as “no big deal” or resulting from “*protectsia*” or an emotionally unhealthy need. Whatever it takes to not be overwhelmed by the feeling of being or having less-than.

Of all the natural responses, the most productive is competition. When envy of another’s positive character traits or spiritual accomplishments causes one to compete and grow in these areas, it serves a productive purpose. As our *chachamim* teach, “Jealousy between scholars increases wisdom.” In fact, we are taught, “If not for envy, the world would not stand.” Even this, though, is essentially a *galus* response, for while the actions are productive, the reason is still selfish.

If we’ve recognized ourselves somewhere in these paragraphs, it is probably embarrassing. But it is also good news, because self-awareness is the first step to growth. Identifying the voice of *galus* within us allows us to take responsibility and choose *Geulah*.

Why is it that when Moshiach comes, there will no longer be envy or competition? The Rambam teaches us the answer through his explanation of the changes that will take place.

We may convince ourselves that when we finally have this, that or the other—which we may need very much—we will be content. Yet having all we need and want is not enough to eradicate jealousy, for competition is a mindset, and the ego is never satisfied. It is not simply that life will be perfect when Moshiach comes; envy will vanish *because our perspectives will have fundamentally changed*. Thus, the Rebbe explains the words of the Rambam:

“For good things will flow in abundance—therefore there will be neither famine nor war, for when every person has an abundance of good, there is no need for war to seize spoils and increase possessions.

“This, however, does not preclude envy nor competition ... therefore [the Rambam] continues, and all the delights will be [as freely available] as dust—meaning that worldly pleasures will no longer have any importance; they will be considered as dust. Therefore, envy and competition will be irrelevant.”⁸

6 Bava Basra 21a

7 Yalkut Shimoni, Tehilim 37

8 Likkutei Sichos vol. 27 p. 237

Worldly pleasures will be considered as dust. That’s the key. The physical is only the means, not the end. It has no inherent value.

As the famous Chabad *niggun* reminds us: “*S’iz doch altz hevel havalim, ein od milvado*”—it is all naught and nothingness; there is nothing besides Him.

Obviously, we need to eat. We need money to buy the many things that we really require. We need health and abilities and skills. But only because without them, we cannot serve Hashem properly. And we don’t all need the same things. Any resource, talent or material advantage that is not necessary for the personal mission of one’s *neshamah* is superfluous.

The eradication of jealousy during the Days of Moshiach will reflect the most important transformation in human beings: we will no longer see ourselves or the world as independent realities, and thus no longer care for material values such as pleasure, power, and popularity. Rather, we will be attuned to the true reality. Therefore, in the words of the Rambam above, “the occupation of the entire world will be solely to know Hashem.”

Since it is our efforts that usher in the *Geulah*, the

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key is striving already now to live with this clarity.

Believing that “all delights are... as dust” does not mean that we transcend the limitations of our physical bodies. It means we recognize that material comforts and human qualities have no inherent value, and therefore it makes no difference what anyone else has. Why do we need what we need? Is it for ourselves or for our Creator? Is it the physical pleasure, comfort, power, recognition, or self-actualization we are after, or the fulfillment of the Aibershter’s desire for the *Geulah*?

In these precious moments when we stand ready to greet Moshiach, we have been granted the ability to rise above the pettiness that defines life as we know it now. We are capable of shedding the suffocating cloaks of self-consciousness, self-centeredness and self-pity that can

never be satisfied with any amount of material “delights” and telling ourselves the truth:

I am here in this world, at this precise moment, to fill a role that no one else can fill in finally making this world a home for Hashem. And I have precisely the personality, skills, experiences, resources, life circumstances and even imperfections I need to make that happen.⁹

And with Hashem’s help, I will. ❧

Chanie lives with her husband Rabbi Yitzchok Wolf and their children in Crown Heights. A teacher and assistant principal at Bais Rivkah Seminary, she is passionate about Geulah, Chassidus and their relevance to the lives of Lubavitcher women and girls.

⁹ Hisvaaduyos 5742, vol. 3, p. 1661

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DEDICATION

One could not have met Mr. Eli Green, a”h, without noticing his warm smile and positive energy. He was always ready to cheer someone up and he had a knack for knowing what to say, be it a joke or a few heartfelt words. Young or old, friend or stranger, what gave him the most satisfaction was bringing joy to his family and all those he encountered.

Being a Lubavitcher *chossid* permeated his life. He took great pride in his commitment to the Rebbe and in joining the Rebbe’s campaigns. He placed

a dedication to the Rebbe in the Baltimore Talmudic Academy High School yearbook; he gave funds for *mitzvah* tanks in Eretz Yisroel even when he didn’t have that much to give; he drove a float in the Lag Baomer parades; the list goes on and on.

From the 26 cents (*gematria* of Hashem’s Name) that he gave his children for *tzedakah* every day to joining the *chevra kadisha*, giving to others was his way of showing his *ahavas Hashem* and his *bitachon*.

Together with, *tbl”ch*, his wife, Chava, Eli raised a beautiful family of 13 children, with the Rebbe’s *brachos*, guidance and encouragement.

Throughout his year-long illness, he genuinely accepted Hashem’s Will. His untimely passing took place on Motzoei Acharon Shel Pesach, 5754. He was only 46.

His children and *ka”h* many



This Moshiach Page is dedicated to Mr. Eli Green, a”h, by his children, in commemoration of his 26th *yahrtzeit*.

grandchildren and great-grandchildren have inherited his love of music and *niggunim*, his cheerful smile, and his caring heart.

We hope to continue his legacy of true *simchas hachaim* and *ahavas Yisroel* and to meet him shortly with Moshiach’s imminent arrival.