

Rabbi Weintraub's Teaching "Enough!"

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In this political season, an old joke:

Candidate Smith is stumping and meets a familiar constituent, Sol. The candidate asks for his support. Sol says he's going with his opponent. Smith presses him: "Sol, don't you remember before the last election, I got you that zoning variance for the display in front of your store?"

Sol replies, "I remember." Smith also reminds him, "And then about five years ago, when your wife was ailing, I put the call through to that trustee at Suburban Hospital."

"Yes, that's true," Sol answered. "And when I first entered politics, it's got to be 18 years ago, I helped get through that pedestrian plaza for your commercial district." "I know" Sol admits. "I know." "So", Smith wonders, "Why can't I count on your support?" Said Sol: "Because I'm thinking: What have you done for me lately

The issue of contentment is a burning and perennial one. What is enough? Our physical and mental health depend on the answer. Families grow or break up based on their members' happiness. No wonder that content and discontent are levers that politicians pull.

In our Torah Portion these weeks, we read of the life and trials of Jacob, the most emotionally developed of the Patriarchs. So great is our identification with him that we took his mature name, Israel, as our national name.

As the Torah Portion of Vayishlach opens (Genesis 32:4), Jacob has completed 20 very difficult years in exile from his homeland, Canaan (Israel). He had fled earlier because of the murderous fury of his brutish, impulsive twin brother, Esau, whom Jacob tricked out of both the birthright and the final parental blessing. In exile, Jacob has worked, under oppressive conditions, for his father in law, Laban. Jacob does, however, over those 20 years, mature from a manipulative child into a wizened SAM: do you mean he's wiser? Or that he was shriveled, as in "wizened"? and pious adult with four wives, 12 children and a vast estate.

In chapter 32, Jacob finally reunites with Esau and immediately offers him lavish gifts. Esau declines, saying, "*Yesh li rov/ I have plenty. My brother, let what you have remain yours*" (Genesis 33:9).

Jacob persists: "G-d has been gracious to me, and *Yesh li Kol, I have everything.*" (Genesis 33:11).

The contrast of *Rov* (plenty) from *Kol* (everything) points not just to the difference between Jacob and Esau but between Jacob the adult and Jacob the child.

Earlier, Jacob was chronically dissatisfied. He connived not just to get more, but to take on other identities, to become someone else. He tricked Esau into giving him the birthright, and then tricked his father, Isaac, as he masqueraded as Esau to get the final blessing and inheritance. Jacob did not just want more property, more cows, donkeys or fields; he wanted to shed his own identity and take on another.

We see the same desperation in people today.

Melanie Klein, the psychoanalyst, distinguished between jealousy and envy. Jealousy involves wanting something for ourselves that we believe someone else possesses. Once we get it, the individual of whom we are jealous no longer interests us.

Envy is a much more intense and complicated desire. With envy the “thing” we want is actually the other. We project all of our frustrations onto that other person. Envy then fuels resentments and grudges, which develop vicious lives of their own.

Envious people—like the young Jacob-- do very irrational things. They manipulate others in destructive and self-destructive ways. They seek positions, whether in the family, or business, or community groups, that are not rightfully theirs.

After the fraternal reunion, Jacob decides to move his camp away from Esau’s camp. This expresses symbolically that Jacob can now live entirely within himself. He truly is free, because he can extricate himself, psychically, spiritually and materially from his conflict with another.

Entrenched conflict usually involves severe dependence. We give enormous power to the people we resent and hate. To quit this cycle, Jacob employs a subtle countercheck. In place of envy, he decides to rejoice in his brother’s success: “If you would do me this favor, accept from me this gift: for to see your face is like seeing the face of G-d and you have received me favorably” (Genesis 33:10).

It takes a lot of spiritual and emotional work to gain such magnanimity. It took Jacob 20 years. How can we get there? A few broad suggestions:

- Take on the regular observance of Mitzvot-commandments, which can lift you out of obsessive self-regard and foster contentment.
- Work on your self-esteem so that the success of others is not crushing.
- Keep yourself, and I would add your children, away from environments or interactions that you know will trigger envy.
- Be still and remember times when you were able to let go of envy and competition, and to bless wholeheartedly the success of colleagues, siblings and friends. Remember how calming that feeling was.

These are ways to experience yourself as a rich person, no matter how much you own.

“Who is rich? He who is content with his lot” (Pirke Avot, Ethics of the Fathers, 4:1).

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Weintraub