

Jealousy

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لطفاً نسخه فارسی این مقاله را در فایل همراه ملاحظه کنید.

**You can't close the hostile mouth,
Nor could you tie the jealous tongue.
Make your friend happy, instead,
And let go of all the others.**

If the (*jealous) friend's harsh and cruel to me,
What difference between him
And the bloodthirsty enemy?

An individual or a society's most dangerous enemies are their closest jealous friends.

I have no doubt that every Jewish person wishes to find out the roots of anti-Semitism. Altogether, much research and the many books covering this subject have offered “jealousy” as a principal cause behind this ill.

Usually, it's the exhibitionist or the pretentious types of people, or those endowed with such advantages as knowledge, beauty, wealth, rank, etc., who tend to become the targets of jealousy. But jealousy toward the Jewish people has been so intense that even the poor and stranded Jews often find themselves targeted by the flames of jealousy or even outright hostility. This goes so far as given the centuries-long Jewish life within environments filled with discrimination, where they were deprived of the very right to defend themselves, many people today wish as well to deny the Jewish person his or her right to defend themselves. As we may observe in the nature, a jealous child doesn't covet his or her sibling's wealth or rank, their beauty, or any other advantages, of which he knows little if at all. Rather, it's the presence of the rival and the thought

of them getting more parental attention, which mainly stirs his or her jealousy. On a grander scale, those who covet the Jew, or any other minority at hand, do so not only for their wealth, property or knowledge, but because of the rival's presence, and the attention they receive from the world. We may find a root of this problem in the holy books of the religions, where from the get go, instead of adhering to fraternity, they set out to compete with the very first party who introduced monotheism. As a result, they all remain divided today into tens of competing or even hostile groups. They may have no qualms to give their all, even their lives, for marketing, yet each of them assumes a unique color and speaks of "me" rather than "us".

On another note, as the French philosopher **Jean-Paul Sartre** put it, where he examined anti-Semitism in his book, and I paraphrase, "Unfortunately, humankind always needs another individual or people to blame on them the consequences of his own wrongs and mistakes, to thus acquit the main culprit and make him look pure and innocent."

As we may see today, even governments try to cover up their own crimes by stirring jealous feelings in their people, in the guise of religion or politics. And to that end, they may present friend as the foe and muddy the waters to catch the fish, so far as the gullible opportunists could start following these artificial enemies. Take a look at the history of religions and the current situation in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, Yemen, etc., and see for yourself the catastrophes wrecked by the followers of the religions! See whereas the reasonable people are labeled as "infidel", the backward are deemed "religious"; and see how by drawing on their own holy texts, the metaphorical "wet and dry twigs" burn together and are sacrificed.

**Until the rein's in the hands of the wicked,
The dastards will be cruel to the men of honor.**

The Lebanese poet and thinker **Khalil Gibran** said to the effect, "To scare the birds away, they found nothing scarier than the scarecrow made in the shape of man!"

Clearly, the plague of jealousy is not limited to specific persons or a particular religion, but it appears at all times and places, in one color or another. On a trip to Japan, I found myself next to an Indonesian gentleman. My co-traveler told me that for centuries, most of the business in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim country, as well as those of its neighboring countries, had been in the grip of the Chinese; and that every rising problem was blamed on these Chinese, nicknamed "The Oriental Jews" (*sic!*), and their rights were violated. For, everywhere and in any

situation, the proverbial “shortest wall” at hand has been the scapegoat of choice for the bullies. Whereas, in the words of Saadi, **“Whether the moth asks to unite with the sun, it won’t dim the sun’s worth and demand.”**

It’s an ironic situation, because the Jew, as the first party to present monotheism, was merely chosen by the command of the *Holy Torah*, the book of *Deuteronomy*, to carry on their mission and promote the faith in One God. As we read in *Isaiah* (Ch. 60), **“ve-hAlchu goyim le-‘orech”**, that is, “the other nations shall walk by your light,” and you’ll be assigned to spread monotheism among the other nations. Sadly, however, the critics don’t read the matter as such, as they have often made “being chosen” look like “a claim to superiority” by this people. May the day come when everyone has realized that the *Holy Torah* speaks not in exclusive but in general terms where it says, **“ve-AhavtAh le-re’achA kAmochA”**, i.e., **“Love your kind as you love yourself.”** There is no “chosen one.” If at all, only who knows more and is more useful would be chosen; besides that claims of superiority would only subject the individual or the group to more intense jealousy.

Always in the minority, the Jewish people have long been hurt by the jealous pens who wrote against them; whereas the Jews almost never had a chance to properly introduce themselves and their precious laws. In that respect, however, as history attests, the statesmen and lawmakers who were familiar with the laws of Judaism were often friends of the Jews — even as the jealous went on coveting.

Indeed, jealousy was noticed so intensely and was deemed so dangerous that the last of the *Ten Commandments* of the *Holy Torah* was dedicated to it, where it reads, **“Thou shall not covet!”** One main reason for jealousy is a “feeling of inferiority” in the face of the superiority and success of the others; for clearly, nobody covets a person with, say, an evident physical shortcoming. The significance of this matter can be observed beyond personal dimensions, and in the wider scope of the world. As young a country as it is, within merely 200 years, the United States has provided generously the best of services to the world, whether through financial, economic, defense, social, health, hygienic and agricultural assistance, or by offering countless inventions and innovations to humanity. Yet today, it finds itself subjected to the jealousy and even animosity of the covetous people, some of whom have benefited from the knowledge provided by the country itself! We conclude that the more a person, nation or government

deserves to be appreciated, the more intense the jealousy that it will receive from the short-sighted minds — even as the more fruit it bears, the more rocks that the tree receives. Needless to say, such jealousy is in itself proof enough of the superiority of the target; and the more intense the jealousy, the more certain the target's virtue.

I'm reminded of the Biblical story of Abel, who was murdered in the hands of his only brother, Cain; and I wonder if this story was meant to warn humankind of this flaw of our species, and to make them understand its roots. This takes me to the late **Fereydoun Moshiri**, who cited eloquently this ancient tale in his beautiful elegy for “the death of humanity”, in which he shows us tangibly that above all, we best try and promote humanity. As he says,

Ever since the day Cain's hands / Were stained by Abel's blood; / Ever since his brothers threw Joseph into the well; / Ever since they built China's Great Wall by the whips and the blood; / Ever since enmity's (*jealousy's) bitter poison / Boiled in the Children of Adam's blood... / Humanity had died, even though humankind was still alive... / Among a people patient with such suffering, / They talk of the death of kindness, the death of love; / They talk of the death of humanity.

The problem isn't just anti-Semitism. The problem is the animosity directed at humankind. The problem is humankind's enmity toward one another. The talk is of the death of humanity, the death of humaneness.

A farmer had a beautiful horse, which a jealous man wished to buy — even steal, if the coins failed. But as much as the buyer persisted in his offer, the owner refused to sell the animal. One evening, on his way back home from the field, the farmer saw the relentless man lying flat on the roadside, howling and moaning in pain. The farmer climbed down his beloved horse to help the patient and give him a ride to the city, when suddenly, the wicked man stopped pretending sick, jumped on the horse, and galloped away on the stolen animal. The poor farmer shouted, “Alright, let the horse be yours! But don't tell a soul what you did to me! That'll end humanity!” The Jew, as the scientific authorities of the world would attest, has served humanity far beyond his due share — yet he has been rewarded proportionately by unkindness. Thus, he says, in the words of the poet, **“Anyone I befriended, he would become my natural-born enemy. / Anywhere I built a nest, it would become the hunter's shed.”** If only his cries were heard. **Ah, for who discriminates against another, he has shed the honor of humanity.**

Spreading hatred in the guise of religious advocacy has long been a means to impose oppression and cruelties; and accusations such as “the chosen people” have in part supplied the fuel. It’s worth reflection that the *Holy Quran* (Ch. 2, Verse 47) states, “O Children of Israel! Remember the blessing that I bestowed upon you, and that I privileged you above the worlds.” Superiority for what? This “superiority” does not mean that the Jewish person was born superior; nor does it mean for him to promote the Jewish religion. Rather, by “superiority” it’s meant to signify “the chosen candidate”, the one who is obligated to promote the faith in God among the other peoples. Crying out aloud for when the pen falls into the jealous hands who make the white look black! What horrors that the Jewish people have not suffered by jealous minds over the very adjective of “chosen”! **Hafez**, too, was badly hurt by the jealousy of the others. As he said,

**If a jealous man spoke ill of a friend and hurt him,
Tell your friend, “Be happy, for we won’t listen to the idiot!”**

**Hafez! Let’s forgive the foe’s wrong words,
And let’s not resist the words of truth.**

Some uninformed people attribute the cause for the damage done by jealousy to “the evil eye.” For that reason, my late father often advised us, “The ‘evil eye’ is a superstitious idea. Instead, just don’t do anything to subject you to people’s jealousy and get you hurt by them.”

When it comes to stirring jealousy, the exhibitionist people themselves are not devoid of blame; yet this won’t justify the flames aroused in the jealous person. Also, “to be jealous”, “to covet”, it covers a range of emotional states, which in turn makes us ask as to **what could constitute legitimate and constructive jealousy?** The legitimate and constructive human jealousy, rather subtly termed “envy”, can be seen, for instance, when you notice someone running ahead of the others, yet instead of resorting to destructive jealousy and throwing rocks on his way, you compete constructively, attempt more to catch up with him, and perhaps manage to run past him.

This is not about how much jealousy is there. What I mean to say is that most poisons, such as opium or the snake venom, as deadly as they are, they could become a means to heal when they’re applied in the dosage advised by the pharmaceutical sciences. Similarly, jealousy — like religion or bigotry — can be useful, as long as it’s present in a sound, logical and controlled

dosage; but it could become fatal, once it exceeds the amount. It's best for us to maintain balance and moderation, so that we could walk safely the shaking rope of this short life.

Alas, however, many people think that their house will only thrive on the ruins of their neighbor's. Thus, the Jew, having suffered the cruelties of history, says in the words of a poet,

**Alas, the cure for our secret pain,
Sadly, the solution for our turmoil,
It's been left to a bunch who imagine
They'll flourish over our ruins.**

A child can't grasp logic, but instead, he follows his inherent feelings. Similarly, many adults don't seem to grow up, but as in the days of childhood, they're driven by jealousy to commit fratricide, or even suicide.

Once upon a time, there lived a villager who owned one cow, but he was jealous of his neighbor for his two cows. One night, an angel told the villager in a dream, "Wish anything for your neighbor, and I'll give you twice as much!" The jealous man said, "Blind my neighbor in one eye!" In the Persian literature, the expression *khar-e deezeh* or a "grayish donkey" stands for a donkey who throws itself off of the cliff, along with the cargo it carries, just to hurt its owner. If we look carefully, we may spot many such "grayish donkeys" all the time, who influenced by religious and sectarian propaganda, go so far as killing themselves to kill the others.

In certain cases, major analytical institutions try and estimate the statistics of a person's worth by studying the number of their opponents: the larger the number, the more positive his presence in life. An evident case in point was the late Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, the King of Iran. Today, nearly forty years later, people have come to realize that **the number of his opponents** during the tumultuous days of the revolution **showed his greatness**, and not lowliness. Likewise, on the international scene, when so much of the problems of the world are blamed on the Jewish people — this tiny minority with fewer than 15 million members, i.e. less than 0.2% of the world population, that is, 2 out of 1000 people worldwide — it goes to show the positive presence of this small group on the world stage, and not their inferiority. "People were always kept alive by the morals. / A people who lost that, it's a dead people." Alas, as the poet said, **"The words of the elders with fragrant breaths, / They rot on the one side, and stink**

on the other.” That is, the inciters will realize the truth too late, and inherited jealousies and prejudices will continue to recur in various forms. It’s as if that negative force of nature known as “jealousy” has forever nested in the essence of humankind, stretching its head out every now and then, resurfacing generation after generation.

What is the solution? In one word, the ultimate solution is upon the mothers and the teachers of the religions to make our kids understand that, **“The Children of Adam are the limbs of one body, / Once created from a single essence.”**

Conclusion

No doubt, jealousy has been an inherent ingredient of the human nature, and of some other living beings, ever since they were born. However, this dangerous emotion does vary in degree. In some people, it’s intensified by religious, racial or traditional factors, or it’s fueled by self-grandeur; in the others, it’s always kept in-check, moderate, even constructive. On the world stage, and in comparison with the powerful governments and the billion-member populations of the world, the name “Israel”, this small group of people, has an astonishingly frequent presence in the world’s public media, and for a variety of reasons. “Ask of this tale from another, for I’m simply in awe.” That also sheds a light on anti-Semitism.

For a credible evidence of the inherence of jealousy in humankind, we need to look no further than the jealousy of a 2-year old child toward his or her infant sibling: The child, who still has no idea of human advantages and flaws, is jealous of the little brother or sister, even if the cost is to physically eliminate them!

Therefore, young parents should be aware that human jealousy is similar to the proverbial sting of the scorpion, i.e. “it’s not aroused by contempt, but it’s a demand of its nature,” an attribute that **“enters the body by the mother’s milk, and exits along with life.”** I was recently witness to a 2 ½ -year old child asking his mother to throw their new-born into the trash bin! Also, I remember how about 70 years ago, my sister ran into our neighbor’s little child who was mumbling things like “my bro’s dead...”, or “... killed my brother”. My sister immediately took the little boy in her arms, kissed him on the cheeks, and asked, “Would you show me where your brother is?” The boy pointed to their mother’s room. My sister rushed to her room. The mother

wasn't there. A pile of pillows and bedcovers had been thrown on the infant's face. The poor baby was blue and nearly dead. But my sister had arrived just in time, and she managed to save the baby.

That infant is now a famous university professor. When I told him of that incident with reference points, he said, "I'm going to find my elder brother and pull his ears!"

Unfortunately, through history, those hostile to humanity have used religion or the pretext of the "majority" to provoke the destructive feeling of jealousy in people, in order to achieve their abhorrent goals. It's a bitter tragedy that as a teenager, that jealous 2-year old kid could turn into a toy in the hands of the so-called advocates of religion or politics; it's painful if the proverbial "egg thief grows up to steal camels," and bring destruction upon himself and his society. Thus, the poet **Nasser Khosrow** protested toward God as to why He had given this and other such attributes to humankind:

**O God, I'm right to say that You are behind the trouble,
But I'd be too scared to speak any of it aloud.**

**If you don't have a pebble in the shoe,
Then why create the murderous (*jealous) person?**

**On the one hand, you shout at the deer to escape,
While on the other, you cry at the hunter to run after it.**

Thence, the poet **Attar** became dizzy with the contradictions and conditionalities of the instructions contained in the religious writings, so far as he said,

**Neither they let me in the mosque — for they call me "Drunk!"
Nor am I allowed in the tavern — for "This drinker's an amateur!"**

**I know of a road midway of the mosque and the tavern,
But I'm a stranger, and alone. May I ask where the road is?**

Is there any other way but promoting humanity — sincere, true humanity? Is anyone capable of fighting the religion, this multi-faceted entity entrusted to us, with thousands of years of history, that "got into humanity by the milk?" Is there any other way but to love our kind and to do so unconditionally? Could we ever touch humanity without giving up jealousy?

At the end,

Anytime you meet someone who's jealous of another, make sure he won't get to know you!

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February 2018, Los Angeles

To receive copies of this and other essays and writings by Norman "Nourollah" Gabay in English and Persian, including his book entitled *An Invitation to Reason, The Glossary of the Kashani Jewish Dialect*, and soon to be published, an electronic book covering his more recent essays, please visit the following website: www.BabaNouri.com.