

WHY I HATE YOU AND YOU HATE ME



THE INTERPLAY OF ENVY, GREED, JEALOUSY,
AND NARCISSISM IN EVERYDAY LIFE

JOSEPH H. BERKE

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 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2012 by
Karnac Books Ltd.

Published 2018 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A C.I.P. for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN-13: 9781780490328 (pbk)

Typeset by V Publishing Solutions Pvt Ltd., Chennai, India

May it be Your will, Lord my God and God of my fathers, to protect me this day, and every day from insolent men and from impudence, from a wicked man, from an evil companion, from an evil neighbour and from an evil occurrence; from an evil eye, from a malicious tongue, from slander, from false testimony, from men's hate, from calumnious charges, from unnatural death, from harsh diseases, and from misfortune; from the destructive adversary, from a harsh judgment and from an implacable opponent ...

Morning Prayer
Siddur Tehillat HaShem



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*For
Mushka*



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Deborah Armstrong, many thanks for suggesting the title.

Shree Berke

Mordechai Gafni

Yitzhak Hertz

Robert Hinshelwood

Kate Loewenthal

Tali Loewenthal

Ephraim Rosenstein

Sam Saunders

Stanley Schneider

Paul Williams

Robert Young



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INTRODUCTION

This book explores the darkest recesses of the self: envy, greed, jealousy, and narcissism. Such elements tend to remain within the shadows of perception because they are chaotic, violent, dangerous, and highly disturbing. Yet a knowledge of their presence and of their intricate relations with each other is essential for understanding why: “I Hate You”, “You Hate Me”, and “We Hate Ourselves”. Furthermore, it is the *sine qua non* for freeing the world from the grip of evil and liberating goodness.

Malevolence has three components: perception—an awareness of something provoking an intolerable feeling; feeling—intense displeasure and vexation; and action—forceful, attacking, annihilating behaviour.

An aggressive response may be essential to survival when it is self-protective and an obvious reaction to provocation. All too often this is not the case. The person who goes around with a “chip on his shoulder” is an unlikely example of constructive self-assertion, or even reactive revenge. I am concerned with another kind of malice, a passion which may not have an obvious cause, yet which is very intense, deep-rooted, and is associated with hate, rage, chaos, and, in general, evil. Such passions accompany consciousness and are uniquely human. Malicious

hatred is painfully private and publicly dangerous, fed by the interplay of perception, memory, and imagination. It is an enmity, all pervasive, yet generally relegated to the realms of fiction, as in the popular TV series, *Desperate Housewives*. The drama depicts a well-to-do community of good-looking people who live in elegant houses with good jobs and drive expensive cars. Behind this facade, however, there lies a simmering brew of vicious hatred, murder, and mayhem.

Such malevolence tends to be ascribed to problems of environment or heredity. The “yob” who stabs the old lady down the block, or the man who kills his child, “must” have bad genes. Or maybe their biochemistry has gone haywire. Similarly, acts of outrageous criminality tend to be justified when done in the name of economic inequality, political oppression, or bad weather.

But as the housewives reveal, man himself is the source of the dark forces against which he is constantly struggling. And it is only possible for him to transcend this basic malignity by knowing how, what, why, and when it arises. The alternative is to continue the blind butchery of our environment and fellow creatures which otherwise permeates our lives.

It is possible to know, albeit harder to accept, the shadow side of ourselves, the inner iniquities which breed ill will. Envy, greed, and jealousy are the fundamental components of this malice. Their counterparts are gratitude, generosity, and compassion. Each does not exist in isolation from the other. The interplay of these forces of love and hate create the structure of our lives, which on a personal level is called *character*, and on the social level is called *culture*.

This study will focus on the negative or angry constituents of character. But I shall not ignore love. On the contrary, I shall demonstrate that when the negative components of our emotional life are denied or ignored (because of guilt or fear), then the positive ones suffer too. As always, love and hate, benevolence and malevolence, are inexorably intertwined.

The overall purpose of my work is to develop a detailed understanding of our capacity for destruction, as well as for making good. This is not an easy task, either for me, the writer, or you, the reader. The relative absence of comparable studies is an indication of the anxiety that envy, greed, and jealousy arouse.

Remarkably few scientific books or papers document the emotional havoc and implacable conflicts caused by sheer hate. Some major British and American journals of anthropology and sociology have not carried a single reference to envy, jealousy, or resentment over periods

of nine to fifty-two years.¹ And in the indices of three major studies of human aggression and destructiveness, two did not mention envy at all (or greed, or jealousy) (Fromm, 1973; Pinker, 2011), and the other mentioned envy and greed once each, jealousy not at all (Montagu, 1976). Yet when you talk to people they are always aware of envy, usually in others. I think that envy is to modern times what sex was to the Victorians, an obsession best forgotten, denied, or avoided.

We now know that this pernicious orientation to life begins at birth, and if not tempered during the course of development, may lead to a hatred of all life-giving experiences, essentially towards any "source of supply".

On the other hand, greed is an insatiable desire to take for oneself what another possesses. It is damaging because of its ruthless acquisitiveness. A greedy person can admit that what he wants is good and valuable. In contrast, an envious person is not concerned with possessing, just with preventing others from possessing. For the envious or evil eye goodness must not be preserved, only attacked, spoiled, or destroyed.

Developmentally, jealousy is a later emotion concerned with relationships. Jealousy has to do with rivalry with one person for the love of another. Jealousy is always triangular; envy is dyadic, subject to object.

Much of this work will be concerned with the interpersonal implications of these impulses, directed emotions felt by one person, the agent, the subject, towards another person, the target, the object. Therefore they have to be considered from the point of view of both individuals.

Moreover, the expression of envy can be seen from two ostensibly different angles. One is via straightforward assault. The other side is via narcissism. By narcissism I do not mean self-love. Rather narcissism involves intense self-hatred. Why? Because when the narcissist compares himself with another person, he feels put down, disabled, and generally inferior. Consequently the narcissistic response is to inflate the self, in contrast to the envious response which is to deflate the other. In fact they are two aspects of a common response to an unwelcome reality.

The aggressive aspects of these responses can themselves take two forms, active and passive. The former is by a direct attack on the hated object. This is exemplified by "grateitute", a new concept which encompasses the grating, burning feelings produced by an ungrateful state of mind as well as forceful, annihilating retaliation. The converse is passive aggression. This is exemplified by sulking, not doing what is expected. Sulking is a universal phenomenon barely discussed in the psychological literature. I shall show how and why it takes place up

to the point where extreme forms of sulking can be as destructive as a direct envious attack.

To complete this study I will query the resolution of envy, greed, and jealousy as well as narcissism, gratitude, and sulking. There exist many false solutions to these feelings. Pseudo-solutions strike at the hated object in the hope that if the envied person or source of anguish is eliminated, then malice and spite will be vanquished as well. This is patently not the case. The best answer to the destructive aspects of ourselves is by enhancing the life-sustaining elements in our lives. Most profoundly, gratitude counteracts the damage done by envy. If envy is destructive, gratitude is constructive. If the envious "I" spews bad looks and bad thoughts, then the grateful heart mitigates the damage. Similarly, generosity counteracts greed, compassion overcomes jealousy, and tangible accomplishments enhance a lack of self-esteem.

I have divided the book into four parts. The first considers the experience of envy, greed, and jealousy and how they operate between parents and children, brothers and sisters. The second focuses on the object of these harmful emotions, what attracts malice to them, and how they may arouse it. This includes the essential representatives of life, the breast (the source of all things), the womb (female potency), and the penis (male potency), in all their real and symbolic forms. The third part of the book focuses on the nature of and expression of narcissism. Lastly I will explore how life's sins and graces interact and positively influence each other.

I would like to add one further point. The text is not gender specific. I have used the terms "he", "him", and "man" to refer to men and women, and person and people to refer to mankind and womankind. To do otherwise makes for a very choppy dialogue. All this reflects the fact that it is hard to find one term that reflects both the feminine and the masculine and that both male and female all come from the same source.

Note

1. *American Journal of Sociology*, 1947–1985;
Rural Sociology, Vols. 1–20, 1936–1955;
The British Journal of Sociology, 1949–1959;
American Anthropologist and the *Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association*, 1949–1958;
Southwestern Journal of Anthropology, Vols. 1–20, 1945–1964.

CHAPTER ONE

Witches, giants and scary parents

The wicked witch is a withered old woman with bony hands, humpy back, and sharp-tipped teeth, who preys on the blood and flesh of boys and girls. She dresses in black because she is a creature of the night shrieking with delight as her owlish eyes discover a tender baby or chaste young girl. Jocular caricatures of long-nosed ladies with devilish hats riding astride flying broomsticks bolster beliefs that untold women possess vast powers of occult destruction (Cohn, 1976; Widdowson, 1973).

The legendary counterpart of such a hideous creature is the killer giant, whose huge size and fearsome strength conveys elemental forces given over to rampant evil. In Dante's *Inferno*, he was an "archfiend", while in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, he was Satan personified as an enormous, malicious angel. Meanwhile, giants abound in myth and folklore from Cornwall to China. They are always well-equipped with savage teeth and raucous grunts, as well as clubs, hammers, and nowadays, guns (Opie & Opie, 1980).

Witches and giants are not only products of rampant imaginations, the child's eye view of parents, or its parents' scary constructions, but they actually touch upon archaic and not so archaic memories of childhood and child care. The witch represents the cruelly rejecting,

depriving, devouring, treacherous mother, more concerned with her own looks, feelings, and needs than her child's. She is a woman greedy for food, envious of youth and jealous of love, like the Cruella De Vil of contemporary cinema, a malign crone who can bring down misfortune by a curse or a glance.

In fact, mothers have commonly put unwanted children out to die and there are many references to infanticide from antiquity onwards. In ancient Greece and Rome children were thrown into rivers, flung into cesspits, potted in jars, or simply left exposed by the roadside, "a prey for birds, food for wild beast to rend" (DeMause, 1974, p. 25). As recently as 1890, abandoned babies were a common sight in London streets, lying dead in the gutters and dung heaps (*ibid.*).

Even when they were not left to die, vast numbers of newborn babies used to be passed into the hands of wet nurses to be suckled. Disease or neglect led many to perish before they were handed back after two to five years. In the interim they rarely saw their biological parents. This custom was an effective shield against passionate involvement with offspring who probably would not have reached adulthood anyway.

By the eighteenth century the practice began to diminish, even before improved sanitation made motherhood less problematic. It became more common for children to enter their parents' emotional life, to be prayed with, and sometimes played with. Closer contact led to new methods to curb anticipated greedy demands and wicked behaviour. Psychic assaults replaced infanticide and physical abuse. The child was a mind to be filled with frightening figures in order to engender compliance.

Bluebeard, werewolves, and nowadays, hated politicians, have been added to an arsenal of images that included "gorgons and ghosts, witches, giants and Jews", as well as a tyrannical God who held aberrant youngsters "over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect, over the fire". In addition, both Europeans and Americans were obsessed with "boogiemen", that is, black people. Typically, little girls were told to behave themselves otherwise a "horrible little Black Man ... [who] was hidden in the room [would] catch her the moment she left her bed or made the slightest noise" (White, 1882, quoted in DeMause, 1974, pp. 12-13).

Increasing public attention means that the number of known child abuse cases appears to escalate all the time.¹ One can hardly open a newspaper in the United States or Europe without encountering a child

murder or sexual assault, aside from more numerous, but less obvious examples of mental and bodily cruelty. In Britain alone the estimated number of children murdered by their parents or carers ranges from five to twenty-five per week.² These include teenagers as well as infants (Creighton, 1985; Garner, 1999).

Let us begin by considering the persecuting parent, an adult who hates and attacks children. This may be shocking for readers who think that in the relations between parents and children resentments invariably flow from sons to fathers or daughters to mothers. In truth there exists a balance of terror, albeit mitigated by the tender feelings that young and old hold for each other. While children certainly crave the breast and begrudge womb and phallic powers, parents are also assailed by terrible tensions for which they often blame their offspring. These concern their own inadequacies in the face of life renewed, but especially, in an age of narcissism, the special attentions which children demand, but which mothers and fathers prefer to keep for themselves. Thus, even before Oedipus becomes an issue, parents may feel deprived of love and life, and seek mortal revenge (Moore & Day, 1979; Smakowska, 1985). Considering the relative size and strength of adults in comparison to infants, it is no wonder that these antagonisms tend to be denied as located in other worlds at other times and places.

The story of *Hansel and Gretel* provides one of the finest descriptions of the malevolent mother. Different versions exist in many countries, but all have similar features. The Brothers Grimm acquaint us with a poor woodcutter who lives at the edge of a big forest with his son and daughter and wife (their stepmother). A famine hits the land and there is not enough food to go around. The woman tells her husband not to worry: they'll take the children far out into the forest and leave them. Then, "They won't find the way back home and we'll be rid of them" (1982, p. 56).

The man protests, but his wife, ever concerned with her own needs, prevails. So, after several false starts, the young boy and girl are dumped in the forest to die of starvation. Forlorn and frightened they decide to follow a little white bird. It brings them to a lovely house with walls of bread, roof of cake, and windows of pure sugar. The children are delighted, but it is a trap. Suddenly the door opens and an aged, decrepit crone creeps out and invites them in. She pretends to be kind. Really she is: ... an evil witch who lay in wait for children and had only built the little bread house to lure them her way. When a child fell into

her power she would kill it, cook it and eat it, and that was a day of feasting for her (ibid., p. 60).

On the next day the old woman locks the boy in a shed and forces his sister to help her fatten him for the kill. Eventually she prepares the oven to roast them both, but Gretel plays a trick and pushes the crone into the oven instead, whereupon "the godless witch burned miserably to death".

The villains in this story are a stepmother and a witch. They represent two aspects of the same person, the bad mother. To make it safer to hate her and get revenge, she is changed into a combination of one or more stepmothers, witches, and mothers-in-law, at least in the world of make-believe. This hungry mother is not just a creation of the child's own impulses. All too often the negative view coincides with one or more aspects of real maternal destructiveness. A 1985 report by Susan Creighton for the British NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) seems to serve as a coda to Grimm tales. It surveyed twenty-five years of child abuse and concluded that mothers perpetrate thirty-three per cent of child murders.³

Hansel and Gretel feared hunger and abandonment. What they overlooked was the likelihood of being eaten themselves. Many mothers regard their infants as "food objects". It is a common experience to see a woman kiss a baby on the behind and exclaim with delight, "Oh, you look good enough to eat." Sometimes this is not a joke.

The desired food is more than milk. The baby is a breast which flows with love towards those who care for it. Battered babies and children have parents who reverse the roles. They insist that their offspring look after them, and get enraged if this does not happen. One woman who severely injured her child commented:

I have never felt loved all my life. When the baby was born, I thought he would love me. When he cried, it meant he didn't love me. So I hit him. (DeMause, 1974, op. cit., p. 7)

Similarly, the Brothers Grimm wrote a parable about an emotional famine. The children are burdened with a mother who begrudges love while resenting their youth, their vitality, and above all the affection they draw from their father. He loves them but is a *schlemiel*, he cannot protect them from her devouring jealousy. So the children have to rely on ingenuity, as occurs in many families where emotional strength and shrewdness are keys to survival.

The fatal trap is narcissistic seduction, while the intent is self-aggrandisement. The malicious mother enchants children with false hopes and inflated promises—candy floss, while forcing them to feed her pride and self-esteem. The Scottish psychiatrist, R. D. Laing, portrayed his childhood in comparable terms. He was an only child in a bleak, pleasureless house with a mother who was either “in a decline” or deeply possessive of his psychic life. When he was little she snatched away his favoured toy horse, and burned it because “he was getting too close to it”. An aunt observed that she “burned up with envy and jealousy”, and would destroy anything he became attached to. Later in life, after he had left home and had become a famous psychiatrist, he discovered that his mother had acquired a tiny figurine which she called “Ronald” or “Ronnie”. She enjoyed sticking pins into its heart in order to make him have a heart attack (Laing, 1985; see also Laing, 1976).

A mother’s rage can even extend to an unborn child. “Kate” had yet to give birth to the child inside her, but she feared her foetus was a dangerous rival, “a thing” nibbling away inside her just like the grub in *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Carle, 1970).

Although continuing to eat, drink, and smoke excessively, she was aware that the baby might be damaged by a rapid weight gain (no room for the womb) and nicotine (poison). She also worried that the foetus was too close to her back passage where “a lot of heavy shit goes down”, in other words, her own shitty feelings.

Kate herself had been premature and still resented her mother for cheating on womb time. So the pregnancy stirred up enormous appetites which she preferred to deny and bury in her body in the form of “galloping leukaemia” or “Aids”. The “galloping leukemia” was an uncontrollable group of cells which she imagined would suddenly proliferate and savage everything before them. But “Aids” was the most terrifying prospect. It meant she would waste away and was an unjust desert for being greedy.

Who was to blame? Kate fingered her husband and baby. The bigger she got the more “it” got in the way. Once she was crossing the street and a car whizzed by. Her husband pulled her back onto the pavement by pulling her tummy. She was indignant. How dare he try to save the baby before her? She felt ignored and the incident confirmed the unwelcome prospect of a newborn baby occupying the centre of familial attention. Moreover, it brought to mind many memories of her own parents who were “always busy, always having all the fun while I was just a pudding”.

The worst conflicts were between Kate's determination to nurture and protect the foetus and her wish to compete with or destroy it. The competition was for food, love, and attention. She enjoyed musing about the clothes, the dinners, the holidays, and the thousand other things that she could choose as soon as the baby was born. Then she would be pre-eminent again. In this respect she was like her mother and thought her children would be like her, proving themselves at others' expense while setting the stage for the transmission of envy and jealousy from one generation to the next.

Maternal destructiveness can also be a protection against maternal destructiveness. Many women contemplate killing themselves, or their children, in order to avoid the wrath of their mothers. It is not unusual for women to give birth and then beg their mothers not to kill them (Rheingold, 1967).

If we think of three or more generations of mother-child relations, suicide, sterility, miscarriage, and madness do not only stem from the upward flow of envy and jealousy, the young towards the old. But we have to consider the downward deluge, the extremes of spite and vengeance by mothers who abhor their daughters' femininity and abominate their social successes (see Lomas, 1960).

The sacrifice of children in order to propitiate the mother's mother is a fact from antiquity onwards. Firstly there is literal abandonment. More often we can trace the transfer of care to alternative parents, as well as filicide. The latter has been recorded in the annals of the Irish Celts, Gauls, Scandinavians, and many Middle Eastern peoples. Inscriptions which identify the victims as the firstborn sons of noble families have been traced to Jericho 9,000 years ago. Thus Plutarch documented Carthaginian child sacrifice:

... with full knowledge and understanding they themselves offered up their own children, and those who had no children would buy little ones from poor people and cut their throats as if they were so many lambs or young birds; meanwhile the mother stood by without a tear or moan; but should she utter a single moan or let fall a single tear, she had to forfeit the money, and her child was sacrificed nevertheless ... (1928, p. 493)

Even now when boys and girls play London Bridge is Falling Down, and catch the child at the end of the game, they are acting out a

sacrifice to a river goddess (Bett, 1924). Of course, conflicts between new mothers and old do not begin with pregnancy or motherhood. They reach far back into childhood when the first hints of sexual maturity arouse envious rivalries, mother to daughter and vice versa. And the same hostilities extend far forward into adulthood when disparagements of childbearing become critiques of child rearing.

The Hollywood story of actress Joan Crawford and her adopted daughter, Christina, falls into a similar category. Both in the cinema and at home, this mother played the modern sorceress and malicious queen. Her wand was self-seeking infatuation and scornful detachment. At a wave it could turn Christina into a little princess at a film opening, or exile her to a convent run like a penal colony, for kissing a boy. The older Crawford was surreally envious and ruthlessly disruptive of her daughter's youth, sexuality, prospects, in fact, her entire personality (Crawford, 1979).

Crawford is not untypical. Many contemporary mothers, like the proverbial wicked witch, are adept at dramatic interventions: disrupting weddings, inducing chaos, and generally ruining the happiness of their daughters and sons-in-law, or sons and daughters-in-law. These mothers are not averse to casting spells, summoned from hearts fermenting with fury, including seducing the groom, fighting the guests, and dying from heart attacks.

A special interest of the malign enchantress is to transform boys into girls. In *Hansel and Gretel* it was not by chance that the old crone chose the boy to lock up and fatten for the kill. Crones and hags embody ancient fears of possessive, castrating mothers who appropriate their sons' phallic powers. Similar suspicions poison relations with wives, daughters, and women in general. In the ensuing struggles either the men manage to retain their identities (and faculties), or the women wind up with the broomsticks. Then the victims become unsexed, bitter, vengeful people—like witches.

Not surprisingly, many men are terrified of their mothers, who have been variously described as whirlpools, hurricanes, tornadoes, and typhoons or, from the animal world, treacherous cats, dogs, and snakes. One middle-aged writer confirmed these epithets during the course of recalling lifelong feelings of isolation and panic in the face of women. He grew up in New York in a household of feminists. His mother was dominating and oppressive. She seemed to have treated his father as an inferior species and married solely to get a son.

With a frustrating panache she enjoyed exhibiting her nude body while he was on the toilet or she in the bath. Yet, she avoided kissing, hugging, or other physical contact. Forever exciting, she belittled male bodies, said sex was dirty and males unacceptable. Her general attitude was that the penis and testicles were messy. The female genitals were much “neater” (Jaffe, 1968).

Unlike this person, the psychiatrist, Robert Stoller depicts a woman who was more subtle, yet equally devastating in her assault on her son’s body, gender, and personal identities. She created a transsexual (Stoller, 1984).

For “Mrs C” mothering was an addiction. She cared for her son constantly, rarely letting him out of her sight or touch. His body was hers. In the meantime she hated her husband and he agreed to stay out of the way.

As time passed, Mrs C fell in love with her son’s penis, which she called “the phallus of her flesh”, her rebirth. She recalled:

In regard to boys’ penises, I was very put out that God didn’t give me one of those. This started when I was four or five. I kidded myself and probably thought that maybe I would have one eventually. I can remember at night when I would say my prayers that I would wake up a boy the next morning ... (ibid., p. 113)

Stoller concludes that Mrs C was a bisexual mother with severe “envy and anger” towards males. By means of unlimited physical contact and other intimacies she promoted a form of pathological symbiotic identification between her son and herself. Her son was solely allowed to exist as “his mother’s feminised phallus”. As far as she was concerned he was her, not him, and existed mainly to cure her of emptiness. What she denied was her hatred of him as a male and separate person. Should he have tried to separate, to be himself, she would have wreaked revenge (ibid., p. 120).

Neither Mrs C nor the writer’s mother would be unfamiliar to the ancients, who would be quick to see in their destructive styles many aspects of the Indian goddess of destruction, Kali, or the Greek mother goddess, Cybele. Her consort was Attis, a devotee and lover, both a man and a boy. His sufferings were seductions quite similar to those I have just described. The writer was warned that if he used his penis for pleasure it would fall off. Cybele imposed a vow of chastity on