

VAYOMER ELIYAHU

Inspiration and Encouragement on Topics of Trust and Faith in Hashem Yisborach
Based on the Weekly Torah Portion

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In English

ערב שב"ק פרשת
Acharei-Kedoshim
שנת תשפ"ה

בס"ד

One Who Has Emunah Feels No Need to Take Revenge!

» The Prohibition of Nekimah and Netirah

The pasuk in this week's Parshah states: (19:18): "You shall not take revenge from nor bear a grudge against the members of your people. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am Hashem."

Rashi cites the words of Chazal: "He says to him, 'Lend me your sickle,' and he replies, 'No!' The next day, he says to him, 'Lend me your ax.' If he says to him, 'I will not lend it to you, just as you did not lend to me!' this constitutes revenge. And what constitutes 'bearing a grudge?' He says to him, 'Lend me your ax,' and he replies, 'No!' Then the next day, he says to him, 'Lend me your sickle.' If he says to him, 'Here it is for you. I am not like you, who did not lend me!' this constitutes 'bearing a grudge,' for he keeps the hatred in his heart, even though he does not take revenge."

The Mesilas Yesharim (Perek 11) writes that the desire for revenge and bearing a grudge are natural feelings in a person's heart. Therefore, the Torah warns us not to seek revenge. He writes that vengeance is the natural desire to refrain from doing good to someone who refused to do good for him or who committed wrong to him. Bearing a grudge is to remind the wrongdoer of the wrong he committed to him while one is doing good to him. He states that the yeitzer stokes the heart, seeking constantly to leave at least some remembrance of the wrong done to him. The Torah therefore stated a general principle which includes everything: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Vayikra 19:18) - "as yourself", with no difference whatsoever, "as yourself" without any strategies and ploys, literally "as yourself".

The Mesilas Yesharim had previously stated: "Hatred and vengeance are likewise exceedingly difficult for the mocked heart of human beings to escape from. For a human being strongly feels insults and he experiences great pain therein. Revenge is then sweeter to him than honey for it alone is his peace. Therefore, for one to have the strength to relinquish what his nature impels him to and to overlook the wronging, not hating the one who ignited hatred in his heart, not exacting vengeance when he has the opportunity to do so nor bearing a grudge

against him, but rather to forget the whole incident and remove it from his heart as if it had never happened - he is mighty and courageous.

"**Such** forbearance is easy only to the ministering angels who do not have among them these traits, but not to human beings 'who dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust' (Iyov 4:19). But it is a decree of the King."

On the verse "The voice of Hashem is with power", The Mechilta (Parshas Yisro) says: "It is within the power of every individual." We know that Hashem never demands anything of us that is beyond our abilities. If the Mesilas Yesharim says that this matter is easy for Heavenly angels and is demanded of every person, we can discern what a great treasure trove of strength exists in the heart of every single Jew to be able to overcome his nature and love his friend literally like himself.

Rav Elya Lopian zt"l (in Lev Eliyahu) writes: "One should not err and say that this is only an extra measure of piety. Rather, it is a positive and negative commandment – the positive command to love one's friend like oneself and the negative command not to take revenge or bear a grudge. As the Mesilas Yesharim states, the command is to love one's friend literally like himself and the negative command is not to take revenge as if no wrong had been done to you at all. You must consider the one who wronged you like your best friend and love him as you do yourself. Hashem demands this of every Jew, with no exceptions. It is amazing to contemplate this and see how great the powers that Hashem gave every Jew truly are."

» "Vengeance is Sweeter Than Honey." How Can One be Expected Not to Want It?

How can one reach the level of being above the natural inclination to desire vengeance against one who wronged him? "Vengeance is sweeter than honey" and, as the Mesilas Yesharim writes, it is only natural for one to want to get even with someone who harmed him. How can one overcome this natural tendency?

The Chinuch (Mitzvah 241) states: "A person should know that everything that befalls him,

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both good and bad, all comes from Hashem. Nothing can happen without the will of Hashem. Therefore, when someone hurts him or pains him, one should know that his own actions were the cause of his problems. And he should not think about taking revenge against his antagonist because he did not harm him. Rather, his own sins harmed him, as Dovid Hamelech said after being cursed by Shimi ben Geira (2 Shmuel 16): ‘Let him be, let him curse, for Hashem has told him to’.”

Rav Yechezkel Levenstein zt”l explains the words of Chazal that: “Torah scholars bring peace into the world.” He explains that Torah scholars are always on the level of understanding that everything that occurs comes from Hashem. Even when someone wrongs them, they know that this person is not the one that is harming them. They know it is all from Above and their antagonist is only the tool that is being used by Heaven. He is merely like the mailman delivering a letter to him which contains bad news.

Of course, one would be foolish to be upset at the mailman for delivering the bad news since he is merely the messenger. So too, even when Torah scholars’ friends hurt them, they don’t become upset at their friend and they don’t get into a fight because they know the friend is merely a messenger. In this way, Torah scholars increase peace in the world and reduce strife between man and his fellow man.

Therefore, our *avodah* must be to strengthens our faith that everything comes from Heaven. If one does this, he will not be upset at his friend for hurting him in any way, and he will be able to repay his badness with kindness.

This is also seen from the verse (Tehilim 41:6-11) where Dovid says: “My enemies speak evil of me; “When will he die and his name be lost?... But You, Hashem, be gracious to me and raise me up, so that I may repay them.” Rav Sadya Gaon explains (quoted by the Radak) that Dovid wished to repay them good for bad. He thus states on the next verse: “With this (by repaying good for bad) I shall know that You desired me.” He writes that this is the command of Hashem not to take revenge or bear a grudge.

We can now understand why the Torah places the command to love one’s friend like himself right after the prohibition to take revenge or bear a grudge. The Torah is telling us that one may not take revenge or bear a grudge. If one would claim: But he wronged me! The

Torah’s response is that you must love him like yourself. By loving him you will automatically remove the hatred between you and replace it with love.

If you would ask how it’s possible to love him after he hurt you, the verse concludes: “I am Hashem” – I am the One behind everything that occurred and your friend was merely a messenger. Therefore, you have no reason to hate him.

Having said all this, there still is a deeper point to address. While it is certainly true that having *emunah* that everything comes from Hashem will prevent a person from seeking revenge against his friend, the fact remains that one may still feel hatred towards his friend who wronged him, as he knows that his friend has *bechirah* and chose to do what he did out of his own free will. It would seem that to overcome this natural anger, one needs to be on an even higher level of *emunah*.

» **Yosef Hatzadik Was Not Affected at All by His Impure Surroundings!**

We may wonder how Yosef Hatzadik managed to retain his tremendous righteousness despite the fact that he lived for so many years in an impure environment.

He was sent down to a strange land when he was just a lad of 17. He found himself surrounded by idol worshippers, in a land sunken in deep depravity. The negative influence of such a place is beyond description. In fact, we find how negative an influence such a place can have from a Medrash about the holy Moshe Rabenu.

The verse states (Shemos 2:21): “And Moshe consented to stay with the man (Yisro).” The Yalkut Shimon remarkably states that the term “Moshe consented” (Vayoele Moshe) is a euphemism for making a vow. The Yalkut explains that Moshe amade a vow to Yisro at that time that he would allow one of his sons to be raised as an idol worshipper.

Sefer Michtav M’Eliyahu (Chelek Bais) uses this Medrash to stress how much influence a location can have on a person. The impure influences of the land of Midyan even affected Moshe Rabenu! It is thus certain that a 17-year-old boy would be affected by his impure surroundings. The Medrash Rabba does, in fact, relate that when the Shevatim first came down to Egypt, they searched for Yosef in the streets and banquet halls, meaning they only

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expected to find him in such places of depravity.

The Sefarim Hakedoshim explain that the answer to this is found in Yosef's words: "I was sent to Egypt before you by G-d for sustenance." A great lesson in serving Hashem is found in these words. One who arrives in a place simply to dwell there cannot be compared to someone who arrives in a place with the feeling that he is there on a mission from Hashem.

When one goes somewhere simply to live there, he is in danger of being influenced negatively by his surroundings. But when one feels that he was sent to that place on a mission from Above, not only will he not be negatively influenced by his surroundings, he actually will influence his surroundings for the better. He will improve in all areas of Torah and spirituality, while also helping those around him improve.

Yosef told his brothers: I am in this situation today because I was sent here as an agent to do a mission from Hashem. That mission was to provide sustenance for the people of the land and for you. We know that people on a mission to perform a mitzvah are never harmed. And, furthermore, they only improve in *emunah* and trust in Hashem, and have a powerful influence on all those around them.

We can now readily understand how Yosef could reach a level of having no complaints at all against his brothers. On the contrary, he actually felt a debt of gratitude to them.

The Mashgiach Rav Yeruchim Levovitz zt"l (Da'as Torah, Chelek Haburim) explains that Yosef made light of all the bad that done to him and explained how so much good came out of it to such an extent that it seemed as if he was saying that he may have been the one who caused the brothers to harm him, and he felt the need to placate and appease them.

This is because he felt that his whole life was a mission sent to him directly from Hashem. Therefore, whatever Hashem sent his way he accepted with joy and heart full of willingness to accept the new mission. He accepted the fact that whatever Hashem does to him is for the good, and he felt as if no bad things had ever occurred to him. Therefore, he did not have any anger towards his brothers as he believed that they did no harm to him at all -for it was all merely part of the mission that Hashem had assigned to him.

>> Yosef's Message to His Father

The Sefarim Hakedoshim emphasize an important lesson we see from the words of comfort Yosef told his brothers. They note that he stressed the positive that came out of the ordeal as the purpose for it all to occur. In this way, he made it clear that he has no complaints against them because there was a reason why everything had to happen as it did.

The Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh (Bereishis 45:5) explains Yosef's words by saying that Yosef was telling his brothers that he knew they were saddened by what they had done, and he told them not to be upset because he had no complaints against them. He then said: "You did not send me here – for it was Hashem." Yosef was telling them that they should not think he had any hatred towards them for what they had done to him. He said that now that we have seen the outcome of his being sent down to Egypt, we know that the events were from Hashem, and you were merely His messengers. Therefore, there is no reason to harbor any hatred or feel any less brotherliness towards you."

The Maharal dwells on this point in his Sefer Gevuras Hashem (Perek 10). He writes: "Yosef Hatzadik hinted to Yaakov Avinu not to punish his other sons for selling him since it was a Heavenly decree that this needed to occur in order that they descend to Egypt. This is stated in the verse (Bereishis 45): 'And to his father he sent like this 10 donkeys carrying from the best of Egypt.' The verse says he 'sent like this', which means that he specifically sent this quantity of 10. What is the significance of sending exactly 10?"

"The explanation is that Yosef was telling his father that the 10 Shevatim who sold him were nothing more than the donkey that carried him down to Egypt. Just as a donkey carries a load but has no idea what he actually is carrying or why, it merely carries whatever load its master places upon it, so too the Shevatim carried out the sale but did not really know what they were doing. In actuality, they were only doing what had been decreed by Hashem Yisborach. Hashem had already decreed that they should descend to Egypt, and the sale was merely the means to get them to go down to Egypt. Even though their main reason for selling Yosef was because of their hatred for him, the real reason was to cause Yaakov to go down to Egypt.

The Chazon Ish (Orech Chaim 56:4) writes: "The way of the Torah is to be at peace with all people. A smart man certainly would never be angry at an emotionally ill person who yelled at him. He also should not be angry at or seek revenge against a 'spiritually unwell' person who yells at him out of a lack of refinement and control. There is absolutely no difference between a mentally ill man and a wicked man, so one should not become angry at either of them."

The Pachad Yitzchok (Michtavim 43) explains the Chazon Ish to be saying that one should never seek revenge because he should realize that people who harm him are simply acting out Hashem's decree. Just as a mentally unstable person cannot control his actions, so too a wicked person is not in control of what he does. He is simply acting as an instrument for Hashem to put his decree into effect. If one accepts this, it will be easy to remain at peace with all people.