

DO NOT TAKE REVENGE OR BEAR A GRUDGE PART 2

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

Last week we began discussing the prohibitions of taking revenge and bearing a grudge; when a person causes us pain we are prohibited from actively taking revenge and even feeling enmity in our hearts. One could ask, "what is wrong with taking revenge from someone who wronged us - does he not deserve retribution for his actions?!" The Sefer HaChinuch¹ answers this question by teaching us a fundamental principle in Judaism: Everything that happens to us is a result of Divine Providence. G-d did not just create the world and then leave it to its own devices. G-d constantly oversees the world, directing events and nothing happens without His awareness and intervention. There is no such thing as 'co-incidence'. Consequently, if a person causes us pain then it happened for a reason and it is futile, and indeed forbidden, to feel resentful towards the guilty party.

One may ask that this seems to contradict another fundamental Jewish concept; free will. We have the ability to choose between right and wrong, consequently we are responsible for our actions. How can the Sefer HaChinuch say that when a person causes us pain it was all from G-d - G-d did not force that person to harm us, he had the ability to choose to act however he pleased! The answer is that he did indeed have free will to do the wrong thing, however if Hashem did not want that thing to happen to us then He could have easily prevented it from actually taking place. The fact that He allowed it to take place means that He wanted it to happen. It is true that the aggressor will have to bear responsibility for his actions, however that should not be our concern - what is relevant to us is that G-d allowed this incident to occur - He is speaking to us through His Providence.

The idea that Hashem sometimes deliberately places us in unpleasant situation leads to another problem - G-d is all loving, why would He want such things to happen to us? We are put on this world to grow as people - to improve our character traits, develop healthy relationships with G-d and His creations, and to fulfill our potential. Sometimes we stumble in these tasks. In response, G-d sometimes deems it appropriate to send us a 'wake-up call' - a message that is intended to cause us to introspect and assess whether we could improve our behavior in some way.

If we can approach life with the attitude that everything that happens to us, does so for a reason, then we can accept the tribulations that life has to offer with far more equanimity and use them as opportunities to grow into better people.

¹ Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzva 241. He lived about 800 years ago and wrote a book in which he discusses all the commandments in the Torah.

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