

DO NOT TAKE REVENGE OR BEAR A GRUDGE PART 3

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

Last week we began discussing the reasons for the commands to not take revenge or bear a grudge. We discussed the opinion of the Sefer HaChinuch about the reason for the prohibitions to take revenge or bear a grudge. He wrote that if a person causes us pain of some kind then that is a result of Divine Providence and it is futile to feel resentment towards him. The other commentaries offer other explanations:

The Rambam (Maimonides), the great commentator who lived around 1000 years ago, writes simply that the matters over which we may feel vengeful are, in truth, not important enough to get upset about. There are far more important matters in life than when a person wrongs us - at the time we may feel very upset, but later on we realize that what he did was really not of such significance.

The author of the great ethical work, 'Orchos Tzadikim' writes that to take revenge is forbidden because it demonstrates the characteristic of cruelty - trying to cause harm to another human being is cruel and unjustified even if he caused us harm.

Another possible explanation of this prohibition is that if everyone were to continually take revenge on each other then society will become very unpleasant, characterized by tense relationships and a feeling of distrust. We can all make mistakes and occasionally cause harm to other people - this alone need to cause great dissension. However, if we take strong action every time we felt wronged then society would constantly be characterized by conflict and discord. Consequently the Torah instructs us to try to be forgiving and judge others favorably, thereby maintaining a society of healthy relationships.

The commands to not take revenge or bear a grudge are not easy - we can easily feel slighted by other people's behavior towards us. However, like all commandments Hashem does not demand anything that is beyond our capability. By working on our character traits we can reach the level where petty incidents do not affect us and we can forgive people, recognizing that they are humans and all humans make mistakes.

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