

You shall not take revenge, and you shall not bear a grudge against members of Your people. (19:18)

The Torah forbids us from taking revenge in any shape or form. Is revenge really that bad? For one individual, it might give him closure to an ordeal which he wants to forget. Another just might desire the fellow who harmed him to feel some of the emotional and physical pain which he had experienced. Some might even consider revenge to be sweet. What they do not realize is that revenge is obsessive and destructive, taking its toll on both parties. The old proverb which states, "He who seeks revenge should prepare two graves," is very true. Yet, should revenge be prohibited?

In his *sefer*, *Devarim Achadim*, the *Chida*, *zi*, quotes the **Kli Yakar** who explains this concept with a parable. A young child was busy building a large castle out of sand. The edifice he created was outstanding. The child was quite adept and creative. The many hours he had spent laboring in the heat had produced a result that filled him with great pride. We can, therefore, imagine the pain and anger he felt when his older brother walked by and, with the sweep of his hand, destroyed his younger brother's lavish creation.

The little boy went crying to his father, complaining bitterly concerning his older brother's act of "treachery." How could he do this to him? The child demanded that his father punish the older boy to the fullest measure of discipline. No compassion – he demanded the worst.

The father was no fool. He was acutely aware that the massive piece of architecture which was destroyed by his older son was nothing more than a sand castle. In a materialistic world, sand does not play a major role. Sand is plentiful, and anything made from it has zero permanence. The younger son was playing, not building. His edifice was no more than the product of a deft hand and an active imagination. There was nothing real to this castle – but sand. The father could hardly accede to his younger son's wishes for punishment and revenge.

The lesson to be derived from this parable is probably already clear to everyone. Life in this world is much like sand castles. We endeavor and build; we think that we have achieved, that we are actually in control. We are, however, very wrong. Our accomplishments, our successes, our institutions and establishments are all sand castles. Nothing in this world is of lasting value, except, of course, Torah and *mitzvos*, and those endeavors that promote Torah and *mitzvos*. In our material/physical dimension, nothing really counts, because nothing is real. If someone infringes on what we view to be our "turf," they have only encroached themselves on our sand castles. They have not hurt us, because we have nothing. Taking revenge bespeaks an attitude that is antithetical to Torah. Nothing has been gained: thus, nothing has been lost.

Sadly, many of us have stigmatized vision, seeing only what we want to see, mistaking imagination for reality. Our creations are not much more than a dream; our endeavors, unless anchored in

spiritual achievement, are meaningless. Everything falls under the category of sand castles.

The *Kli Yakar* applies this parable to explain why, when we see someone who was, in some manner, offended by his fellow man crying out to Hashem with a *taaneh*, complaint. "Hashem! Punish him for what he did to me," Hashem does not respond. It is almost as if Hashem is ignoring him. True, he might be justified, and his complaint valid. Yet, Hashem still does not answer. Why? Hashem is like the father who listens to his young child complain about the actions of his older brother. The father understands that there really was no sustainable damage. It was only sand castles.

We often meet individuals who have reneged religious observance with the excuse: "I have issues with religion; I have questions concerning G-d; I cannot reconcile some of the occurrences that have taken place throughout history." Who do they think they are to have questions of G-d, complaints and issues with religion? They are no different than the child who built a sand castle and whose world came crashing down when his castle was destroyed by his older brother.

I recently came across a story printed in a popular weekly periodical. The story was adapted from an Israeli Torah publication. While this is certainly not the only story of its nature, I am using it because in some way it involves the *Chida*. The episode took place last fall when a young couple, who direct a Jewish outreach center in *Yerushalayim*, were returning to the Holy Land. Upon landing and retrieving their luggage, they approached the dispatcher for a *sheirut*, a company which provides shared rides from Ben Gurion airport to *Yerushalayim*. It was early in the morning, with minimal crowds, and the dispatcher directed the couple to a waiting mini-van that was slowly filling up with passengers. When they approached the driver, he said that he would not be going to the section of *Yerushalayim* where they lived. They should wait for the next *sheirut*. Rather than get into an argument with the driver, the couple returned to the dispatcher and asked for the next van. The dispatcher would not hear of it. He had told them to go with that certain driver. He had no choice but to take them to their apartment.

They returned to the van, loaded their luggage and took their seats. The driver was not going to be very happy. The very next passenger to board the van was a young Israeli named Yoav, who had just returned from Barcelona. He was in *Eretz Yisrael* for a four day visit with his parents. His father had fallen ill, and he felt it prudent to come home.

The young man sat down next to the rabbi and almost immediately requested, "Rabbi, tell me a *dvar Torah*, Torah thought." Rabbis love sharing Torah thoughts, and what better way can there be to strike up a conversation? Since they had both just landed in the Holy Land, it made sense to focus on the unique *Hashgachah Pratis*, Divine Providence, which the Almighty exercises in *Eretz Yisrael*. This does not negate in any way from Hashem's Divine Providence *vis-à-vis* the rest of the world; it is just that *Eretz Yisrael* is, after all, unique and special. The Torah describes the Holy Land as *Eretz asher einei Hashem Elokecha bah meireishis ha'shanah ad acharis shanah*, "The land over which Hashem's eyes are watching from the beginning of the year until its

end” (*Devarim*). “This means,” explained the rabbi, “that the Almighty watches over the Holy Land far more directly than He does over the cities from which we have just arrived (New York and Barcelona).”

While the young man listened intently, he was quick to disagree. Apparently his disagreement seemed to be spurred on by personal issues which he had with the Holy Land and with G-d. “Statistics show that at least as many people are hurt or killed in *Eretz Yisrael* as the result of terror attacks as we note in other countries. Despite its miniscule size and limited population, the numbers are probably greater than in other countries. I would not call that Divine Providence,” the young man countered, almost with anger. “In fact, my best friend was killed in a terrorist attack.”

The rabbi explained that all is not what it seems. Events occur before our eyes that are definitely inexplicable – to us. This does not mean that there is no rationale. There certainly is. We are just not privy to it due to our limited ability to grasp. Everything that occurs is part of Hashem’s Divine Plan. As the rabbi was giving a discourse on our inability to grasp Hashem’s ways, he reminded himself of a story that had taken place ten years earlier.

“My wife and two of her friends went to visit a woman who had lost a son during the terror attack on the Number 14 bus in Yerushalayim. During their visit, they also met Moshe, a younger brother of the victim who related the following incredible story.

“On the fateful day that his brother had been killed, Moshe had been on a bus traveling to the north, as part of a school trip. As the bus moved smoothly along, Moshe dozed off and began to dream. Shlomo, the brother who had been killed, appeared to him in a dream clothed completely in white. He told him that he would soon be leaving this world and that he expected him to be there for their mother and grandmother, who would be heartbroken over the tragedy. Shlomo directed his brother to various places in their house where he had hidden certain valuable items. He concluded by saying that he would visit the family during the *shiva*, seven-day mourning period, appearing in the form of a butterfly.

“The bus stopped moving along, and Moshe woke up from his sleep. The dream that he had just experienced had left him in a state of confusion. Just then, one of the students asked the driver to put on the radio so that they could listen to some music. Exactly at that moment, the newscaster broke into the regular programming with a news alert. A terrorist attack had occurred in Yerushalayim. By the time Moshe reached his mother, she was on the way to the hospital, following a call from the police.

“Shortly after the funeral and the family began to sit *shiva*, a butterfly flew into the house and parked itself on a family portrait, staying there the entire week. At the end of the *shiva*, the butterfly flew upstairs to Shlomo’s bedroom, landed momentarily on his bed and then flew off, never to return.

“Obviously, the entire occurrence had shaken the family. When Moshe shared his dream with his mother, they all decided to visit a famous *Kabbalist* in Tzefas. Perhaps he could unravel the mystery. The *Kabbalist* told the family, who happen to be descendants of the *Chida*, that Shlomo was a *gilgul*, reincarnation, of the *neshamah*, soul, of the *Chida*’s father. Therefore, his life was short, since the soul of the *Chida*’s father required very few corrections to achieve perfection.”

The rabbi concluded his story to the young traveler from Barcelona by underscoring the notion that, if we take a penetrating look at life experiences, we will see Hashem’s Divine Hand manipulating events. Even at a time of grave tragedy, Hashem’s guiding hand is present. The young man had entered the *sheirut* a doubter, but left a faithful believer in Hashem. He kept repeating over and over that he was in shock. Finally, the rabbi asked him why he was shocked. Did everything not make sense?

“You do not seem to understand. This story which you related struck home. Shlomo was my best friend. I have been doubting Hashem ever since that tragic day when his life was snuffed out. His untimely death undermined my belief.”

Looking back, they both saw Hashem’s Divine Providence. The rabbi was forced to return to the *sheirut*, where he met the young man, who requested a *dvar Torah*, which all started with Hashem’s watchful eye on *Eretz Yisrael*. We must remember: Life is filled with what appears to be questions; serious questions. For the believer there are no questions; for the non-believer, there are no answers.