**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

**SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA**

**PARASHAT VAYECHI**

SICHA OF HARAV YAAKOV MEDAN

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

In memory of Rebbetzin Miriam Wise, Miriam bat Yitzchak Ve-Rivka *z”l*,

whose yahrtzeit is on 9 Tevet

by Rav Yitzchak and Stefanie Etshalom

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

Revenge

Translated by Kaeren Fish

And Yosef said to his brothers, “Come near to me, I pray you.” And they came near, and he said, “I am Yosef, your brother, whom you sold to Egypt. Now therefore do not be grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For these two years there has been famine in the land, and there are five more years in which there shall be neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve a remnant for you in the earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me here, but God, and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. Hasten and go up to my father and say to him: Thus says your son, Yosef: God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. And you shall dwell in the land of Goshen and you shall be near me – you, and your children, and your children’s children, and your flocks and your herds, and all that you have. And there I will nourish you, for there are still five years of famine, lest you and your household and all that you have, come to poverty.” (*Bereishit* 45:4-11)

And when Yosef’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “What if Yosef will hate us, and will pay us back the evil which we did to him?” And they sent word urgently to Yosef, saying, “Your father commanded before he died, saying, ‘So shall you say to Yosef: Forgive, I pray you now, the trespass of your brothers and their sin, for they did evil to you.’ And now, we pray you, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father.” And Yosef wept when they spoke to him. And his brothers went and fell down before his face, and they said, “Behold, we are your servants.” And Yosef said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? For your part – you thought evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it to pass at this day that many people should be saved alive. Now therefore do not fear; I will nourish you, and your little ones.” And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. (*Bereishit* 50:15-21)

There is no ignoring the remarkable fact that Yosef has no sense of vengeance. His brothers’ former hatred of him, their rejection of him, their casting him into the pit, the decade and more than he spent in prison in Egypt – he dismisses all of this upon meeting his brothers, as though it never happened. In *Parashat Vayigash* (the first quote above), this remarkable quality seems to reflect deference to Yaakov, just as Esav would make no effort to kill his brother so long as Yitzchak was alive. However, in *Parashat Vayechi* (the second quote above), we discover that Yosef is entirely unlike Esav. He shows nothing but benevolence and forgiveness towards his brothers, even after Yaakov’s death.

Another character who shows a similar trait is David. He, too, is the youngest of his brothers, and when they all attend the festive gathering with Shemuel at their home, David is still outside with the sheep; no-one calls him (*Shemuel I* 16:4-13). Eliav, his eldest brother, heaps scorn on him at the Valley of Ela when David is sent there by his father to check on his brothers’ welfare (ibid. 17:13-28). But when trouble arrives and Shaul persecutes not only David but also his family, his parents and brothers take refuge with him (ibid. 22:1). David firmly refuses the advice of those around him to exact revenge on Shaul for his betrayal and persecution of him (ibid. 24:4-15; 26:8-12). He is ready to forge a covenant with Avner, who has continuously pursued him up, and he is vehement in his denunciation of Yoav and Avishai, who later killed Avner (*Shemuel* II 3:12-37). Similarly, he shows benevolence towards Ish Boshet, son of Shaul, who rules over a kingdom that his hostile to his own (ibid. 4:9-12). He does not raise a finger against Shim’i ben Gera, who curses him (ibid. 16:10-13; 19:17-24), and he seeks no revenge against Avshalom, who rebels against him (ibid. 18:5; 19:1-7). He takes Amasa son of Yeter as captain of his army, despite the fact that Amasa previously headed the army that rebelled again him under Avshalom’s leadership (ibid. 19:14).

Another figure in whom this characteristic is prominently manifest is the “servant of God” in the prophecy of Yishayahu.[[1]](#footnote-1) According to many of the commentators, as well as the *gemara* in *Masekhet Sanhedrin*, this prophecy speaks of the *Mashiach*. He, too, is persecuted and scorned by all, but he prays to God for all of them, seeking to excuse them:

Behold, My servant shall prosper, he shall be exalted and extolled and be very high… He had no form or comeliness, that we should look at him, and no countenance, that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected of men, a man of pains and acquainted with sickness, and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we did not hold him in esteem. But in truth he has borne our sickness and endured our pains, yet we regarded him as stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded because of our transgressions, bruised because of our iniquities; his sufferings were in order that we might have peace, and by his injury we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall upon him. He was oppressed, but he humbled himself and did not open his mouth; as a lamb which is brought to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and false judgment he was led away, and of his generation who considered? For he was cut off out of the land of the living, for the transgression of the people to whom the stroke was due. For they made his grave among the wicked and his tomb among the rich, because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. But it pleased the Lord to crush him by disease; if his soul shall consider it a recompense for guilt, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the purpose of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see the travail of his soul, he shall be sated with seeing; by his knowledge my servant justified the righteous One to the many, and bore their iniquities. Surely I will give him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he has poured out his soul to death and was numbered with transgressors, but he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (*Yishayahu* 52:13 – 53:12)

Yosef, David, and Mashiach are linked by the quality of establishing the kingdom of Israel. Is there a connection between the kingdom of Israel and nullification of the natural quality of revenge? Before addressing this question, let us consider the essence of the nullification of revenge in each of these three personalities.

In the case of Yosef, there is a very clear reason for his lack of vengeance – his complete faith that all that has happened to him has not really been brought about by mortal hands, but rather represents God’s will and His plan to help and save Yaakov’s household. All that he has suffered along the way has merely been the means of bringing about that goal. Everything that has been done to him by others was meant, unbeknownst to them, to advance God’s plan.

This approach is described in the *mussar* works as one of the ways of overcoming the desire for revenge, which is prohibited by the Torah. A person’s sense of responsibility for every one of his actions, and criticism for any transgression, is inwardly directed and limited to his view of himself. When it comes to others, a person must remember that what happens is guided by God, and he must humbly accept God’s decisions and His way of running the world.

If we follow David’s rise to power, we discover what seems to be the reason that in his case, too, revenge is not part of his thinking. Throughout David’s life, he pursues a quest for internal peace that will strengthen the nation in its struggle to survive. By setting aside any thought of personal revenge, he succeeds in uniting the tribes of Israel through his covenant with Avner, his erstwhile enemy; in a similar way, he achieves unity by virtue of his covenant with Amasa, captain of Avshalom’s army. This would also seem to be the principal reason for his behavior towards Shaul. In David’s attitude towards Shim’i ben Gera and Avshalom, we see his quality of submissive acceptance; he accepts God’s verdict and the decree of Natan, the prophet, following David’s sin with Batsheva.

Yishayahu’s prophecy concerning the servant of God reveals, to my mind, yet another trait in this king who does not take revenge. The prophecy radiates a boundless love of Israel – and perhaps love of mankind. It also depicts very clearly the nullification of the subjective personality of the servant of God – this, too, without bounds. His own fate is of no interest to him; he cares only about the fate of the collective.

Indeed, in his *Messilat Yesharim*, *Sha’ar Ha-Chassidut* (ch. 19), Ramchal writes as follows:

For the Holy One, blessed be He, only loves he who loves Israel, and the more a person's love of Israel increases, the more the Holy One, blessed be He, increases love for him. These are the true shepherds of Israel, who the Holy One, blessed be He, greatly desired in, who sacrifice themselves for His sheep, seeking and striving for their peace and well-being in all matters, always standing in the breach to pray for them to annul the harsh decrees and to open for them the gates of blessings.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The connection between nullification of revenge and kingship pertains first and foremost to the great danger that arises from the possibility of harnessing the almost unlimited power of the king to the fiery revenge that may burn in him. As we find in *Mishlei* (16:14), “The wrath of a king is as messengers of death…”

This may explain the reason for the *mitzva*:

Fathers shall not be put to death for children, neither shall children be put to death for fathers; every man shall be put to death for his own sin. (*Devarim* 24:16)

Amatzia, king of Yehuda, understood this *mitzva* as a reference to judgment by the king, not Torah justice. When it comes to Torah justice, who would ever think of stoning the son of a man who desecrated Shabbat, rather than the sinner himself? How would we ever arrive at the idea of putting to death the father of a man who committed adultery, rather than the offender himself?

Now it came to pass, when the kingdom was established to him, that he slew his servants who had killed the king, his father. But he did not slay their children, but did as it is written in the Torah, in the Book of Moshe, where the Lord commanded, saying, “Fathers shall not die for children, nor shall children die for fathers, but every man shall die for his own sin.” (*Divrei Ha-Yamim* II 25:3-4)

The drive for revenge on the part of any king, in conjunction with his power, could lead to indiscriminate killing on a horrific scale. Through the figures we have discussed here, the Torah seems to be telling the king that he must rein in his inclination towards revenge.

However, the qualities of the three personalities above are also related to kingship. The king must know that he is nothing but a pawn in the hand of the King of kings; he is merely God’s emissary, as Yosef was well aware. Like David, the king must strive to build and strengthen the fortitude and unity of his nation by forging internal unity and peace at all costs. Also, as the Ramchal expounds, the king, as God’s servant, must have no personal motive; his entire goal and purpose should be the good of the nation and enhancing the glory of God.

1. Iyov also prays for those who pursue him and scorn him during his time of trouble (*Iyov* 42:8-10), but the scope of our discussion does not allow for further elaboration in his regard. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Translation at <https://dafyomireview.com/mesilat.php?d=22&e=0#com> . [↑](#footnote-ref-2)