YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Student summaries of sichot of the Roshei Yeshiva**

**Parashat Vayechi**

**“You Shall Not Take Vengeance, Nor Bear Any Grudge”**

**Sicha of HarAV Yaakov Medan**

Adapted by Itai Weiss

Translated by David Strauss

And when Yosef's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said: “It may be that Yosef will hate us and will fully requite us all the evil which we did to him.” And they sent a message to Yosef, saying: “Your father did command before he died, saying: So shall you say to Yosef: Forgive, I pray you now, the transgression of your brothers, and their sin, for that they did to you evil. And now, we pray you, forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.” And Yosef wept when they spoke to him. And his brothers also went and fell down before his face; and they said: “Behold, we are your bondmen.”

And Yosef said to them: “Fear not; for am I in the place of God? And as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear you not; I will sustain you and your little ones.” And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. (*Bereishit* 50:15-21)

The brothers fear that Yosef will take revenge against them for the evil that they did to him, and they therefore alter the truth in order to maintain the peace. In response, Yosef demonstrates true nobility of spirit, explaining to his brothers that they have nothing to fear from him and even comforting them and talking to their hearts. Why do the brothers fear Yosef's revenge, after he already explicitly reassured them when he revealed himself to them: "It was not you who sent me here, but God" (*Bereishit* 45:8)?

This story takes us back in the book of *Bereishit* to another person who did not take revenge against his brother – namely, Esav. The respect that Esav showed his father is not reflected only in the fact that he fed his father with delicacies, while dressed in fine clothing. In fact, the main expression of the honor that Esav showed his father was that he put off exacting revenge from his brother Yaakov:

And Esav hated Yaakov because of the blessing with which his father blessed him. And Esav said in his heart: “Let the days of mourning for my father be at hand; then will I slay my brother Yaakov.” (*Berakhot* 27:41)

Esav had many reasons to carry out his plan. He was accustomed to bloodshed and he felt cheated, and rightfully so. However, he set aside his own desires because of his father Yitzchak. It would appear that Rivka and Yaakov's suspicions were unfounded – Rivka when she instructed Yaakov to flee, and Yaakov when he feared his encounter with Esav – for at those times Yitzchak was still alive and there should have been no concern that Esav would try to kill Yaakov.

Let's return to the brothers. Yosef was a hated brother from his childhood; his brothers cast him into a pit, sold him, and created a situation such that until he reached the age of thirty, he did not really live. Even after he became Pharaoh's viceroy, it is difficult to say that his life was especially good in the midst of Egyptian society. The brothers have good grounds to believe that precisely now, after Yaakov's death, Yosef would carry out revenge, for he would no longer aggrieve Yaakov by doing so. Once again, however, Yosef proves to them that he has no anger for them in his heart.

Two elements underlie Yosef's refraining from exacting revenge: The first is Yosef's recognition of the fact that the responsibility for what happens in this world is shared by the people who play an active role in the world and God. When a person performs an evil deed, he cannot blame God for his action, but when a man is wronged, he must acknowledge the fact that God has a part in what happens in the world: "You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good" (*Bereishit* 50:20). The second element is Yosef's recognition that man is capable of influencing God's governance of the world. As the Ramchal writes:

This is obvious, for the Holy One, blessed be He, repays measure for measure (*Sanhedrin* 90a). One who is merciful and acts with lovingkindness towards others will also be shown mercy when he is judged, and his transgressions will be pardoned with lovingkindness. Such pardon is justice, a measure commensurate with his behavior. As *Chazal* said (*Rosh Hashana* 17a): "Whose sins does He forgive? The sins of one who overlooks transgressions [committed against him]." (*Mesilat Yesharim*, chapter 19)

The Kabbala deals extensively with the relationship between God and His attributes and the difference between the two. Among other things, God’s attributes are acted upon by two factors: God Himself and man. Each of us needs the attribute of mercy in his life, and whether we are shown mercy depends also on our own ability to practice kindness and mercy.

There are three other people in the Bible who clearly demonstrate the trait of refraining from taking revenge and bearing a grudge. We will point out the unique aspects of this trait in each of them.

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King David grew up in an atmosphere similar to that of Yosef. When the Cinderella story of choosing a king from among the sons of Yishai takes place, David is sent to the flocks. When David goes down to see how his brothers are faring, Eliav says to him: "I know your presumptuousness and the naughtiness of your heart; for you come down that you might see the battle" (I *Shemuel* 17:28). This is a small window indicating David's status in his home. Despite this attitude, later in his life, when David has accumulated strength and his family is in danger when Shaul is pursuing him, David spreads his protection over his family.

Furthermore, throughout his life, David yields and shows no interest in hurting the people who have hurt him, including Shaul, Avner, Amasa, Ish Boshet, and Avshalom.

It seems that the reason that David does not harm these people is different from the reason that Yosef refrains from taking revenge. David did this not because of his understanding of the role of providence, but because of his desire to preserve the unity of the people, even at the cost of personal injury.

The *Mashiach* will act out of a similar motive:

Behold, My servant shall prosper, he shall be exalted and lifted up and shall be very high. According as many were appalled at you – so marred was his visage unlike that of a man, and his form unlike that of the sons of men – so shall he startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which had not been told them shall they see, and that which they had not heard shall they perceive. Who would have believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he shot up right forth as a sapling and as a root out of a dry ground; he had no form nor comeliness, that we should look upon him, nor beauty that we should delight in him. He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of pains and acquainted with disease, and as one from whom men hide their face; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely our diseases he did bear and our pains he carried; whereas we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded because of our transgressions, he was crushed because of our iniquities; the chastisement of our welfare was upon him, and with his stripes we were healed. (*Yeshayahu* 52:13-53:5)

The ability to make oneself small and be prepared to suffer for the people of Israel is the virtue of a leader, and especially of the messianic king. Here too we will cite the words of the Ramchal:

And Gideon was told: "Go with this might of yours" (*Shoftim* 6:14), for he pleaded the cause of Israel. For the Holy One, blessed be He, loves only one who loves Israel; and the more a person's love for Israel grows, the more the love of the Holy One, blessed be He, grows for him. These are the true shepherds of Israel, in whom the Holy One, blessed be He, takes great delight. For they devote themselves to His ﬂock. (*Mesilat Yesharim*, chapter 19)

The third person is Iyov. Iyov's friends verbally abuse him throughout the book, and he even tells them so. After God reveals Himself to Iyov, we see Iyov's kindness and lack of vengeance:

And it was so, that after the Lord had spoken these words to Iyov, the Lord said to Elifaz the Temanite: “My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of Me the thing that is right, as My servant Iyov has. Now therefore, take to you seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to My servant Iyov, and offer up for yourselves a burnt-offering; and My servant Iyov shall pray for you; for him will I accept, that I do not to you anything unseemly; for you have not spoken of Me the thing that is right, as my servant Iyov has.” So Elifaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuchite and Tzofar the Naamatite went and did according as the Lord commanded them; and the Lord accepted Iyov. (*Iyov* 42:7-10)

Iyov prays on behalf of his friends, saving them thereby from a punishment similar to the one that he had received.

Iyov teaches us an important lesson. When something bad happens to a person, he can fight on two fronts, and the battle with the one greatly weakens the battle with the other. A person can fight against the evil person, or he can fight against the evil. When a person fights against the evil person, the evil often moves over to his camp. Iyov chooses to fight the evil, and he wins:

And the Lord changed the fortune of Iyov, when he prayed for his friends; and the Lord gave Iyov twice as much as he had before. (*Iyov* 42:10)

(This *sicha* was delivered on *Parashat Vayechi* 5778 [2017].)