

What is the proper response to being wronged?

Tish'a B'Av

Saddest day on Jewish calendar. History full of catastrophic events that befell Jews on Tish'a B'Av (accidentally or intentionally):

-From Mishnah [Ta'anit 4:6]:

- The spies Moses sent to scout the Promised Land brought back a largely negative report which demoralized the Israelites,
- Both Temples destroyed (586 BCE and 70 CE),
- The Bar Kochba revolt against Rome failed in 135 CE when he was killed and the city of Betar was destroyed, and
- Jerusalem was razed a year later, and the Exile began.

-Since then...

- In 1095, the Pope began the Crusades. On the way to the Land of Israel, the Crusaders slaughtered 30-50% of the Jews of Europe.
- In 1242, 24 cartloads of handwritten Talmuds burned in Paris
- In 1290, Jews expelled from England
- In 1306, Jews expelled from France
- In 1492, Jews expelled from Spain, including my own ancestors
- In 1626, the false messiah Shabtai Tzvi was born. His apostasy he dashed the hopes of millions of Jews (one-third of the total) and severely disrupted their lives.
- In 1914, World War I began. It led to World War II and the death of 6 million Jews in the Holocaust, and facilitated Communist Revolution, spelling 70 years of darkness for Soviet Jews.
- In 1941, Nazis ordered the Final Solution: The Holocaust.

What should our attitude be towards the perpetrators of all these atrocities, and more generally towards anyone who has wronged us?

Five possible responses

1-Retaliating in kind. Do the same unto them. An eye for an eye.

2-Hate them, but take no action yet. Bide your time and secretly prepare for revenge.

3-Forgive them.

4-Love them.

5-Ignore them.

Let's examine them one by one.

1-Retaliation

Three times in Torah it appears we are told to retaliate in kind:

Ayin tachat ayin, shen tachat shen -- Eye for eye, tooth for tooth

1-Exodus:

...You shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. [Ex. 21:23-5]

2-Leviticus:

A fracture for a fracture, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Just as he inflicted an injury upon a person, so shall it be given to him. [Lev. 24:20]

3-Deuteronomy:

And you [shall have no] pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot. [Deut. 19:21]

Antisemites talk about our cruelty, our lack of compassion, our lust for revenge allegedly embodied in that law. There is only one problem with this criticism: There is no record of Judaism ever sanctioning doing this.

Oral Law: Injunction refers only to financial compensation. Its purpose is to set a limit to it: Do not ask for more than the value of an eye for the loss of an eye. The penalty must be proportional to the offense, not higher than the offense. The Mishna says:

One who injures another becomes liable for five things: damages, pain, medical expenses, incapacitation, and mental anguish.

-Damages: If he put out his eye, cut off his arm or broke his leg, the injured person is considered as if he were a slave being sold in the market place, and one must calculate how much he was worth before the injury and how much he is worth after the injury; [the difference is the damages to be paid]

-Pain: One must calculate how much a man of equal standing would require to be paid to undergo such pain.

- Medical expenses: If he has struck another, he is under obligation to pay medical expenses... If the wound was healed but reopened, healed again but reopened, he would still be under obligation to heal him. If, however, the wound had completely healed [even though it may have reopened much later] he would no longer be under obligation to heal him.
- Incapacitation: The wages lost during the period of illness must be reimbursed.
- Mental anguish: Must be calculated in accordance with the status of the offender and the offended. [Baba Kamma 83b]

The Gemara that follows the Mishna explains, with arguments that are quite clever:

- It says in Leviticus:

He who kills a beast shall make it good; beast for beast. [Lev. 24:18]

All agree that 'beast for beast' means monetary compensation; so it is for 'eye for eye'.

- It says in Numbers:

You shall not take monetary compensation from a murderer. He must be put to death. [Num. 35:31]

This implies that it is only from a murderer that you may not take compensation, whereas you may take compensation for other offenses, such as loss of body parts.

- It says in Leviticus:

You shall have only one standard of law, for you, for your countrymen, and for the stranger... [Lev. 24:22]

Therefore, "an eye for an eye" cannot mean actual retaliation, because if the eye of one was big and the eye of the other small, one weak and one strong, they would not be equivalent, and two standards of law would apply. So monetary compensation is implied. Money is the great equalizer.

-R. Shim'on bar Yochai says: If 'eye for eye' meant retaliation, what would you do if a blind man put out the eye of another man, or if a person missing both hands cut off the hand of another, or if a person missing both legs broke the leg of another? You could not physically retaliate in kind. Yet the law must be applied the same way to all. So it means monetary compensation.

- The School of R. Ishmael taught: The Torah says in Leviticus:

Just as he inflicted an injury upon a person, so shall it be given to him. [Lev. 24:20]

The word 'given' can apply only to monetary compensation.

-The School of R. Hiyya taught: The Torah says in Deuteronomy, 'Hand for hand', meaning something that is given from hand to hand, that is, money.

-Abbaye said [in the name of the School of Hezekiah]: It says in Exodus: 'life for life, eye for eye'. It does not say 'life *and eye* for eye'. If one retaliated in kind, the offender may die while being blinded. This would be unfair, and cannot be predicted or prevented, so monetary compensation is meant.

-R. Zebid said in the name of Raba: It says in Exodus, 'Wound for wound'. If retaliation were meant, a person who is delicate would suffer more pain than a person who is not delicate. This would be unfair, so monetary compensation is meant.

-R. Papa said in the name of Raba: It says in Exodus:
If men quarrel and one strikes the other... and forces him to stay in bed... then the offender ... shall pay for the loss of his victim's time, and shall [pay for] him to be thoroughly healed. [Ex. 21:18-19]
This refers explicitly to monetary compensation. Besides, flesh heals fast for some people but not for others, so retaliation would be unfair, and monetary compensation is meant.

-R. Ashi said: It says in Exodus:
...If one man's ox [kills] another man's ox, ...he shall surely pay ox for ox... [Ex. 21:35-6]
The word 'for' in 'he shall pay ox for ox' is the same as in 'eye for eye'. [Namely, '*Tachat*']. So just as in the first monetary compensation is implied ('he shall pay'), so it is in the second.

Final note: The primary aim of Jewish justice is restoration of the victim, not so much punishment of the guilty. Putting out the eye of the offender does not help the victim one bit, but financial compensation does. In the case of murder, no restoration of the victim is possible, so a different resolution is necessary.

2-Hatred

Hatred and bearing grudges are not Jewish. Jews could not have contributed to the betterment of humankind as they did if they wasted time hating all those who wrote wronged them. As is well known, hate eventually destroys the haters.

The Torah tells us clearly not to hate:
Lo tisna et achicha bil'vavecha.
Do not hate your brother in your heart. [Leviticus 19:17]

The Talmud says:

Why was the First Temple destroyed? Because [the people engaged in the three main sins:] idolatry, sexual immorality, and murder... But why was the Second Temple destroyed, given that in its time the people WERE occupying themselves with Torah, observance of mitzvot, and deeds of kindness? Because senseless hatred [*sin'at chinam*] prevailed. That teaches you that senseless hatred is considered as serious as the three sins of idolatry, sexual immorality, and murder combined. [Yoma 9b]

So, even though the majority was punctiliously observant, the many groups harbored intense hatred towards one another. This led to Rome's victory and the razing of the Temple. So, clearly, it's not enough to be technically observant, the hatred towards those who think differently must go also. One is reminded of a prayer uttered by a little girl: Dear God, please make the bad people good and the good people nice.

In Talmudic days, the school of Hillel was always pitted against the school of Shammai. In the end, the Sanhedrin decided to rule according to Hillel. Why? Because, it says, Hillel's disciples were kind and humble, and always quoted the other side's opinions before their own.

Now, if some hatred is 'senseless', then some hatred must make sense. When? The Talmud answers: You may bear ill will when you witness someone breaking the Torah. [Pesachim 113b] You must then intervene quickly *before* helping those you love [so that the ill will does not turn to hatred.] [Bava Metzia 32b] How do you know that you have reached the point of hatred? A hater [*sone*] is someone who does not speak to his fellow for three days because of enmity between them. [Sanhedrin 27b]

Hatred is bad. It also destroys the haters. The Talmud even proposes a prayer to be delivered from hatred:

May it be Your will, O Lord our God and God of our fathers, that no hatred against any person come into our hearts, and no hatred against us come into the hearts of any other person, and may none be jealous of us, and may we not be jealous of anybody; and may Your Torah be our labor all the days of our lives, and may our words be as supplications before You. [Talmud Y, Berachot 8:6]

3-Forgiveness

Jewish law: The perpetrator must seek forgiveness from the victim, and the victim MUST forgive. Story in Talmud:

Once, Rabbi Eleazar son of Rabbi Shim'on was coming from Migdal Gedor, from the house of his teacher, and he was riding leisurely on his ass by the riverside and was feeling happy and elated because he had studied much Torah.

He came upon an extremely ugly man who greeted him, saying: "Peace be upon you, Sir."

[The rabbi,] however, did not return his greeting but instead said to him: "Empty one, how ugly you are! Are all the people in your city as ugly as you are?"

The man replied: "I do not know, but go and tell the craftsman who made me, 'How Ugly is the vessel that you have made'."

Rabbi Eleazar then realized that he had done wrong, so he came down from the ass and prostrated himself before the man and said to him: "I submit myself to you, forgive me."

The man replied: "I will not forgive you until you go to the craftsman who made me and say to him, 'How ugly is the vessel that you have made'."

[Rabbi Eleazar] walked behind him until he reached his native city. When his fellow citizens came out to meet [the rabbi] they greeted him with the words: "Peace be upon you O Teacher, O Master!"

The man then asked them: "Whom are you calling that?"

They replied: "The man who is walking behind you."

Thereupon he exclaimed: "If this man is a rabbi, may there not be any more like him in Israel!"

The people then asked him: "Why?"

He replied: "He has done such and such to me."

They said to him: "Nevertheless, forgive him, for he is greatly learned in the Torah."

The man replied: "For your sakes I will forgive him, but only on condition that he does not act this way in the future!"

[Taanit 20a-b]

The Talmud concludes:

Our Rabbis have taught: A man should always be gentle as the reed and never unyielding as the cedar [in granting forgiveness]. [Ta'anit 20a].

After payments have been made for physical harm, the perpetrator must seek the victim's forgiveness for suffering he caused. [BK 92a; Yad, Hovel u-Mazzik 5:9; Sh. Ar., HM, 422]

Why forgive?

-Self-interest. Forgiveness to one's fellow wins forgiveness from Heaven. Talmud:

He who is merciful [forgiving] to others, mercy is shown to him by Heaven, while he who is not merciful [forgiving] to others, mercy is not shown to him by Heaven. [Shab. 151b; also RH 17a, Meg. 28a]

So: To get God's forgiveness, become more forgiving yourself.

-Imitating God. Talmud: God is merciful, so imitate Him by being forgiving toward those who have wronged you. [Shabbat 133b; see Lev. 19:2]
R. Nahman of Breslov: Imitate God by being compassionate and forgiving. He will in turn have compassion on you, and pardon your offenses.

-If I believe God willed everything that happens to me, then this, too, is for my own good, and I should forgive (and thank?) the perpetrator.

Some commentators went further:

-If the victim refuses to forgive when the perpetrator has asked for forgiveness three times, in the presence of others, then the victim is deemed to have sinned. [Tanh. Hukkat 19]

-Victim should pray that God forgive the perpetrator, even before the perpetrator asks for forgiveness. [Tosef., BK 9:29; Sefer Hasidim 267: 360] Based on Abraham praying to God to forgive Abimelech. [Gen. 20:17] So Talmud says:

Whoever is merciful [forgiving] to his fellow man is certainly of the seed of our father Abraham, and whoever is not merciful to his fellow man is certainly not of the seed of our father Abraham. [Beitzah 32b]

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks: When we forgive and are worthy of being forgiven, we are no longer prisoners of our past.

But all this assumes perpetrator admits wrongdoing, repents, and asks for forgiveness. If he doesn't, victim not required to forgive.

-Generally speaking, Christians have asked for forgiveness; Muslims have not.

4-Love

Loving one who has wronged you is not a Jewish requirement.

Some even classify it as a disease: "The Stockholm syndrome":

Strong emotional ties that develop between two persons where one person intermittently harasses, beats, threatens, abuses, or intimidates the other.

Origin of term: Hostages in a 1973 Stockholm bank robbery defended their captors after being released and refused to testify against them.

FBI: 8% of victims suffer from it. Sociologists: "The victims develop positive feelings toward their captors and sympathy for their causes and goals, and negative feelings toward the police or authorities".

Examples:

- Patty Hearst (1974) was held hostage by an urban guerilla group. She publicly denounced her family and the police, proclaimed her sympathy for her captors and their goals, and worked with them to rob banks.
- Yvonne Ridley (2001) was captured by the Taliban, and when released she became a fervent Muslim and denounced the values and lifestyles of the West.
- “Beauty” in “Beauty and the Beast” fairy tale. [!]

It afflicts victims of domestic abuse, child abuse, human trafficking, incest, prisoners of war, political terrorism, cult members, concentration camp prisoners, slaves, prostitutes, etc. Women are more prone than men. Studies show it even exists among animals.

Psychoanalysis: Just a survival mechanism. Victims are afraid perpetrators will perceive their love as fake, so they end up deceiving themselves, believing their positive feelings are genuine.

Relevant by-product: **Jewish self-hatred**. Marginal or ignorant Jews accept the antisemitic feelings of the majority and join them in attacking Jews, Judaism, and Israel. Causes:

- Stockholm syndrome.
- To advance themselves socially.
- Psychology professor Phyllis Chesler: Many Jewish women are obsessed with the Palestinian point of view because they transfer their rage against oppression, frustration and patriarchy onto Israel.
- Harvard psychiatrist Kenneth Levin: Abused children blame themselves for their suffering, believe they are "bad," and want to become "good" like their abusers to end their suffering.
- Jewish tradition supports this "blaming the victim" view.

5-Ignore

Ignore them. This is the Israeli response. They let their government and military deal with terrorism, but as individuals they ignore terrorists and go on with their lives. They waste no time hating them, plotting retaliation, or wondering whether to forgive them. (They leave that to the far left.)

This is by far the best Jewish response.