

Revenge

Punishment and revenge are interrelated. In the strict sense of the word punishment is the restoring of a balance, which has been distorted by a crime or misdemeanor. We turn the restoration work of punishment over to our legal system. We hope that this system will be fail proof. Punishment is a serious weapon to hold in our hands. Revenge is a more dangerous variant on punishment, for it lacks the internal control mechanism that punishment, properly understood, depends on. (We all know that punishment too can go to extremes, and can suffer terrible abuse; we are at that talking of punishment which is under the control of a legal system) . Revenge is retribution which is unrestrained, and therefore able to follow any path chosen by the avenger. No legal system enters in the case of revenge.

By and large revenge is locked into older social worlds, like those given free rein in early societies or stages of society, or in loosely assembled criminal groups like the mafia. The higher religions are unanimous in condemning revenge, as an invitation to uncontrolled ego, and yet we have in our own day heard revenge spoken of approvingly by the President elect of a major western power. We have to believe that the urge for direct and unmediated punishment, revenge, hovers dangerously close to the surface of many so called contemporary men and women.

The savage breasts of the great are not the only hideouts of those 'seething to get back.' Turn on your television before you drop off to sleep at 9 or 10. Try *True Crime* or *Forensic Files* or *Date Line*: remind yourself of the American Family's Archeology of Mayhem, Internecine Murder, and Revenge. Then drop off for a long peaceful sleep.