

WHERE THERE'S A CAUSE, THERE'S AN EFFECT

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

This is a parsha of cause-and-effect.

To begin with, the parsha begins talking about two types of war—one against the human enemy, and one against the internal enemy, the yetzer hara:

When you go to war against your enemies and G-d, your G-d gives them over to you and you take captives; and you see a beautiful female captive whom you desire to take as a wife, then you shall bring her home and ... (Devarim 21:10)

The rest of this section describes the procedure that must be followed before the Torah permits this Jew to marry this non-Jewess (who obviously must convert before marriage). After he brings her home, she must cease to take care of herself, so that her beauty fades before his very eyes. She must also mourn the fact that she has been removed from her family, which for sure will play on his nerves, and give him recourse to reconsider what he did in his moment of passion. If after thirty days of **THIS** he still wants to marry this captive, and she converts according to halacha, then, the Torah permits him to do so.

What about the Talmudic statement that one should not convert for the sake of marriage? What about the fact that Jews shouldn't seek to marry non-Jews? What about the fact that the Jews are supposed to exercise exceptional self-control, even in times of war, and keep their passions in check?

The Talmud (Kiddushin 21b, which Rashi quotes) states that this parsha speaks to the yetzer hara, or better yet, about it. We know as a people first hand what happens to man's instinctual nature during war; the death, destruction, and sense of despair causes many to "snap" and simply follow the desires of their heart. Apparently, according to the Torah, the Jewish male can act likewise during wartime. And, as Shlomo HaMelech wrote, "Stolen waters are sweet ..."; they are certainly "sweeter" at a time when a person has little, if any, self-control. If so, then what is a person to do?

The answer is: stall for time. The answer is, "Yes, you can have her, but ... "

Everyone knows that you can't say "no" to passion, at least not outright. Whether it is a desire for a

piece of chocolate cake while on a strict diet, or a yearning for something absolutely forbidden, a "cold turkey" reaction can often have the reverse effect, instead intensifying the desire until it becomes impossible to hold back.

However, a burning desire was never a reason to give in to the yetzer hara. The trick is, it seems, to give the **IMPRESSION** to the yetzer hara (or child for that matter, who operates in very much the same way as the yetzer hara!) that you are meeting its demand **SOMEWHAT**, but on condition that ...

"On condition that ..." what?

It is precisely here that the psychological warfare begins. How many times do we lose the desire for something after a little bit of time has passed? There is the story of a woman who loved chocolate cake, and her weight revealed it. She tried dieting, but each time, at a moment of test, she failed and succumbed to the "inner voice" to eat. She would tell that voice,

"NO! We're on a diet!"

But that voice would yell back louder,

**"DIET, SHMIET! LIFE IS FOR ENJOYING,
AND EVEN SKINNY PEOPLE DIE YOUNG!"**

So, one day, at a moment of capitulation, she took the cake and put it down in front of her. She was tired of fighting, and had all but given up on the War-of-Weight. However, this time, before gulping down the cake, she just sat there, and stared at the cake. She sat there for at least fifteen minutes, just staring at the cake, waiting before starting to eat it. But something strange happened this time: she didn't eat the cake.

Not only did she not eat the cake, but her **DESIRE** to eat the cake also dissipated as time went on. She noticed that as time passed, her body calmed down, and her intense desire to consume the fattening food reduced, until finally, in a moment of calm, she simply got up walked away, leaving the cake intact. However, she did gain something from the whole affair: increased self-esteem and a greater resolve to lose that weight after all.

The yetzer hara always makes it seem that if we don't feed it what it wants **NOW**, it will never stop hounding us-like a child who throws a temper tantrum in the local store over candy he or she **MUST** have. To the panicky parent, it can seem like a do-or-die situation, forcing submission to the screaming tot's demand. However, the calm parent knows that "this too shall pass."

Passions don't last forever, unless they are stunted outright; they merely intensify because the waters become more "stolen," and seemingly "sweeter." But they are not. What is wrong is wrong and what is off-limits is off-limits, and there can never be any halachic justification for acting immorally. Giving in to a child at the wrong time in the wrong way may silence him for the moment,

but it sends the wrong message and lessens the child's chance of emotional maturity.

But every good parent knows that raising children is often a matter of distraction- distraction away from the wrong thing and toward the right thing. There is an art to giving the child the impression that they have not lost anything, while at the same time heeding his parent's wishes. It works the same way for the yetzer hara as well.

The procedure of the "Yafes Toar" (the name of the captive woman) illustrates how surviving the moment of passion leads to the revelation of its inherent ugliness, which dampens the desire for fulfillment. Past the moment of passion lies reality, and once we wake up to **IT**, the yetzer hara has very little to say.

The truth be known, everyone wakes up to reality-eventually. The only question after we do is, "were we burned," another casualty in the war of life having committed an irreversible mistake for which we will have to pay for later, or did we hang in long enough to survive the moment, and the war itself, and walk away a whole person, in a position to receive the true "spoils" of war-**THE WORLD-TO-COME.**

Shabbos Day:

Then the Torah talks about a man who has two wives, one which he loves and one which he hates. However, the firstborn son, who stands in line to inherit the double-portion from his father, happens to belong to the hated wife. The Torah admonishes the man by telling him that regardless of how he feels about his wife or her child, the firstborn son is the undisputed firstborn son, and his rights are his rights.

However, there is more to this marriage than meets the eye, as Rashi already pointed out by the Yafes Toar:

*... If he does marry her (the female captive), in the end he will **HATE** her, for the Torah says afterwards, "If a man has two wives, one he loves and one he hates ..." (Devarim 21:15); ultimately, he will have a **REBELLIOUS SON** from her (Ibid. 18). It is for this reason that the Torah juxtaposes these sections. (Rashi, Devarim 21:11)*

The end of Rashi is referring to the next section, which speaks of the rebellious son, who, unlike any other Jew, is killed by capital punishment even before the age of Bar Mitzvah! What a tragedy! What a disaster! And all because this man gave in to his passions and married his yetzer hara, ah ... that is ... **HIS** Yafes Toar!

Now **THAT'S** cause-and-effect.

(Lest one think that this situation is somewhat out-of-the-ordinary, we have only to review the story in Tanach of Dovid HaMelech's son from a Yafes Toar, Avshalom, who violated his step-sister (Tamar) and Dovid's daughter from a real marriage; see Pirke Avos, 5:19.)

Another way of referring to this cause-and-effect relationship is: a mitzvah leads to a mitzvah, and a transgression leads to a transgression (alternatively: the reward for a mitzvah is a chance to do another mitzvah, and for a transgression, the trap of another transgression). This, Rashi also points out later:

When you build a new house, then you shall make a fence on top of it, so that no blood should be on your house if a man falls from it. (Devarim 22:8)

If you fulfill the (previously mentioned) command of sending away the mother bird to take its young, then you will be privileged to build a new house and fulfill the command of putting a fence around its roof, for one good deed leads to another ... (Rashi)

There is a mitzvah, if one's house has a flat-roof, to fence the roof in as a precautionary measure, to responsibly reduce the possibility of an accident occurring. And this important mitzvah, Rashi says, comes in the "wake" of the previous mitzvah of not taking the mother bird with her young. There certainly is what to explore with regard to the deeper connection between the mitzvah of "Shaluach HaKan" (sending away the mother bird), and the mitzvah of "Ma'akeh," (building the roof-fence). However, the main point here is the concept of how our response to moral imperatives effect our personal future, the future of our families, and of the whole nation. The effect may not come swiftly in response to our cause, but take it for granted that it will, and when it does, hopefully it will be one that we will not regret later.

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

"When a man takes a wife and marries her ... " (Devarim 24:1)

This verse is the source of the Jewish concept of marriage, and it alludes to the means by which Kiddushin (marriage) can be affected, of which there are three (Kiddushin 2a): the transference of money from the husband to the wife (today, we use a ring equal to at least the Talmudic value of a "perutah"); a marriage contract stating the officialness of the union, and consummation (which the Talmud outlawed for obvious reasons, permitting it only after Chupah has been performed). There are basically two stages to the Jewish marriage process: Kiddushin and Nisuin. Kiddushin, from the same word as "Kiddush," means to sanctify, or to "set-aside." As the Talmudic commentary

Tosfos points out (Kiddushin 2b), when a man becomes halachically engaged to a woman, she becomes sanctified to him, that is, off-limits to every other man. They may not live together at this stage of the relationship, but, for all intents and purposes, they are **HALACHICALLY** husband and wife. Separation at this stage would require a "Get," that is, a halachic divorce document.

Nisuin is the part of the process that is performed through the ceremony under the Chupah, which makes the man and woman husband and wife in every sense of the term. Hence, a married person is called a "*nisui*."

It used to be that after the halachic engagement of Kiddushin was done, the chason (groom) and kallah (bride) would return to their parents' homes to prepare for the wedding to be held months later. In Talmudic times, before catering and refrigeration made weddings a "snap," months of preparation were necessary to give the kallah the type of wedding every woman deserves. As a result, a considerable span of time would pass before the marriage could be consummated, though halachically, they were already married.

As a result, and because young people often have difficulty controlling their passions, unfaithfulness sometimes resulted between the time of Kiddushin and the final act of Chupah. This was tantamount to adultery. For this reason, today, Kiddushin and Nisuin take place at one time under the chupah; any other type of "engagement," for the most part, is only ceremonial.

However, one must always be very careful, lest he and she find himself and herself **UNINTENTIONALLY** "married," the consequences of which may be the requirement of a divorce should the man and woman choose not to remain together. And remarriage in a case where divorce was necessary but not carried out results in illegitimate children, accidentally or purposely.

The bottom line is that the male-female relationship is never a casual "event." As the word Kiddushin implies, it is a **HOLY** relationship, one rooted in the very reason for creation, of which the Talmud says is to **TRY** to have children. In fact, King Chizkiah was almost killed for not having children, and one of the four questions they'll ask us when we get up "There" for the final "test" is: Did you try to have children?

Melave Malkah:

The end of the parsha includes the mitzvah of Yibum, or, the Levirate marriage. This is the mitzvah for the surviving brother to try to have a child on behalf of his dead brother through the latter's wife, should that brother leave his wife childless. All of this, says the Torah, is ...

■ *So that his name shall not be eradicated from the Jewish people. (Devarim 25:6)*

However, what is amazing here is that, if the brother died leaving even only one child, then marriage between the surviving brother and his sister-in-law would be absolutely forbidden. Yet, if the brother dies childless, not only is it **PERMISSIBLE** to perform the Levirate marriage with his sister-in-law, but it is a **MITZVAH** to do so, one for which abstention results in public humiliation!

"... This is what is done to the one who won't build his brother's house!"

What changed in the woman because she did or didn't have children? How can she be both forbidden yet permissible? How does having a child change her nature with respect to the surviving brother-in-law that she all-of-a-sudden becomes permissible to him? Obviously, there is a lot to discuss and understand here. In fact, there is a whole, long section of Talmud devoted entirely to the laws of the Levirate marriage. But, in the meantime, we have a classic example of how nothing is intrinsically permissible or forbidden in this world. (Can we really tell the difference between meat that was ritually slaughtered up to a hairsbreadth, which, according to G-d, makes it treif?)

What makes something, anything "permissible" or "off-limits" is **WHAT G-D THINKS ABOUT IT**. Like the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, which the midrash says was not intrinsically good or evil. What made its fruit forbidden and spiritually dangerous was because G-d called it that. And **THAT** is the **ULTIMATE** reality of forbiddenness.

Analyzing mitzvahs to gain a deeper insight into life and its purpose is fine and even encouraged. However, in the end, we have to keep in mind that it is what G-D thinks about the mitzvos and their performance that makes all the difference in life. This is the ultimate cause that leads to the ultimate effect: closeness to G-d, and peace to the entire world.

Have a great Shabbos,
Pinchas Winston

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