

A CAUSE TO BE EFFECTIVE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

All the people pulled off the golden earrings from their ears and brought them to Aharon. He took all of it from them, and with an engraving tool formed it and made a molten calf. They said, "These are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up out of Egypt!" (Shemot 32:3-4)

There's cause and effect, and then there is cause and effect. There is a cause and effect where I hit my hand on a hard table and it hurts, or I say something insulting and it angers someone. These are effects that clearly and justifiably result from causes that I have created. I didn't have to hit my hand on the table so hard, and I certainly don't have to insult someone if I don't want to.

However, sometimes weird effects result from seemingly unconnected causes, and with very dramatic results. The golden calf in this week's parshah is a case-in-point. From the simple reading of the verses, it seems as if the perpetrators took their gold, threw it into the fire where it melted, and then fashioned it into a calf. However, the Midrash says otherwise. What the Midrash reveals is that the calf emerged on its own, and big time. What I mean by "big time" is that not only did a golden calf emerge, but a living gold calf emerged, bleating and moving around, quite a sight indeed! Aharon HaKohen had intended to take the gold and slowly and painstakingly mold it into the calf in order to forestall the people and wait for Moshe Rabbeinu to return to the camp and get things back on track again. However, the forces of impurity had other plans.

In the camp were two Egyptian sorcerers, Yanus and Yambrus, two of Bilaam's sons. One of them had taken hold of two-thirds of the gold, and the other, the remaining one-third. Using black magic, they were able to draw down the light of the image of the ox from the Merkavah (Heavenly Chariot) towards them. But, apparently, other "ingredients" played an important role in the catastrophic creation of the calf as well, as the Arizal explains:

The Name Yud-Lamed-Yud is the second Name of the Name of Ayin-Bait... (Sha'ar Ma'amrei Chazal, Mesechet Brochot, Ch. 1, 5b)

The 72-Part Name of G-d is made out of 72 three-letter Names, of which Yud- Lamed-Yud is the second, and is one of the most powerful Names; it is derived from a verse in the Torah (Shemot 14:19-21). Tradition states that this Name was revealed to Moshe at the Burning Bush and it is what he used to part the sea.

...and with it Moshe raised the coffin of Yosef, as explained on the posuk, "The ox knows its Master" ... (Yeshayahu 1:3)(Ibid.)

The Midrash explains that the Egyptians knew that Yosef had imposed an oath on the Jewish people that, when the time came for redemption in the future, they would take his bones with them for burial in Eretz Yisroel (Devarim Rabbah 11:5). Therefore, in preparation for the possibility that the Jewish people might try to leave Egypt in the future, Pharaoh had Yosef's body placed in a lead coffin and submerged in the Nile River beyond the reach of men. Hence, in order to fulfill the vow and leave Egypt Moshe had to use Kabbalah to raise it from the bottom of the Nile River:

It is already known that the Erev Rav, as along with the gold that they threw into the pit, also threw in the golden plate upon which was written, "Arise ox". Moshe had thrown this very plate into the river in order to raise Yosef (with respect to whom the term "ox" is used; Bereishit 49:6). Thus, with the power of this Name, the calf emerged. Know that on this plate was written the second Name of the 72 Names of G-d, which is Yud-Lamed-Yud ... (Sha'ar HaPesukim, Nevi'im Acharonim, Siman 1).

The Arizal explains that this particular Name of G-d is able to cause things to rise, which is why it was used by Rebi Yochanan in the Talmud to heal Rebi Chiyah bar Abba (Brochot 5b). Thus, by putting this Name on the plate, Yosef's coffin emerged from the depths of the Nile River, allowing the Jewish people to retrieve his bones and bring them up to Eretz Yisroel as promised. And, by throwing the same plate into the furnace, it contributed to the emergence of the calf and the sin that resulted.

SHABBAT DAY:

Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him, who promised the Children of Israel that, "G-d will surely come for you; bring my bones with you." (Shemot 13:19)

What went wrong? How could Divine Providence allow for the very plate that was used to elevate Yosef's coffin from the bottom of the Nile River fall into enemy hands and be used to accomplish the very opposite of what both Moshe and Yosef stood for? Had the abuse of the plate and Divine Name been far less significant, let's say melting it down and selling it for a profit, then perhaps we could overlook the strange occurrence, but a golden calf and such a major stumbling block for the Jewish people? What did they ever do to deserve that?

In other words, everything in this world happens middah k'neged middah (measure for measure). Even if we can't see a connection between the causes we create and the effects we endure, they have to be there, and certainly in the Torah they are. There is no such thing as an "innocent victim" in G-d's world, even if in our world we can't see a trace of guilt in those who are suffering. Even when the hand of G-d is the most hidden, it is still there dispensing justice, albeit on a very hidden level. Everything must be by definition resulting in a tikun.

Such questions force us to re-examine previous events that may have a different meaning now in

light of the results in question. We have the effects; we now need to go in search of the possible causes that may have created them, and once we do, the results are often startling.

"Wow. I didn't know that if I did that it would cause THAT!"

"You're kidding? You mean when I did that, it resulted in... in that?"

"Who would have ever thought that such an act could result in so much bad?"

Or even so much good, for that matter. As the Talmud states, "Who is a wise man? One who sees what is born" (Tamid 32a), meaning that he is aware of what he does today, its results, and what they can snowball into. Life is not a matter of, "Let's try it and see what happens...", but a matter of constantly projecting our actions in the future to try and stem the tide of misfortune before it has a chance to become a wave.

Having said this, let us go back in time to the event in question, and examine what actually occurred at that time, starting with the following Talmudic statement:

Rebi Simlai explained: The Torah begins with chesed and ends with chesed, as it says, "G-d made for the man and his wife garments of leather and clothed them" (Bereishit 3:21). It ends with chesed, as it is says, "He (G- d) buried (Moshe) in the valley (Devarim 34:6)." (Sotah 14a)

Of all the acts of chesed Moshe performed, only one is called a chesed shel emet (true-kindness). It was for this act, according to the Talmud, that G-d rewarded and honored Moshe by burying him Himself. The Talmud states that when the Jewish nation was busy collecting spoils from the Egyptian people, just prior to the exodus, Moshe was elsewhere, involved in a mitzvah of chesed shel emes (true-kindness). While others were enriching themselves, Moshe was busy taking care of the needs of another. Think about it for a moment. At the time that Moshe raised Yosef from the bottom of the river using the mystical plate, he was there alone and no one else was there. They were all out collecting the gold and silver that they left Egypt with, while Moshe tended to the promise made by the ENTIRE nation to Yosef HaTzaddik. His priorities were obviously very different from those of the rest of the nation.

At the time of the golden calf, when the same plate was being used with the very gold that they had collected instead fetching Yosef's bones, everyone was there but Moshe was not, a reversal of the original situation. The inference now is obvious: had the Jewish nation made it their priority to the fulfillment of the request of their righteous leader from the past, the incident of the golden calf would never have occurred! Yes, the Erev Rav were the ones who actually made the golden calf, but it was the desire of the Jewish people for gold and silver that actually empowered them to do it. What took place by the Nile River that day was symptomatic of a spiritual weakness that came out full-blown in the form of the golden calf; they lacked the courage to stop it, along with the energy to keep sorcerers like Yanus and Yambrus at bay.

This puts a whole new spin on the episode of the golden calf and what it represents, and shows how

misplaced priorities today can result, G-d forbid, in tragic events tomorrow. The calf that emerged was made of gold, but it was very much alive because the materialistic desire it represented was gold, but also very much alive. And it was this that the Erev Rav took advantage of, and still to this very day always takes advantage of just to keep us off track.

SEUDAT SHLISHIT:

This is the Gate of G-d, the righteous shall enter through it. (Tehillim 118:20)

The reason why this entire episode revolves around Yosef HaTzaddik is because, that is why he is called "tzaddik". When his choice came between the material and the spiritual, even though he had a way to rationalize the spiritual side of the material, in the end, he fled the material and ran for the spiritual.

We are talking about the episode of Yosef and the wife of Potiphar, an incident which has far more meaning than most people want to invest delving into. She truly was the wife of his master, but she also represented material pleasure in this world. In short, she was the symbol of the material trappings of this world, for which Yosef almost fell, l'Shem Shamayim, for even had he been wrong in his thinking, he still had to believe, on some level, that there was some Divine purpose to be fulfilled in succumbing to the invitations of his master's wife.

In the end, he saw the face of his father in his mind's eye, meaning that the core of his being spoke louder than the more external parts of him. At the basis of all that Yosef had become was a dominating streak of self-honesty, which was powerful enough to overcome any attachments he had to the pleasures of this world. Unlike many others who, in their quest to "sanctify" the physical world around them, often at the cost of lowering their own sense of holiness, Yosef sanctified himself, and more importantly, he sanctified the Name of G-d by putting spirituality before materialistic pleasure.

As a result, Yosef became the symbol of this very trait, which is why he, as opposed to anyone else, is called "tzaddik". Had the Jewish people made his burial in Eretz Yisroel their priority, they would have drawn down his light of righteousness to themselves and avoided the entire golden calf episode. Not only this, but they would not have stumbled in the sin of the spies either, for as the verse says:

This is the Gate of G-d, the righteous shall enter through it. (Tehillim 118:20)

The Ramak said that this verse is talking specifically about Eretz Yisroel, and he goes so far as to say that anyone living in Eretz Yisroel carries the name "tzaddik", by virtue of the fact that he or she lives there. "But there are so many living in the land that look like anything but tzaddikim?" So the Ramak answers, nevertheless, they have the name "tzaddik".

It may be hard to understand, but perhaps the following Midrash from the Arizal, and brought down by Rabbi Natan Shapiro, zt"l, puts things more into perspective.

There is a tradition that, at the time of the arrival of Moshiach, wonderful things will happen for Jews everywhere. On the actual day that they arrive from the Diaspora..., the walls of Jerusalem will be replaced. It will also be the day of the re-building of the Temple, which will be built from exquisite stones and gems. Once the dead are resurrected, they will become transformed and will have very lofty natures. However, the same type of transformation will occur for the... Jews who remained alive [in Eretz Yisroel], and their bodies will be like that of Adam HaRishon before his sin, and like that of Moshe Rabbeinu. They will become so spiritual that they will be able to fly like eagles, which will astound the redeemed exiles. Upon witnessing this, the "Diaspora Jews" will become upset, and they will complain to Moshiach, Are we not Jews like them? Why do they merit to fly and live in an elevated spiritual state, and not us? However, Moshiach will answer them, "It is quite well known that G-d works measure-for-measure. Those who lived in the Diaspora and made efforts and sacrifices to elevate themselves by moving to the Holy Land merited purity of soul. They were not so concerned about their finances and health. They traveled over vast lands and crossed seas, not paying attention to the possibilities of drowning, being robbed along the way, or being taken captive by some strange foreign ruler. Being that they placed priority of their spirit over materialism and physicality, they merit, measure-for-measure, to be elevated to this lofty spiritual plane. On the other hand, you who also had opportunities to go up to Israel, but remained hesitant and reluctant, enamored instead with your materialistic status, making materialism a higher priority than spiritual growth, therefore, measure-for-measure, remain physical... However, for those who valued their soul most, they will be transformed into supernal beings and will be led into the earthly Garden of Eden. (Tuv HaAretz: Praise Of Those Who Dwell In Israel At The Time Of Moshiach)

Thus we see that everything about Yosef HaTzaddik yearned to be back in Eretz Yisroel, even though Egypt had all the materialism he could ever want, and he had access to all of it. Is there any better way for one to earn the appellation of "tzaddik"?

MELAVE MALKAH:

G-d told Moses and Aaron, "This is the statute of the law which G-d commanded to be told. Tell the Children of Israel to take an unblemished, completely red heifer, which has never worn a yoke."
(Bamidbar 19:1-2)

As Rashi points out at the beginning of Parashat Chukat, the parah adumah (the red heifer) was a rectification for the sin of the golden calf. It was also the path to purification necessary before one who was defiled by the dead could offer his Pesach-Offering. Thus, no one ate from it, not even the kohanim; it was totally consumed by the fire, like the chometz that we burn on Erev Pesach.

As the Rambam teaches, if someone sins, then part of the rectification is to go to the other extreme before returning back to the middle path once again. Before he can once again engage in any permissible activity that is like the forbidden one, he has to first avoid all such activities until he has done full teshuvah for the sin he committed.

Hence, the complete burning of the golden calf is the rectification. It is the other "extreme" of the golden calf, a complete withdrawal from the material world, symbolized by the ashes of the parah adumah. And, in the context of what has been discussed so far, it symbolizes the rectification of the trait that caused the Jewish people to forsake their obligation to Yosef, who had predicted their eventual redemption, but the people became involved in materialistic pursuits instead of attending to their obligation.

The ironic thing about materialism is that it feels as if it makes us freer, when in fact, it really enslaves us. That is why, the Maharal explains, matzah is called both "Poor Man's Bread" and the "Bread of Freedom". It is not a contradiction explains the Maharal, because a poor man is free to come and go as he pleases. How many times in history have people been trapped in regrettable situations because they could not make the necessary break from their physical possessions, from their comfortable way of life, as in the case of the Spies who rejected Eretz Yisroel and those who do not make aliyah.

What's worse is that materialism so blinds a person to reality that he can be pursuing a materialistic approach to life, and yet not see how it is so. Instead, he will argue how his present lifestyle is not a sacrifice of kedushah or spirituality, even though at the end of the day, it is clearly so to anyone else looking on.

The goal is not to live in poverty, but the trick is to remain only loosely attached to a materialistic lifestyle so that when a spiritual opportunity comes along, especially a life-saving one, you can make the right decision at the time, and go with spirituality. This is not something that one can do on the spur of the moment; it is something that a person must be working on every day of his or her life, because if we don't, we might end up seeing some really weird and outright dangerous effects from what we thought at the time were really not such significant causes.

Have a great Shabbat,
PW

Text

Copyright © by [Rabbi Pinchas Winston](#) and Project Genesis, Inc.

Rabbi Winston has authored many books on Jewish philosophy (Hashkofa). If you enjoy Rabbi Winston's Perceptions on the Parsha, you may enjoy his books. Visit Rabbi Winston's [online book store](#) for more details! www.thirtysix.org