

FOR THE RIGHT REASON

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Bilaam said to Balak, "Build me seven altars here, and prepare for me seven bulls and seven rams."
(Bamidbar 23:1)

THE TALMUD SAYS something that could easily be taken for granted, but shouldn't be. It has so much to say about how Hashgochah Pratis works, and clearly few people know it, based upon their approach to Jewish history.

From the Talmud:

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: A man should always occupy himself with Torah and the commandments even if it is not for their own sake, because from [occupying himself with them] not for their own sake he comes to do so for their own sake. As a reward for the 42 sacrifices which Balak, king of Moav, offered, he merited that Rus should come from him and from her descended Shlomo . . . (Sotah 47a)

The first part of this statement requires discussion, but is certainly understandable. Torah is powerful and has a way of impacting even people who do not intend to be impacted by it. So as bad as it is to learn Torah for the wrong reasons, it is still better than not learning it all, because doing so can lead to learning it for the right reasons.

Just how far does this idea go? There must be many examples over the course of Jewish history of those who sat down to learn Torah for the wrong reasons, and ended up learning it for the right reasons. I've personally witnessed some of these stories.

However, the Talmud doesn't turn to such examples to make its point. It doesn't even use a story about someone learning Torah or performing mitzvos for the wrong reasons. Balak never did come to do either for the right reasons. Instead, he had a descendant he would have preferred not to have if he knew who she would be.

In fact, Balak probably wouldn't have offered his 42 sacrifices if he knew at the time that eventually they would result in the ancestress of Moshiach. He offered them as a bribe to God, to allow him to harm the people God said to leave alone. Why does he deserve ANY reward at all?

He didn't. And, he certainly would NOT have considered it a reward to provide the family line of Moshiach Ben Dovid. Even in the World-to-Come, where a person no longer harbors the evil feelings he had in this world, Balak will not have the satisfaction of knowing that he set in motion the birth of

the righteous Rus, since he had no intention of doing so.

Rather, the Talmud is teaching an additional lesson with its example of non-altruistic intentions leading to altruistic results. It is teaching that a good act, even if done for the wrong reasons, will ultimately have a good result. Perhaps not for the person who did it, and they certainly won't be rewarded for it if it had not been their intention, but for Creation as a whole. Offering sacrifices to the RIGHT God, even for the wrong reason, had a RIGHT effect.

It all comes back to this idea of energy which, by definition, is spiritual. God is the Source of all energy, so by definition every thing has to be spiritual, even if it can act very physical. Energy may flow from a waterfall to a generator and then through wires to a house, but it is God Who supplies the energy in the first place. It doesn't just exist in Creation by itself.

Therefore, whenever a person does anything, they are tapping into Divine energy to accomplish it. If it is a holy act, they draw from the Divine Source directly. If they perform an unholy act, like witchcraft, then they draw from it indirectly. Because of the impurity associated with the act, the energy has to be rerouted away from its holy Source, and to give the impression that witchcraft has power of its own, to test the belief of those turning to it (Chullin 7b).

How far does this idea go?

VERY far.

This is why some extremely destructive acts by some of the worst enemies of the Jewish people have eventually resulted in something very positive. It had been Hitler's, ysv"z, plan to exterminate the Jewish people, but instead he inadvertently accelerated the next stage of redemption. When people say that "Eretz Yisroel was built upon the ashes of the Holocaust," they don't realize to what extent this is true.

We are well aware that the Nazis went to great trouble and expense to concentrate Jews in specific locations, either in work or death camps. What people do not realize is that this was only possible after "ingathering" Jews from around Europe, after detaching them from their homes and communities. It made redemption and aliyah more attractive for all those who could not think in those terms previously.

The Nazis also made a point of numbering every Jew, regardless of religious affiliation. The Germans did not care how religious a Jew thought they were or wanted to be. They laid down the rule: a Jew is a Jew is a Jew, something we had forgotten and let get in the way of our national unity.

They also made a point of reducing each Jew to their most basic reality. They took away all differences that previously separated one Jew from another, religious and material, until we were all basically the same. Even intellectual differences were eroded over time because of the constant cruel and inhumane treatment. It was "Achdus," the name for Jewish unity, but from the other side of reality, the evil and impure side.

It is debatable as to what positive results came from such evil and destruction. And, there will be an accounting for how much blood had to be spilled to make it possible, something that should have happened positively, from the side of good and holiness. We can only talk about what we see, and that is, the Jewish homeland is back in Jewish hands, and built up in preparation for the Final Redemption.

Some will argue that there is nothing positive about the modern, secular State of Israel, certainly not from a Torah and redemption point of view. They would have been impressed had Torah Jews been the ones to re-found the Jewish commonwealth, and established a Torah government on the land.

THAT, the Ramchal and the GR"A explain, is only possible when the merit exists for such a fantastic turn of events. THAT is the kind of story end that results when a significant amount of the nation does teshuvah first, and the leaders somehow manage to get their followers in line, and with each other. That was not pre-war Jewish people at all.

So, as the Ramchal and GR"A explains, when that is the case, then the Jewish people must first sink as low as the dust before they can finally rise once again. They must hit the lowest of lows before they can finally move back in the direction of redemption. And even then, they explain, the people only have to do a minimal amount of work to rise up again, the bulk of the salvation being God's only. That has certainly been the last 80 years, and now we await Moshiach Ben Dovid to take us the final distance.

So, in the end, unbeknownst to Balak, he helped lay the foundation thousands of years ago for the redemption for which we are anxiously awaiting. Let it be OUR sacrifices that help finish the job, from the side of holiness. On that note, for those who already contributed to my [Charidy.com/thirtysixorg](https://charidy.com/thirtysixorg) campaign this week, to HELP with the redemption process, I thank you VERY much. For those who would still like to, the campaign runs until Friday afternoon (Israel time), b"H. And, thank you to Rabbi Ya'akov Menken and Torah.org, for letting me inform you about the campaign. Here's to redemption, the proper way!