

INDIFFERENCE, CASUALNESS, & BY-CHANCE ? OH MY!

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

Indifference is the death of any relationship. I have often said that so long as a couple cares enough to scream and holler there is who and what to work with. *** The real danger is when spouses no longer care enough to fight. On the one hand, the household may be less noisy; on the other hand, the relative quiet reflects distance and indifference. Such a home and relationship is a much colder and lonelier place.

*** A note of explanation. I am not suggesting that screaming and hollering is ever a preferred way of relating or communicating. Each of us should take issue with our loved ones and ourselves to insure that communication is always sensitive and respectful. Anything less than respectful and dignified speech borders on abusing those to whom and for whom we should be most caring and responsible.

In the second of this week's two Parshios, B'Chukosai, Hashem describes the climate as "keri": a. (26:21) If you are indifferent to Me (Kaplan)

b. (26:21) If you behave casually with Me (ArtScroll)

c. (26:21) And if you walk with Me by chance (Hirsch)

Indifference suggests a lack of caring and concern. Casualness suggests a minimization of importance, a lessening of significance. Chance suggests the absence or denial of personal responsibility or initiative.

Every relationship, including the relationship of the nation with G-d, will have its ups and downs. However there is a significant difference between our relationship with G-d and our relationships with each other. Our relationships with each other involve two potentially fallible parties. Our relationship with G-d involves only one such party.

With G-d we can be certain that He will do what He says, when He says it, regardless of time or circumstance. G-d promised the Forefathers that He would redeem their children and give them the land of Israel. 430 years later G-d did exactly what He said He would do. By then the forefathers were all gone and buried, but G-d kept his promise to them. Unfortunately, the same is not true

when it comes to fulfilling our promises to G-d. G-d must contend with partners that are far less reliable than He. He must accept our inconsistencies and vacillations, our personal challenges and limits.

With each other, we are on much more equal footing. Both sides are challenged to the extent of their determination and freewill. Both sides of the relationship should accept the possibility of failure, the potential for betrayal, and the need for constant reevaluation of expectations. Not so with G-d. G-d knows from the start exactly what He can expect from us and what He will get from us. The all Knowing G-d, Creator of the Universe, is not subject to surprise or disappointment.

Therefore, the presentation of "Keri" in the Tochacha rightfully starts with the human side of the relationship rather than the Divine side of the relationship. Allow me to explain.

The Torah describes a cause and effect relationship. If we listen to G-d positive things will happen to us, if we do not listen to G-d, negative things will happen to us.

(26:3-12) If you will walk in My statutes? I will give rain, the trees and fields will yield their fruits,

(26:14-17) "But if you will not listen to Me" the following will happen: Panic, fever, chaos...

(26:18-20) "If you still do not listen to Me? I will break your pride, sap your strength, and turn

The purpose of any consequence is to motivate or deter - reward motivates and punishment deters. However, regarding our relationship with G-d the causal correlation between action and consequence is somewhat different. On the one hand, humans reward and punish because their hearts and minds dictate that certain actions demand a response. On the other hand, G-d rewards and punishes by creating a system where every action puts into motion its own consequences. G-d's response is built into the system of nature in contrast to the human response that is imposed on the system of nature. In the end, to the extent that humankind can be responsible for its own destiny is determined by humankind's willful actions.

What happens if after the consequences we still do not listen to G-d? The Torah evaluates the stubbornness of human denial as "Keri." Such behavior is classified as acting toward G-d indifferently, casually, or by chance, and such behavior demands a higher level of response.

Before suffering the next level of consequences, we must first "walk with Keri." We must show indifference to the consequences of our own actions. We must causally dismiss the negative (or positive) consequences as unrelated to our actions. We must conclude that the consequences we suffer are the fortunes of chance and the price of our humanness. We must separate our actions

from their consequences. We must deny the systemic nature of G-d's controlled response.

Once we have denied the causal correlation between action and consequence G-d's response is pure poetry. (26:23-26) "If despite these? you behave "Keriz

At first G-d hoped that we would learn our lesson and refocus on His relationship with us. Toward that end G-d did not act with "Keri." G-d did not act indifferently, causally, or by chance. Instead, the causal relationship between our actions and consequences set in motion a response that revealed G-d's direct involvement. G-d wanted us to turn toward Him and ask for forgiveness, beg for intervention, and beseech the cessation of suffering. G-d hoped we would recognize that our actions caused the suffering and therefore, through our actions we could change the consequences. However, if we do not accept responsibility for the consequences of our actions we are left blaming G-d and accusing Him of being unfair or arbitrary.

The concept of "poetic justice" is the dream of every judge and the reality of G-d. Every judge would like to administer consequences that perfectly fit the crime. In my years at YULA fair and just consequences were among the greatest administrative challenges. Monetary fines, detentions, denial of rights, parental notifications, lowering of grades, notations on permanent records, suspensions, and expulsions are the arsenal of consequences typically available. However, more often than not, the possible punishments did not fit the crimes and did not teach responsibility. They did inflict suffering of sorts and they did act on occasion as future deterrents; however, they did not accomplish the desired engendering of personal awareness, enlightenment, and responsibility.

G-d, the Truthful Judge, always responds with poetic justice. When Yisro joined the Jews in the desert he proclaimed G-d as the only G-d because he had witnessed G-d's poetic justice. (Shem. 18:11) Yisro rejoiced? through their (

The only proper response to our indifference, casualness, and assumption of by-chance toward G-d was for G-d to retreat behind the veil of nature and appear to be indifferent, casual, and by chance. It is classic "Hester Panim ? hiding of G-dž

Hester Panim is a lessening of our ability to recognize G-d's direct intervention in personal, national, and international events. Many suggest that Hester Panim is a lessening of G-d's caring or control; however, that is impossible! G-d Who controls everything to a degree that is incomprehensible for us to quantify is never not in absolute control. Hester Panim is a change in us, not in G-d!

The hoped for outcome of Hester Panim ? G-d acting with "Keri," is to reverse our percepti

(26:44) "And yet for all that, even while in the land of their enemies I have not despised them,

rejected them, or broken My covenant with them?"

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In the second of this week's two Parshios B'Chukosai, Hashem describes the climate of the Tochacha admonitions as 'Keri' (26:21, 24, 27, 28, 40, 41). I would like to share three similar but subtly different translations of the word Keri. Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translated Keri as 'indifference.' The ArtScroll Stone Edition translated Keri as 'casualness.' Rav S.R. Hirsch translated Keri as 'by-chance.' a. (26:21) If you are indifferent to Me? (Kaplan) b. (26:21) If you behave casually with Me? (ArtScroll) c. (26:21) And if you walk with Me by chance? (Hirsch)

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(26:14-17) ?But if you will not listen to Me?? the following will happen: Panic, fever, suffering, and being subject to our enemies?

(26:18-20) ?If you still do not listen to Me? I will break your pride, sap your strength, and turn the land against you??

The purpose of any consequence is to motivate or deter - reward motivates and punishment deters. However, regarding our relationship with G-d the causal correlation between action and consequence is somewhat different. On the one hand, humans reward and punish because their hearts and minds dictate that certain actions demand a response. On the other hand, G-d rewards and punishes by creating a system where every action puts into motion its own consequences. G-d?s response is built into the system of nature in contrast to the human response that is imposed on the system of nature. In the end, to the extent that humankind can be responsible for its own destiny is determined by humankind?s willful actions.

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Once we have denied the causal correlation between action and consequence G-d's response is pure poetry. (26:23-26) ?If despite these? you behave ? Keri? with Me, then I too will behave toward you with ?Keri.? I will bring upon you a sword, a pestilence, and you will be delivered into the hands of the enemy.?

At first G-d hoped that we would learn our lesson and refocus on His relationship with us. Toward that end G-d did not act with ?Keri.? G-d did not act indifferently, causally, or by chance. Instead, the causal relationship between our actions and consequences set in motion a response that revealed G-d's direct involvement. G-d wanted us to turn toward Him and ask for forgiveness, beg for intervention, and beseech the cessation of suffering. G-d hoped we would recognize that our actions caused the suffering and therefore, through our actions we could change the consequences. However, if we do not accept responsibility for the consequences of our actions we are left blaming G-d and accusing Him of being unfair or arbitrary.

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G-d, the Truthful Judge, always responds with poetic justice. When Yisro joined the Jews in the desert he proclaimed G-d as the only G-d because he had witnessed G-d's poetic justice. (Shem. 18:11) Yisro rejoiced? through their (Egypt) very plots, He (G-d) rose above them (Egypt).? Rashi ?The Egyptians attempted to destroy the Jews with water and instead they were destroyed with water.?

The only proper response to our indifference, casualness, and assumption of by-chance toward G-d was for G-d to retreat behind the veil of nature and appear to be indifferent, casual, and by chance. It is classic ?Hester Panim hiding of G-d's countenance.?

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The hoped for outcome of Hester Panim G-d acting with ?Keri,? is to reverse our perception of G-d?s indifference, casualness, and by chance, and once again see G-d behind the veil of nature. The hoped for outcome is to break through nature?s veil of secrecy and recognize G-d?s ever-present direct intervention in all human and universal events. If we will be able to recognize G-d when He is seemingly most indifferent, casual and acting as if by chance, we will then have gained a far greater perception and understanding of G-d?s absolute mastery than ever before.

(26:44) "And yet for all that, even while in the land of their enemies I have not despised them, rejected them, or broken My covenant with them?"

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