

THE CHAIN EFFECT OF OUR ACTIONS

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Rashi in his commentary to this week's parsha emphasizes the idea of cause and effect. Rashi points out that this is true in both a negative and positive sense. In the words of the rabbis of the Mishna, a mitzva causes other mitzvot to occur while a transgression automatically drags along other sins in its wake. This is why the rabbis describe a wise person as being one who can see the future consequences of events and human behavior.

It is not only the individual act itself that is of consequence and importance. It is rather the sequence of behavior and related consequences that flow from that individual act that are just as important. The Jewish soldier who takes the captive woman unto himself in a moment of temporary passion is not intending that the end result of this act will be enduring domestic strife, hatred and eventually a dissolute and dangerous child.

But all behavior creates a ripple effect in life and many unintended consequences are derived from an intentional act of poor judgment and base desire. And the opposite is also true. A positive act of tradition and Torah service brings to the person performing that act of goodness and kindness unforeseen opportunities to perform other acts of goodness and kindness.

The performance of mitzvot leads to there being a protective fence that surrounds one's home and is redemptive in so many other unforeseen ways. Again, Judaism is committed to a far sighted view of life and behavior and the understanding that nothing that a person does or says is truly to be deemed inconsequential.

The charitable person will be given many continuing opportunities to be charitable. The miser will soon realize that no one will frequent his home or office. Initially he may feel relieved at this situation, but he will eventually regret it for it brings with it a loss of stature, a poor reputation and a loneliness of the soul.

The story is told about a wealthy man who, because of his wealth, gave much charity and had many visitors and was held in great esteem in his community. People came to him for advice and succor, though he was not particularly noted for his wit or wisdom. One day he decided that he would no longer give any charity. As this news spread, the visitors soon dwindled and eventually stopped altogether. The man complained to his wife: "I don't understand why people stopped coming. My funny jokes and good advice are still available to them!"

People often mistake honors and attention paid to them as being their personal right when that

honor or attention is only given to them because of their good deeds. It is clear that a person's actions and behavior propels his reputation and standing in the eyes of humankind as well as Heaven.

The Psalmist put it most bluntly: "If only humans would be wise and discerning and appreciate what their end will look like." It is not only about our eventual mortality that the Psalmist speaks. It is also certainly about the consequences here in our lifetime - of our acts, attitudes and behavior.

Shabat Shalom,

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Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com