

What Goes Around Comes Around: Everything's Connected

One of my fundamental tenets of everyday living is “what goes around, comes around”, and it seems like everything's connected in some way. Sometimes the consequences are good and sometimes the consequences are bad, and sometimes the consequences are just neutral. I'm going to talk about some of the more subtle connections and their consequences in this week's *parsha* and connected to this Shabbat.

So here's my first connection. As a long time Brotherhood member—it's no coincidence that I'm speaking today. When I volunteered to speak this summer, I thought, I'd do it early in August on the weekend my wife's having the first *Yahrzeit* for her father...I could say something poignant. But Dick approached me because it was Brotherhood Shabbat, so here I am. Indulge me for a minute or two to talk about the Brotherhood.

First, I'd like to welcome David Singer, the current NER president who is joining us this Shabbat.

The Brotherhood is an important Temple organization. It gives Jewish men the opportunity to have a social outlet, while also providing service and financial support, and enhancing the religious life of the Temple community. Socially, the Brotherhood helps underwrite the Temple Softball team, and sponsor events like our annual beer-making afternoon, and we run an annual Supper Bowl party. We also sponsor the community breakfast on *Mitzvah* day.

We provide service to the Temple through projects like assembling the *sukkah* every year, and we coordinate the High Holiday ushers. Our fund raising projects include the annual *Yizkor* book, which helps the community remember and

honor their loved ones with honor and respect and we also distribute Yom Hashoah candles in memory of the 6 million.

Our annual Passover wine sale helps make it easier to enjoy and finish four glasses of wine at our *Seders*.

Our fundraisers help support capital projects at the Temple like the new shades in the religious school, new computer and projection equipment, and we made a large contribution to the parking lot repaving a couple of years ago.

The Brotherhood also helps enhance the religious life at the Temple through events like the World Wide Wrap, and Build-A-Pair program for 5th graders to introduce *tefillin* in a fun way.

Our Brotherhood spread our leadership throughout the region and nationally. Regionally, we've had 4 regional Presidents: Ben Cohen, Lester Macklin; Mark Druy; and Arnie Miller. Mo Diamant is a regional vice president, and Scott Damsky and Ed Willins are on the regional board. At a national and international level, Mark Druy is chairing the International Convention. Rabbi Fel and Rabbi Lerner have been rabbinic advisors.

If you have any questions about the Brotherhood, contact David Goldberg our President, or Scott Lerman, our executive Vice President, or Larry Andler our treasurer, or Larry Bressler our Membership VP, or any Brotherhood members here today.

Now back to our regularly scheduled program.

When we talked about whatever goes around comes around, this is a phenomena that can be observed every day. A simple example is when you have small children. In the privacy of your home, you might comment on somebody,

like Aunt Sophie wears that gaudy pin everywhere she goes. Next thing you know, you run into Aunt Sophie on the street and your child says to her, “my mommy said that pin you wear is the gaudiest pin she ever saw.” It makes you want to just want to crawl into a hole. Or try swearing near a small child—you’ll start hearing it “when you rise, when you go out, and when you sleep.”

I never really looked at the *Tanakh* from the perspective of my tenet, what goes around, comes around. There are some obvious examples of retribution where the cause and effect are directly linked, like Pharaoh and the ten plagues.

But I’m not really talking about these obvious connections, I’m talking about subtle connections. I was sensitized to the concept of these subtle connections when we were studying the book of Ruth with Rabbi Eisenman during Sukkot this year. I never considered what I call the **Moabite connection**. In Deuteronomy, God states that no Moabite shall be admitted into the congregation of the Lord, none of their descendants even in the tenth generation, shall ever be permitted into the congregation of the Lord because they did not meet you with food and water on your journey after you left Egypt. But Ruth was accepted into the Jewish community with open arms. How could Ruth, a Moabite, be accepted into the community? I am sure her faith in God and her character helped, and it didn’t hurt that Boaz fell in love with her, but Ruth, at least in my mind sealed the deal, by bringing food and water to Naomi in direct contradiction to the reason for God’s decree. It was like turning back the clock and doing it right the first time.

There are some even more subtle instances in today’s *parsha* described in the commentary.

First, this week’s *parsha*, *Hukkat*, includes the story of the Israelites complaining of thirst, and God instructed Moses to speak to the rock to get water,

but after only a few drops fell, he struck the rock. And **for this**, Moses and Aaron were both denied entrance into the Promised Land.

So the first question is, they had water up until now, so why didn't they have water? A legend tells of a marvelous well that sprung up near Miriam whenever the Israelites camped as a tribute to her piety. As a young woman she waited by the waters of the Nile to see the fate of her baby brother, in the wilderness she celebrated God's power at the Red Sea—so she was blessed with water, a substance more valuable than gold in the desert. So the legend said when Miriam died, the well vanished, but I'm digressing.

So what's the irony, Pharaoh decreed that "every son shall you cast into the Nile. The words *Mei Meribah*, the "waters of the dispute" used in verse 13, were used earlier by Pharaoh's astrologers saw that the savior of Israel would be smitten by water and asked Pharaoh to decree "every son shall you cast into the Nile." Moses didn't perish in the Nile, but the water from the rock was his undoing. This was a connection I never made before. What goes around comes around, everything's connected.

Then in chapter 21, verse 5 the people spoke against God and Moses complaining "Why did you make us leave Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread and no water, and we have come to loathe this miserable food." So the lord sent serpents against the people. They bit the people and many of the Israelites died. When the people realized they sinned they asked Moses to intercede for them. God instructed Moses to make a copper serpent and mount it on a rod. And when the Israelites looked up at the serpent they were healed.

When I learned about this in school, we learn that this is the source of the symbol of the medical profession. But the question comes up, why they were attacked by serpents? When you think about the arsenal of misfortunes available

to God, why pick serpents. Tradition has it, that it connects back to Adam and Eve. Because they were deceived by the serpent by means of clever words, the serpent would always be the punishment to people who sin with words [Numbers 19:22]. So the subtle connection is to Adam and Eve. What goes around comes around, everything's connected.

The last connection is a little more personal and connected to the beginning of this *parsha*. The *parsha* begins with a decree by God to sacrifice an unblemished red heifer. A few months ago, my brother sent me an article about a red heifer that is attracting attention on a small farm outside of Lakewood, New Jersey. So what's the connection? Well, the farmer's name is Herbert Celler. My grandfather's name was Joseph Celler. And he is the son of my grandfather's nephew. So who thought, 3 months after I got the article, I'd be asked to speak on this weekend. What goes around comes around, everything's connected.

In conclusion, this week's *parsha* shows subtle connections from seemingly disparate episodes in the Torah: the case of Moses and water; and the Israelites and the serpents. These events come back to bite them (pardon the pun). But on a more positive note—having the opportunity to speak on Brotherhood Shabbat is an honor. And having a relative who actually owns a red heifer is neutral, neither good nor bad, but all demonstrate what goes around comes around and everything's connected. Shabbat Shalom