

The midrashic tradition often navigates the interaction and relationship between efforts and results in narrative form. For example, in the biblical narrative, the text does not elucidate how and why Moses was chosen to be the leader of the Israelites. That is left to interpretation. So, the wise sages seized on that opportunity and presented this understanding.

After Moses fled Egypt, he worked as a shepherd, caring for his father-in-law's flock in Midian.

One summer afternoon, while Moses was taking the herd through a sweet green pasture, he counted the sheep and found one missing.

Moses looked up and saw the smallest lamb in the flock disappearing over the hill at the edge of the field. Moses quickly decided to go after the little lamb.

For almost an hour, he followed the lamb until it stopped on the stream's bank and was busily drinking the water. It drank like it hadn't had anything to drink in weeks.

"Now I see why you ran away," said Moses. "Finish drinking all the water you want." Moses waited very patiently for the lamb to finish drinking.

Moses quietly and gently picked up the little lamb and held it in his arms. He spoke softly and sang to the lamb so it wouldn't be scared. Then, he took the lamb back to the pasture and gently placed it near its mother's side.

Just then, Moses heard God's voice. "Just like the lamb was thirsty for water," said the Lord, "my people, Israel, are thirsty for their freedom. And Moses, just as you brought the lamb back from the water with such kindness and understanding, so, too, will you lead my people into the Promised Land."

As we can recognize from this story, there is a clear connection between action and reaction.

Newton's third law of motion teaches us, "Every action has an equal and opposite reaction."

This applies to items in motion and the ways in which those items interact with the surrounding world, as well as other elements of life and existence. However, there is a secondary lesson here about existence in general. Namely, every action has the potential to cause a reaction. In other words, all that we do has an effect of some sort. Sometimes, the effect is significant, and at other times, it is minute. Nevertheless, this is something to be mindful of as we approach each day.

Nature and the ecosystem are in constant motion to achieve balance: the food chain, the forest, the oceans, etc. Balance within existence is something worth pursuing. We know well that it is easier said than done. While balance may be the ultimate goal, we are striving to keep our heads above water with some regularity. Therefore, perhaps another goal is to pay closer attention to our actions, understanding that there are always consequences.

At certain times, the consequences are positive. Others are negative. Often, on life's journeys, we encounter both positive and negative—because that is our existential nature.

Yet, some focus intently on the betterment of the world—seeking a holier, more peaceful, secure, and just existence. And some actively undermine those efforts. At times, the more substantial the actions of those disregarding human sanctity, the more opportunity there is to see goodness flourish.

At Yad Vashem, the holocaust museum and memorial in Jerusalem, there is The Avenue of the Righteous Among the Nations, which is lined with trees in honor of the non-Jews who acted according to the noblest principles of humanity and risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. Plaques adjacent to each tree record the names and countries of origin of those being honored.

Before entering the Holocaust History Museum, which presents the story of the Shoah, the visitor is reminded that there was an alternative: there were individuals who chose to walk the righteous path and shine a glimmer of light amidst the darkness.

The most significant acts of heroism came at the darkest hour. Their actions had far reaching implications, such as the saving of a life, or in some cases, many lives. As we know well, when one life is saved, it is like one saved an entire universe.¹

This week's Torah portion, Parashat Eikev, calls our attention to the enduring truth, our actions have consequences. Moses teaches the Israelites:

וְהָיָה אִם-שָׁמַעַתְּ אֶת-קוֹלֵי אֱלֹהֵי מִצְוֹתַי אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם לְאַהֲבָה אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וּלְעַבְדוֹ בְּכָל-לִבְבְּכֶם וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁכֶם:

If, then, you obey the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day, loving your God יהוה and serving [God] with all your heart and soul,

וְנָתַתִּי מְטַר-אֲרָצְכֶם בְּעֵתוֹ יוֹרֵה וּמִלְקוֹשׁ וְאֶסְפַּתְּ דְגָנְךָ וְתִירְשָׁה וַיִּצְהַרְהָ:

I will grant the rain for your land in season, the early rain and the late. You shall gather in your new grain and wine and oil—²

In other words, there will be a reward in return for the efforts that one puts forward if those actions are in accordance with the laws of the People Israel. However, the rabbinic tradition showed concern with this belief system that when one performs a mitzvah, one should expect an immediate physical reward. Especially because reality has shown that to be false. We may never directly see the results of our efforts. Nevertheless, we know that for every action, there is a reaction. So when we consider what's next, how we gesture, what we say, perhaps the

¹ B. Talmud, Sanhedrin 37a

² Dueteronomy 11:13-14

mindfulness that the Torah portion proposes can be our next steps on this journey we are blessed to walk.