



# Cause & Effect

We have had times in our history that a decree forced us to change what we were accustomed to doing, yet when the decree was abolished we still kept it the new way. The following are a couple of examples of this: Tosafos Yom Tov tells us that the Haftarahs were established when the wicked Antiochus—the king of Yavan—outlawed the public reading of the Torah. As a result, the sages of the time, established the custom of reading a selection from the neviim (“prophets”) that bear some sort of similarity to whatever was supposed to be read from the Torah that Shabbos. Even after the decree was nullified, we still held onto this practice and continue to do so (Megilla 3:4, Tosafos Yom Tov, s.v. l’kisdiran. In the words of the Mishna Brura [284:2]: The reason for the Haftarah is since there was a decree not to be oseik b’Torah, engaged in Torah, they read from the neviim seven aliyos, at least three pesukim per aliya just as in krias hatorah.).

Another example of this sort of phenomenon concerns blowing the shofar. According to the original custom, that mitzva was performed during shacharis on Rosh Hashana. Rashi (Rosh Hashana 32b, Rashi s.v. b’shas. Mishna Brura 588:2.) informs us that at some point, the government forbade blowing the shofar, so they sent people to spy on the Jews during shacharis in search of violators. Due to this, the blowing was deferred to mussaf.

The Yerushalmi (Yerushalmi Rosh Hashana 4:8. Rosh Hashana 32b, Tosafos.) gives a different reason for why blowing the shofar was moved from shacharis to mussaf. The Yerushalmi explains that they blew the shofar at shacharis, and when our enemies heard the shofar blasts early in the morning, they thought that we sounded a call to rise up against them in battle. They thereupon killed the Jews there. To prevent this from happening again, the mitzva of blowing shofar was transferred to mussaf. Since several hours of tefila and krias hatorah elapse before the shofar is blown, they would now realize it is a religious ritual and not a call to battle.

However, we are left to wonder in each of these examples: why didn’t we simply revert back to the way it originally was once the decree or threat had passed?

R’ Tzadok Hakohen (Tzidkas Hatzadik 178) answers that we continued with the new enactments of reading the Haftarah and performing tekias shofar at mussaf even after the decrees that caused those enactment to be instituted was nullified because the purpose of the decree was in

order to bring out these new establishments. Hashem caused the non-Jews to put us in a situation that we had to change our behavior as a Divine means of forcing us to change the custom.

We find variations of this idea in many different contexts. There are times we may think a certain way when really the exact opposite is true. Here are some of the many illustrations of this:

The pasuk (Bereishis 41:1) states: vayehi miketz shnasayim yamim u’Paroh cholaim (“it happened at the end of two years, and Paroh was dreaming”). The Beis Halevi (Miketz, s.v. vayehi miketz) comments that people mistakenly think that the outcome of Paroh’s dream was Yosef’s release from prison. The truth is it is really the opposite: because Yosef’s Divinely-decreed time in prison expired, Hashem made Paroh have a dream that led to his release from prison. This is how the Beis Halevi interprets vayehi miketz shnasayim yamim: since his Divinely-allotted time in prison was up, Paroh dreamt a dream. As the Midrash (Bereishis Rabba 89:1) puts it: kivan she’higia ha’keitz chalam Paroh chalom (“once the end arrived, Paroh dreamt a dream”) setting in motion Yosef’s release.

A pious but almost penniless Jew was once in need of money to make a wedding for his eldest daughter. Although the man had always put his trust in Hashem, he also knew that blessings require hishtadlus (“human effort”) and one shouldn’t rely on an overt miracle.

The poor Jew then met a man who was selling lottery tickets. Since the cost of the ticket was minor and the possible gain would solve all his problems, he reasoned that buying a lottery ticket was reasonable hishtadlus for his situation. So he bought a ticket.

There was another Jew in the neighborhood who was an unscrupulous businessman—essentially a thief—who regularly swindled others. Because he was deeply in debt, he also decided to buy a lottery ticket.

Hearing the talk in town that the pious Jew bought a lottery ticket, the thief thought that Hashem would surely look with more favor on the holy man’s ticket than on his own. So he figured the chances are that the pious Jew’s ticket was more likely to be the winning one than his own. And so, the thief decided to slip into the pious Jew’s house and substitute his own ticket for the pious Jew’s.

What happened? The pious Jew was stunned that “his” ticket was the winning one! The thief was devastated. The

thief was not willing to concede defeat, so he demanded a din torah (“rabbinic judgment”), which would undo the consequences of his theft. He admitted that he stole the pious Jew’s ticket, and was willing to repay him for that act of thievery. But, at the same time, he claimed that the winning ticket that he left in the pious Jew’s house was really his. Why should he be deprived of the winnings from something he himself purchased?

The rabbi who presided over this dispute was R’ Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (1843–1926). He awarded the proceeds of the lottery winnings to the innocent pious holder of the winning ticket. He condemned the thief not only for his crime, but also for being foolish enough to think that it was the ticket that had the mazel (“luck”) rather than the person. Hashem decided on the winner, not the combination of numbers that were drawn in the lottery.

If we observe the lives of different creatures, we might ask ourselves why Hashem created us with all sorts of needs that other parts of creation don’t have. For example, cats and other animals have no need for shelter, yet Hashem created humans with a need to live in a house or some other domicile. Why did He do this? The answer is this human need causes us to live in a house and therefore we have a chance to perform the mitzvos of mezuzah, maakeh (putting a fence on the roof), and so forth. We shouldn’t erroneously think that because we live in a house we have certain mitzvos. It is instead the opposite: because Hashem wants us to do certain mitzvos, He makes us need to live in a house.

Along these lines, we might think that because there was a horrible decree against us and we were saved, we now have the holidays of Purim and Chanuka. However, the correct view is that the reason for the decree was in order to cause the establishment of these holidays.

This allows us to comprehend another explanation in what we say on Chanuka in yevanim nikbitzu alai... We say the “Greeks gathered against me [i.e. the Jewish People], then in the time of the Hasmoneans. They breached the walls of my towers and defiled all the oils; And from the one remnant of the flasks a miracle was wrought for the roses [i.e. the Jewish People]. Men of insights—eight days established for song and jubilation.” This tells us that the story of the Greeks doing those horrible things occurred so that Hashem could bring about the miracle that led to us establishing the holiday of Chanuka.

## Rabbi Yehoshua Alt

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