WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND
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The world can be divided into twos many different ways. Men and Women, Liberals and Conservatives, Yankee Fans and Everyone else; the dichotomies are nearly endless. In my years in the rabbinate I have observed that by and large most people can also be divided at least one other way; those who believe that everything happens for a reason and those who do not.

You don't have to answer out loud but think for a moment, which are you? Do you believe that everything in your life is pre-determined? Do you believe in fate and destiny? The good, the bad, the challenges and the celebrations are they all part of some master plan in which you are an actor but not a director?

I know many people that believe that way and I admire their depth of belief even if it differs by degree from my own. Personally – that is not how I think all of this works. I say differs by degree because I do believe that "Everything Happens for a Reason" but where others might say the reason is G-d and some master plan, my explanation is the reason is more local, more personal, the reason that everything happens - is **you**.

To explain, I believe in cause and affect that what we do has consequences and that what we put into the world for good or for ill remains there and will often come back to us. This does not explain why tornados skip over some houses on a path of destruction or why those dear to us are stricken with pain and illness. I am not talking about controlling the randomness that is part of our natural world. Faith exists in part to help us find meaning in the randomness of nature. One of the great insights and comforts that Judaism offers us is the commandment to bless life, to love deeply and to not focus on the why's of life but instead derive meaning from the what's.

My response that the reason for everything that happens can be found within us is to make the point that the attainment or lack of wealth, prosperity, education, companionship that some may place in G-d hands, our tradition places squarely in ours. Put more succinctly, Judaism teaches time and again that what goes around comes around. You want good, do good and good will find you, you want bad (and no one wants bad), do bad and bad will find you. Not as a punishment or reward from the heavens, Lo bashamyaim hee, we read, the reward is not in the heavens - the reward or the punishment is in the doing.

Such is the experience of Jacob in this week's Torah portion. In last week's parasha, *Toledot*, Jacob deceives his father by dressing as his brother Esau to receive the birthright and blessing of Isaac. With that blessing Jacob inherits the mantel of leadership of the covenant. But in this week's portion, *Vayetze*, Jacob is the one

deceived. When Esau finds out what Jacob has done he is filled with rage and threatens to kill his brother.

Jacob flees to the home of his uncle Laban in Haran. While working for his uncle (his mother Rebekkah's brother) Jacob falls in love with Laban's younger daughter Rachel. He agrees to work seven years in his uncle's employ to earn the right to marry Rachel. On the wedding night Laban switches daughters substituting his elder daughter, Leah for Rachel. Jacob is now deceived as was his father, Isaac. When he discovers that he had been with Leah on his wedding night and not Rachel, he agrees to work an additional seven years for Rachel.

My friend and colleague, Rabbi Denise Eger points out that *"while this might appear to be a story of great love and devotion of Jacob to earn the hand of Rachel (and it is) it is also touching on this idea of what goes around comes around. The one who deceived his father is now deceived and Jacob learns a valuable lesson. He doesn't like the tricks and deception and he learns they life long consequences."* The deceptive actions that Jacob put into the world have come back to him and this time he is on the receiving end and it doesn't feel so good. Affirming again Hillel's Golden Rule don't do to another that which you would not want done to yourself.

But when we look more closely at both stories—last week and this week's Torah portion— there is a second and still deeper lesson from Jacob's deception. One has to ask the inevitable question: Were Isaac and then Jacob both really unwittingly deceived or were they the reason for their own deception? The rabbis debate this. Even though Isaac was blind he alludes to the fact that he recognizes Jacob's voice even under the hairy arms that feels like Esau. He says, "the hands are the hands of Esau but the voice is the voice of Jacob". Our rabbis teach that Isaac knew it was Jacob but would not allow himself to believe that his son would deceive him at such a critical time as his death bed blessing to his son. He did not push the question, "Who are you?" because he did not want to know the real answer.

And what about Jacob on his wedding night? Was he really tricked by the veil that hid his bride's face? Leah was brought to the wedding chamber and where was the questioning Jacob we came to know from his dreams and struggles with the angel? Did he not know his beloved's voice or body? Like his father before him, he did not want to believe that he could be so deceived on such a sacred occasion as his wedding night.

These questions in our portion help frame our questions and teach us a lesson. Sometimes we are the source of our own deception. Sometimes when the truth will not lead to the outcome we desire we tell lies and make up stories, we deal dishonestly with others, we deal dishonestly with ourselves. These acts of self deception that later bare poisonous fruit – we become the victim of our own misdeeds. We tell ourselves we can work 60 hour weeks without it having an impact on our family or personal well being. We tell ourselves that we have ticker skin and a stronger constitution than we actually do and then those feels we have

tamped down so long boil over when we and others have be conditioned not to expect it. We tell ourselves we are not jealous, vain, lonely, afraid, tired but we can be all those things, they are human emotions and we are human – though we deceive ourselves to think that we are not. Everything happens for a reason the Torah reminds us this week and sometimes that reason is us.

But there is still a third lesson from the example of Jacob – *mitzvah gareret mitzvah*, one good deed, one righteous act leads to another. If the reason for everything that happens is us, then we can be the source of goodness and healing and blessing in our own lives and the lives of others.

At the beginning of next week's Torah portion *Vayishlach* Jacob and Esau are reunited. Jacob is in fear for his life because he knows the hurt and anger he caused his brother, stealing his birthright, his inheritance and his blessing. He prays to God that Esau will not harm his family, and sends gifts out in advance of their meeting in the hopes of appeasing the anger he assumes is raging within Esau. For the first time Jacob thinks others before he thinks of himself, for the first time Jacob is honest with himself and reflects on the potential consequences of his miss deeds. And when they are reunited, Esau rides up on his camel surrounded by his army of hundreds of well armed men. Jacob is sure he is done for, he separates his family so some might be spared he bows low to the ground before his brother as he rides up. An Esau seeing all of this, seeing how Jacob cares for his family, seeing how repentant he is for his misdeeds – leaps down and runs up to Jacob and kisses him and hugs him. He returns the bribes his brother tried to give him and instead gives gifts to Jacob and helps care for his family.

Why does Esau do this, why not lash out in anger and seek retribution? Because Jacob was honest, because he showed that he had grown and learned to care for others not only himself. He put that out into the world and through Esau it came back to him. One good and righteous deed inspired another. Everything does indeed happen for a reason and the reason Jacob was kissed and not killed by his brother was that he was honest with himself and dealt honestly with others. Surely we too can learn this lesson this shabbas, surely we too can recognize that if what goes around comes around then honesty is not only the best **but** the only policy.