

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת ראה

ראה אנכי נתן לפניכם היום ברכה וקללה

“See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse” (11:26)

The Rambam writes in Hilchos Teshuva that a person should always view the world as an even scale. If he does a single mitzva, the world will be considered virtuous. If he does even a single aveira, the world will be weighed down by its sins and judged as guilty. Each individual has the ability to affect the fate of the whole world and the Rambam uses this illustration to help us understand that. A person should never feel insignificant. Rather, he should always be aware of the great responsibility that constantly lies on his shoulders. Any action that a person takes can determine the fate of the entire world. This is an important lesson to contemplate at all times, especially in the month of Elul, which is almost upon us.

This idea is alluded to in the first posuk of our parsha. Hashem tells us to "see" and recognize that the "I," the individual, "presents before you the blessing and the curse." It is every individual who decides whether the community as a whole will receive the tremendous blessings from Hashem that are outlined in the following pesukim. Always remember that every person, from the important and powerful to the simpler people, contributes to the final determination of blessings or curses. Each of us can change the whole world all by ourselves.

והקללה אם לא תשמעו אל מצות ה' אלקיכם וסרתם מן הדרך אשר אנכי

מצוה אתכם היום ללכת אחרי אלהים אחרים אשר לא ידעתם

“And the curse: If you do not listen to the commandments of Hashem, your G-d, and you stray from the path that I command you today, to follow other gods that you did not know” (11:28)

There is a clear difference between the pesukim describing the blessing and the curse. First, the posuk says that blessings will come if we listen to Hashem. Then, it continues that the curse will come if we do not listen to Hashem and stray from the path that Hashem commanded us. Why is this second part added to the curse but not to the blessing? The answer is based on the well-known principle of Chazal that if a person intends to do something but is prevented from actually completing his plans, Hashem considers it as if he had actually accomplished what he intended to do. The thoughts are treated like actions. However, this principle is only true if one attempts to do a mitzva

but cannot follow through. If a person intends to do bad, this is not so. If a person plans on sinning but stops short of doing so, his plans are not considered the same as an evil action. That is why the curses only come if we don't listen and also ultimately commit aveiros. Listening to the words of the Torah and wanting to do the mitzva is equivalent to doing it and warrants a blessing in its own right. Hashem rewards the good in a far greater measure than he punishes for the bad. Hashem has a lot to give and is happy to give blessings. But He wants our heart and wants us to earn the blessings, if we would just listen and accept the mitzvos and decide in our hearts that we want to fulfill them.

כי יקום בקרבך נביא או חלם חלום ונתן אליך אות או מופת
“If there should arise in your midst a prophet or a dreamer of a dream, and he will produce to you a sign or a wonder” (13:2)

The Avnei Azel points out that the Torah gives three examples where a person is led astray by an influential figure. The first case is when a prophet, a charismatic leader of the people, tries to persuade others to do wrong. In the second case, it is pressure from a family member. In the third case, it is the community, the people around us, who attempt to lead us down the wrong path. These three types of influences can be very strong and affect us greatly. We must be able to distinguish between the beneficial impact of these groups of people from the instances when they are exerting their influence to cause us spiritual harm.

ולא ידבק בידך מאומה מן החרם למען ישוב ה' מחרון אפו ונתן לך רחמים
ורחמך והרבך כאשר נשבע לאבתך
“No part of the banned property may adhere to your hand, so that Hashem will turn back from his burning wrath; and he will give you mercy and He will be merciful to you and He will multiply you, as He swore to your forefathers” (13:18)

Why does the posuk state that Hashem will "give you mercy" after the laws of wiping out an idolatrous city? One character trait of a Jew is his compassion. However, a person is influenced by his actions. If the Jews kill an entire city, it is possible that they will develop a taste for violence and will lose their Jewish identity as merciful people. Therefore, Hashem promises that if they kill in order to do a mitzva, He will give them mercy and they will not lose their compassion. When a person does a mitzva, nothing bad happens to him. In this situation, because it is the will of Hashem, the violent actions will not affect them and, even more so, they will be blessed with more compassion. One should never be afraid of a mitzva, even for noble reasons. In the case of

the idolatrous city, the Yetzer Hara wants people to feel that they cannot kill because it will harm their character. This is just the plan of the evil inclination.

בנים אתם לה' אלקיכם לא תתגדדו ולא תשימו קרחה בין עיניכם למת
“You are children to Hashem, your G-d - you shall not cut yourselves and you shall not make a bald spot between your eyes for a dead person” (14:1)

Chazal derive from the commandment of **לא תתגדדו** that we should not make divisions among ourselves and everyone in a community should have the same customs. This is based on the relationship between **תתגדדו** and **אגודה**, groups. How does this derivation of Chazal fit in with the simple understanding of the posuk, that one is forbidden to physically harm himself as an expression of grief?

The Ramban writes that the reason for this prohibition is because when a person expresses so much grief, he shows his feeling that the dead person's existence is over. However, we know that the soul of a person goes on after death. The person continues to exist, albeit in a different form, and so a person should not cut himself.

Based on this Ramban, the Avnei Nezer answers the question. The souls of all Jews are connected. They all come from the same place. Recognizing this leads to an understanding that we must all stick together, love each other and not constantly be divisive. We must focus on the joint soul of our people and not the fact that we are physically separate entities. Thus, the emphasis on the physicality of the person creates this problem, just like it does for the mourner.

וכי ירבה ממך הדרך כי לא תוכל שאתו כי ירחק ממך המקום אשר יבחר ה' אלקיך לשום שמו שם כי יברכך ה' אלקיך
“If the road will be too long for you, so that you cannot carry it, because the place that Hashem, your G-d, will choose to place His name there is far from you, for Hashem, your G-d, will have blessed you” (14:24)

The Alshich comments that when one develops a love for a mitzva, his feelings overcome the burden that it causes and the mitzva is not hard to do. This, he explains, is the hidden meaning of this posuk regarding bringing the maaser sheni, the second tithes, to Yerushalayim and eating them there. If it is a burden to carry your produce on a long journey and the mitzva is too hard for you to do, the "makom," Hashem, is far from you. This difficulty is a sign of the distance that has grown between that person and Hashem. The mitzva to become close to Hashem is repeated in this week's parsha because of its great importance. When one develops this relationship, the mitzvos become easier.

When a person feels that the produce is too much of a burden to transport to Yerushalayim, he is permitted to take money instead but he is required to take an extra 25% in addition to the market value of the produce. For example, if one's maaser sheni produce is worth \$100, he can keep the produce and take money to Yerushalayim, but he must take \$125. One who brings money must spend more than if he had brought the actual produce. Perhaps we can say that this extra money is a penalty, a fine, for not wanting to assume the burden of fulfilling a mitzva. The Torah provides a second option, but it costs more money.

A person should live life with the attitude that being a Jew is enjoyable and the best possible way to live. R' Moshe Feinstein said that an entire generation of American Jewry left the path of Torah and mitzvos in the early 20th century because they were brought up with an attitude that it is difficult to be Jewish rather than with an appreciation for Torah and mitzvos. People in those times had difficult lives trying to keep jobs for more than one week at a time. Life was not easy and they attributed this to their Jewishness. The children saw this and rejected their Judaism. We must be careful about our attitude toward Torah and mitzvos and be sure that the next generation learns the proper appreciation for the great gift that Hashem gave us, His Torah.

**נתון תתן לו ולא ירע לבבך בתתך לו כי בגלל הדבר הזה יברכך ה' אלקיך
בכל מעשך ובכל משלח ידך**

“You shall surely give to him, and let your heart not feel bad when you give him, for in return for this matter, Hashem, your G-d, will bless you in all your deeds and in your every undertaking” (15:10)

The Kesav Sofer explains that "because of this matter Hashem will bless you" refers back to the beginning of the posuk about not letting your heart feel bad. If one gives tzedaka with happiness and does not feel that the mitzva is harming him, then he will receive the blessings for giving charity. One should feel that his money was given to him for this purpose and he is not losing. If one feels badly and gives begrudgingly, his mitzva is incomplete. R' Mendel MiRiminov asks: Why don't we make a beracha on the mitzva of giving tzedaka? He answers that many times people give tzedaka and are not happy about it. This type of mitzva is incomplete and does not deserve a beracha.

Another possible explanation of the word "davar" is that it is to be taken literally, to mean "words." Because of the words that accompany the tzedaka, one will merit the blessings. The Gemara in Bava Basra says that one who gives tzedaka receives six blessings and one who also talks nicely to the poor man and comforts him receives an additional eleven blessings. The Gemara

teaches us that if one gives charity begrudgingly and slams the door in the face of the poor man, he has not done the mitzva in the best possible way. One should make an effort to talk to the poor man and make him feel better about himself. Chazal tell us to realize that the poor are doing more for us than we are doing for the poor. When a poor man comes to ask for money, he provides the wealthy man with an opportunity to do a mitzva. A person who is blessed with wealth should use it for mitzvos. If a person looks at the poor man and is thankful for the chance to use his money for a good purpose, he will approach the act of giving in a much different way. This is how the mitzva of tzedaka is meant to be done. The Sefer HaChinuch (מצוה תע"ט) writes that even comforting a person who is depressed is part of the mitzva of tzedaka. Although we generally associate tzedaka with giving money, this does not have to be the case. Tzedaka can be done by making a person feel better about himself, and this is something that anyone can do, regardless of financial means.

**כי לא יחדל אביון מקרב הארץ על כן אנכי מצוך לאמר פתח תפתח את ידך
לאחיק לעניך ולאבינך בארץ**

“For destitute people will not cease to exist within the land; therefore I command you, saying: You shall surely open your hand to your brother, to your poor, and to your destitute in your land” (15:11)

The word "laimor" means to tell others. The Torah commands us to tell others to give tzedaka in addition to our own giving. Chazal tell us, "One who causes others to do is greater than one who does himself." This is true of any mitzva, but especially of tzedaka, where a person may have limited means. If one is unable to give much tzedaka on his own, he should generate money for tzedaka through other people by asking and encouraging them to help with worthy causes.

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