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Menachem Persoff

What's in a Blessing - And a Curse?

Our Parsha begins with Moshe telling the people: "See today, I set [Lit. give] before you this day, a blessing and a curse." Ostensibly, the blessing is for following Hashem's ways and the curse for not fulfilling the Mitzvot (D'varim 12:26-28). If that is so, why has the Torah not employed the terms 'reward' and 'punishment'?

We might understand and welcome the blessing. But how do we comprehend that Hashem dispenses curses - and yet "today", as the people are preparing to enter Eretz Yisrael?

Perhaps these curses are the consequence of earlier misdeeds. After all, Adam's sin in Gan Eden changed the course of history, and Kayin's killing his brother transformed him (as a prototype) into a wanderer on the face of the earth.

But no! What is it that Moshe wants the people to see? For the Netivot Shalom, the B'racha is not necessarily conditional on good behavior. For surely we wish someone well in the face of uncertainty or a situation needing a remedy. Thus, for example, we bless the baby at the Brit to become a Ben Torah, the sick patient

to recover, and the new Oleh to succeed in Israel.

Moreover, we would not want to curse, a priori, if at all. A curse is more likely to be the consequence of a perceived injustice or the like.

So, what Moshe wants us to see, the Netivot Shalom remarks, is that the blessing and the curse are the personal attributes that Hashem gives us. Moreover, whether "good/blessed" or "bad/cursed", these traits equally serve to bolster our spiritual journey and unique mission in this world.

Clearly, our Chesed and Mitzvot enhance this goal - but our bad qualities, how so? So, the Netivot Shalom explains: Hashem bestows only good in this world. Thus the "curses" that Hashem gives each of us are not intrinsically evil; they are there to be overcome - the lust, the greed, pride, anger, apathy, cynicism, and more. Once achieved, the transformed flawed features elevate the individual and bring the Tikun (rectification) into this world, leading the way to perfection.

So, this is what Moshe wanted us to see. Seemingly, then, an appropriate blessing for Shabbat might be that we should all be ZOCHEH to galvanize our attributes to achieve our unique Sh'lichut in this world and bring about the Tikun. **MP**