

Parshah Re'eh (See) Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17

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Good & Evil
FREEWILL
Blessings & Curses



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**“No man chooses evil
because it is evil; he
only mistakes it for
happiness, the good he
seeks.” - Mary
Wollstonecraft**



Overview

The opening words of this weeks' parashah “**See, I place before you today a blessing and a curse.**” (**Deuteronomy 11:26**) can be likened to a master that says to a servant if you do my will I shall adorn you with a fine necklace, but if you do not do my will I shall bind you in chains. (Rabbi Leve - Deuteronomy Rabbah 4:2)

But what are blessings? Do we really know what they are? And what are curses? Most people actually feel a closer connection to curses than they do blessings. They seem more conscious of the what seems like curses in their lives. They feel that a curse is more powerful than a blessing, in that it's more likely to take root than a blessing is and it's harder to shake off than a blessing is to keep. How did we become so affiliated with negativity?

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Blessing

ברכה Berakhah

Meaning: To draw down od spiritual energy (for the good)

The function of a *berakhah* is to acknowledge Elohim as the source of all blessing. Berakhot also have an educational function to transform a variety of everyday actions and occurrences into Divine experiences designed to increase awareness of Elohim at all times.

Everything in life — health, prosperity, joy, wisdom, peace of mind — needs to be drawn down from its potential, spiritual state into the actuality of our physical existence. A blessing is something that was already present in thought but is now manifest in speech. It's the act of drawing something from thought to speech, building the momentum hopefully into action. The action is dependant of the recipient creating a type of vessel, which manifests from pursuing righteousness.

We engage the yetza tov (good inclination) to receive blessings.

Curse

The English word "curse" is used over approximately 11 different Hebrew words in Scripture.

אלה *alah* אָרַר *arar*

Meaning: Imprecation

Meaning: Bitter Curse (to execrate [loathe])

Alah appears 5 times

Arar appears 14 times

קלל *qallel*

Meaning: Accursed

Meaning: To Remove a positive influence of Elohim

A Curse

“Therefore *the curse* [“*alah*”] has devoured the earth, And those who dwell in it are desolate ...” (Isaiah 24:6)

The basic term for imprecation in Scripture is *alah*. In most instances it represents an adjuration, i.e., a conditional curse upon someone in the second or third person. As "imprecation" the *alah* is implicitly present in every oath (*shevu'ah*), for an oath is by definition a conditional self-curse.

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The next term most frequently associated with the idea of curse is the verb *kallel* (*qallel*; קלל) and the cognate noun *qelalah*. This term has a far broader connotative range. It reflects attitudes, behaviour, and actions all the way from contempt, through verbal abuse, and to physical violence.

When we engage the yetza hara (evil inclination) we risk receiving curses that create an environment which manifests obstacles that come from the sitra achra, or “*other side*.”



Only Two Paths

There are two paths that avail themselves to a person, the path to do good and the path to do evil. Both paths open-up exponentially to the practitioner. It is said that one mitzvah (love deed) leads to another mitzvah and one עבירה (aveira [sin]) leads to another aveira. This is mercy, because rather than administer immediate strict justice, the path of falsehood grows gradually more constricting until a person chooses the path of good or slowly perishes. However, when a person sins and they see no immediate consequence, they convince themselves that there is no consequence, so while they are kept alive in the hopes that they would do t'shuvah, they instead continue to use that time to descend into greater transgression. Furthermore, the choice to do evil is seldom taken for the sake of doing evil. For when a person chooses to do evil, he does so not because it is evil, but because he perceives it as good. His judgment is of course warped, and his subjective criteria of goodness is certainly off – but what he believes nonetheless is that he is doing good in some sense. At its root, the desire to take an alternate course of action is driven by thinking that the person knows better than Elohim. This is how cities like Sodom and Gomorrah emerge from a once fruitful place. Rather than let Yerushalayim potentially descend into another Sodom and Gomorrah, transgression in the Land leads to expulsion or death.

“Even the land has become defiled, so I am punishing it for its sin, and the land will vomit out its inhabitants.” (Leviticus 18:25)

The Creator has given to the world the phenomenon of free will. It is the capacity to choose between different courses of actions, words or thoughts—not due to outside influence, internal nature or any sort of personal preference. Just a balanced choice between right and wrong. He created an environment of cause and effect.

Faith, Righteousness & Freewill

When things go wrong in our lives, sometimes we might find ourselves challenged by thinking where is G-d in the situation. Sometimes you might hear it said that life is hard. This can lead to questioning justice and fairness in the world and then questioning the world's Creator. Added to this, there is a large majority of people wandering around who believe that the commandments of the so-called Old Testament were too hard to obey, causing the Messiah to come, making it easier, bringing a type of short-cut or discount to salvation. **“Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, ‘Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?’ Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, ‘Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?’ No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it. See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love Yahweh your Elohim,**

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to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and Yahweh your Elohim will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Yarden to enter and possess. This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love Yahweh your Elohim, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For Yahweh is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov.” (Deuteronomy 30:11-20)

The key in observing Torah is to walk by emunah (faith or trust). Faith means that we make judgments not on what we always feel, hear or see, but by **“every word that comes from the mouth of Yahweh.” (Deuteronomy 8:3)** Because **“we (are to) live by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7)**

Rav Sha'ul reiterates the same theme in **Romans 10:4-10** quoting largely from **Deuteronomy 30.**

“For Moshiach is the goal of the Torah for righteousness to every one that believes. For Moshe describes the accessibility of righteousness which is of the Torah, that the man which does those things shall live by them. Whereas the Tzidkat Emunah (righteousness which is from faith) speaks thus: "Do not say in your heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Moshiach down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Moshiach again from the dead.) But what does it say? The word is near you, even in your mouth, and in your heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if you shall confess with your mouth Yahshua HaMoshiach, and shall believe in your heart that Elohim has raised him from the dead, you shall be saved. For with the heart man believes unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” (Romans 10:4-10)

Faith, is when one principally places their emphasis on the Word of Elohim despite the nature of a situation. A person who has faith is largely unaffected by situations, whether they might seem disastrous or miraculous.

The gifts or blessings that Elohim has in store for those who love Him are all predicated on the concept of freewill.

The Purpose of Contracted Creation

Freewill came about as a core necessary element for determining the wilful participation in a relationship between two entities. Genesis describes Elohim bringing the entire universe into existence out of the void for the purpose of heightening the joy of His manifestations. His purpose was to increase joy throughout His infinite expanse, by chiefly creating a collective purpose across the anatomy of His existence.

To correct the world we live, the most effective way is to correct ourselves. **“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.”** (Matthew 7:1-5)

Scripture warns us to approach situations where we rebuke one another with absolute caution.

“Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.”
(Galatians 6:1) Note the prerequisite here: **“you who live by the Spirit.”**

In recent times someone, coming off the end of a fast told me that they had received insight into my sin. Surely, one who is fasting, and praying is receiving insight into their own short comings firstly and foremostly. In this regard, excessive prayer and fasting becomes like a weapon, wielded like a rod as if to say, I fasted for so many days, so I know what's going on and you better listen to me!

We improve our interpersonal relationships by making efforts to improve our own observance, by examining our own daily routine. How often are we reciting Tehillim (psalms)? Are we doing it with concentration? Are we praying and studying regularly? Are we keeping Shabbat? Are we beginning to remove certain thinking patterns and gradually improving our outlook and the way we conduct ourselves?

Most Offensive Document in History

The Torah, the TaNaK and the Netzarim Ketuvim that span out from it, is the most politically incorrect and offensive document known to man in this last generation. If Moshe Rabbeinu or any one of the prophets, even Moshiach spoke in the same vain as they did in their day, they would be seen as fundamentalist fanatics and unwelcome in most religious institutions. Most people reading this and quietly nodding their heads in agreement would still be offended. They might agree with my opening statements, but still wouldn't last five minutes in a pure lecture on Torah mussar (ethics) delivered by one of the greats. The book of Deuteronomy deals a lot in mussar. The word mussar appears in the TaNaK fifty-one times and more than half of its appearance is found in Sefer Mishlei (The Book of Proverbs).

Most students left to their own devices naturally gravitate away from Torah that involves mussar, because it can be very confronting as a person is challenged to confront their own personal lacking in their character in an effort to grow closer to Elohim.

Learning Torah is a whole other world away from beginning to implement it in a person's own character. Its confronting to allow the Torah to change your thought patterns, your speech and your actions.

People, even believers, are used to the damage in the world today. A child grows up amid dysfunctionality, only knowing dysfunctionality and is deprived of seeing relational harmony and stability. Brokenness is normal to most people, it doesn't shock them, worry them or really motivate them to do anything about it.

The spirit of Yahshua, Yah's right merciful arm of salvation, the Torah made flesh, was manifest in the Torah and the age when the Torah was given. The same Yahshua that saves, shelters, nurtures, and protects, is the same Yahshua who shatters, breaks, and wounds.

Yahweh Elohim deliberately allows the fear of heaven to be removed from a person. This means that most people don't live with a natural ongoing fear of doing anything wrong. Freedom of choice has been granted to every man: if he desires to turn toward a good path and be righteous, the ability to do so is in his hands; and if he desires to turn toward an evil path and be wicked, the ability to do so is in his hands...

This concept is a fundamental principle and a pillar of the Torah and its commandments. As it is written [*Deuteronomy 30:15*]: "See, I have set before you life [and good, and death and evil]" and "See, I set before you today [a blessing and a curse]"... For were Yahweh to decree that a person be righteous or wicked, or if there were to exist something in the very essence of a person's nature which would compel him toward a specific path, a specific conviction, a specific character trait or a specific deed...how could Yahweh command us through the prophets "do this" and "do not do this,"...? What place would the entire Torah have? And by what measure of justice would Yahweh punish the wicked and reward the righteous...? (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance 5:1-3)

Fear of Heaven

The fear of Elohim is mentioned 18 times in the TaNaK, 4 times to fear punishment, 8 times to fear is majesty or honour. This is as opposed to love Elohim, which is mentioned approximately 10 times in the TaNaK.

The overarching mindset in our walk is to maintain and cultivate a healthy fear of Elohim and esteem it over the desire to acquire knowledge for its own sake. **“The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” (Proverbs 9:10)**

The concept of freewill and inevitable judgment that comes along with it, is certainly a blessing and the fact that our actions carry so much weight, for better or for worse, is an enormous privilege. If we see this as a curse, it could be because we are exercising our freewill in ways that we know will lead to disaster.