

When a person sins, he, by his very actions, rejects Hashem. He is implying, "No thanks, I am not interested." Hashem listens to him. We hear people who have sadly been on the receiving end of troubles say, "I have been cursed." From the *Kli Yakar*, we observe that a person is not cursed; rather, if he is not deserving of Hashem's protection (for whatever reason. It might even be Heavenly ordained for ultimately engendering good), he will be left exposed to the "elements" that result from his sin. Perhaps we should ask ourselves if we are as quick to thank Hashem for the good that He bestows upon us as we are to kvetch when something does not seem to go our way.

גם כל חולי וכל מכה אשר לא כתוב בספר התורה הזאת יעלם ד' עליך עד השמדך

Even any illness and any blow that is not written in this Book of the Torah, Hashem will bring upon you, until you are destroyed. (28:61)

This *pasuk* caps it off. If there were not enough curses (98) to punish us, we are informed that, just because the curse did not appear in the Torah, we will not be exempted from it. Every illness or blow, in other words, everything that could possibly be imagined – is included in the punishments available for disciplining us, if necessary. This presents us with a very bleak outlook. *Horav Mordechai Pogremonsky, zl*, addressed this issue, when the Telshe students who were displaced from their *yeshivah* were living in Shidlov, at the beginning of World War II. Tensions were rising, as fear of the Nazi invasion was becoming more imminent with each passing day.

Rav Pogremonsky distinguished between the *makkos ha'kesubos baTorah*, those blows that are written in the Torah, and those which are not. Those blows which are not included in the Torah are of a unique nature in that they address the very existence of the Jewish People. These *makkos* are of a nature that, Heaven forbid, they could destroy our People. It is specifically with regard to this aspect that these blows are ineffective. Hashem has given us a promise that He will never destroy *Am Yisrael*, our nation – regardless of our iniquity. *Chitzai achaleh bahem*, "My arrows shall I use up against them (*Devarim* 32:23): *Chazal (Sifri)* consider this a blessing in disguise, *chitzai kalim v'heim einan kalim*, "My arrows will be used up, but they will not be used up." *Klal Yisrael* will never cease to exist. This is Hashem's word.

Therefore, those *kelalos*, curses/blows that are not in the Torah are of concern, but they should not create anxiety to the point that we think an end, Heaven forbid, will come to our People. That will never happen. *Rav Pogremonsky* concluded that, while it is true we were witness to brutality and terror that is beyond anything that has ever occurred and beyond anything alluded to in the Torah, it does not mean that we have met our downfall: "Does this mean that we have reached the point of no

return? No! If the Nazis come at us with a blow that is not written in the Torah, then it is a clear indication of their defeat. Indeed, the beginning and end of their downfall will be due to their utter brutality towards the Jewish People."

Va'ani Tefillah

רופא חולי עמו ישראל – Rofeh cholei amo Yisrael. Who heals the sick of His People, Yisrael.

When we pray to Hashem to heal an individual of his illness, we add, *b'soch shaar cholei Yisrael*, "among the other ill people of *Yisrael*." We do not ask only for ourselves or for a close relative or friend; we ask for all of our people to be healed of their ills. We do so, explains *Horav Yitzchak Kirzner, zl*, because we acknowledge the unique role and mission of each and every Jew in his contribution to the world. Hashem has created each of us with a special mission to accomplish. When a person is ill, he cannot fulfill his mission, thus depriving the world of its perfection. We ask Hashem to consider that merit, that mission which will be left incomplete as long as that person is ill. We do not ask for health just because we care for that person. We look at the larger picture, the global, *Klal Yisrael* picture – because this is where a person's *z'chusim*, merits, are purposeful. Sure, we want our friends/relatives to live; this goes without saying. If we are to present a good reason, however, it should be that, as long as that person is incapacitated, he/she cannot make his/her unique contribution to the Jewish nation at large.

Ruthie and Sam Salamon

*in loving memory of
Mr. Victor Gelb*

**אביגדור בן משה ז"ל
נפטר י"ט אלול תש"ן**

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Parashas Ki Savo

תשע"ז

פרשת כי תבוא

**ונצעק אל ד' אלקי אבותינו וישמע ד' את קולנו
Then we cried out to Hashem, the G-d of our forefathers,
and Hashem heard our voice. (26:7)**

The *Chassidic Masters* teach that, when *Klal Yisrael* was enslaved in Egypt, they lost the power to articulate their needs to Hashem. *Sagar aleihem ha'midbar*; "The wilderness has locked them in" (*Shemos* 14:3). Pharaoh claimed that the Jews were confused and lost in the wilderness; literally, they were locked in. *Midbar* is interpreted by the Masters as *medaber*, to speak. Their ability to speak, to pray to Hashem properly, to voice their concerns and plead their case was locked, i.e., they were unable to speak. Thus, the only manners of expression left for them were: *anachah*, groaning; *zaakah*, crying out; *shaavah*, outcry/crying; *naakah*, moaning. These are not terms of speech, because we had not yet reached that level in which we could speak to Hashem.

Shaavas aniyim Atah sishma; "The outcry of the poor You hear" (*Tefillas Nishmas, nusach Sfarad*). *Chazal (Nedarim 41a)* say, "Ein ani ela b'daas, A (true) poor person is one who is impoverished of understanding." The *Nesivos Shalom* explains that, like the poor person/poor of intelligence, who lacks the ability to speak, to express himself intelligently, so that he cries out, so, too, was *Klal Yisrael* in Egypt. Impeded in their ability to pray to Hashem, to articulate clearly their needs, their pain, their aspirations, they resorted to crying out.

We, too, are often so overwhelmed by our physical desires that we are unable to think properly, to express ourselves cogently to Hashem. The *Nesivos Shalom* observes that *Shabbos* is a time of spiritual clarity, when the *tefillas*, prayers, that are lacking during the week, due to our impoverished/physical state, come to the fore anew, with fresh clarity. We must then see to it that our *tefillas* of *Shabbos* carry over to the week. This, of course, achieves efficacy only if one makes a point to attend *shul* and *daven* – not socialize (author's addendum). The advantage of *Shabbos*, the benefits reaped from the rich, spiritual atmosphere that permeates the person, his home, his life, allows him to *daven* in such an exalted manner that he is able to offer his heartfelt feelings to Hashem. To articulate to the Almighty is to reach out to Him in a manner ordinarily unattainable during the weekdays, when he is absorbed with the endeavors of his mundane, physical life.

The *Nesivos Shalom* quotes the *Toras Avos*, who offers a similar explanation with regard to *Tekias Shofar*. He analogizes our *Tekias Shofar* "prayer" to sons of a king who were taken captive by a band of thieves. During the ensuing stay of captivity, the princes themselves were so influenced

by the rough environment and vulgar nature of their captors that they became like them. No longer did they speak with refinement. They were uncouth, gross individuals, who spoke in a manner becoming such dropouts from society. A number of years passed, and the princes were finally rescued and returned to the palace. They entered the palace and began speaking to their father, the king, in their newly-acquired vernacular.

Understandably, the king was clueless concerning what they were saying, to the point that he said, "These are not my sons!" When the princes saw that they were about to be dismissed, they began crying out "Tatte! Father! Do you not recognize us?" They were no longer speaking in their vulgar language; they were crying out to their father. Now, he heard them! They were his children.

A Jew stands before Hashem on *Rosh Hashanah* unsure of what to say, how to plead, what excuse to give. He has no mouth, no words, nothing intelligent to articulate, to explain the past year and why he is not where he was supposed to be at this point in life. What does a son whose father neither understands nor recognizes him do to get his father's attention? He cries! Our cries are the *tekias, shevarim, teruah*, the blasts of the *Shofar*, which represent our brokenhearted emotions. *Vanitzaak el Hashem, vayishma es koleinu* – "We cried out to Hashem... and He listened to our voices" – not our words, because we were unable to speak. We cried. He heard our emotional pleas.

Yosef Mendelevich was a refusenik who stood up to the evil empire of the USSR before the fall of the Iron Curtain. In his autobiography, "Unbroken Spirit," he describes his youth and his first memory of Hashem. He was outwardly raised as a good and loyal Soviet, while inwardly he had questions concerning some unusual rituals that were somehow connected with his Jewish heritage. As a young boy, he did not have the luxury of a Jewish education, so his knowledge of religion, Hashem, Torah and *mitzvos* was nil. These are things that we take for granted. Perhaps if we would meet Jews who might even be living on our block, who were raised without everything which we take for granted, we might no longer take them for granted. He describes his first memory of Hashem at the age of ten.

Yosef recalls returning home from school to find his house in shambles, furniture overturned, books strewn on the floor, clothes all over. It appeared as if it had been hit by a tornado. His mother explained that the government was searching their home for Jewish artifacts, which they found. As a result, his father was arrested and taken off to prison. Yosef describes vividly that fateful day when the entire family came to the courthouse to be present in support of his father, when

the judge would declare his verdict. At the moment that Yosef saw his father standing there, waiting for the judge's pronouncement, he was filled with an overwhelming emotion. From the depths of his heart, he cried out, "Hashem! Please save us!" He was as shocked as everyone else, because he had never heard of Hashem. He had never prayed, studied, interacted in any manner with Hashem. Actually, being Jewishly illiterate, he was an *ani b'daas*, person impoverished in understanding, a Jewish boy by birth – but totally foreign to Judaism. Never having been educated about Hashem, how did he cry out like that? The cry emanated from his innermost soul. The *Pintele Yid*, essential Jew, was crying out to his Father in Heaven, "Tateh! *Shoin genuck*, enough! Please!"

That moment was the game-changer, as he became consumed with Judaism. He desired to meet, greet, study with, and teach fellow Jews. He was eventually sentenced to eleven years in Siberia for his activities as a "refusenik," but he was proud. He was answering the cry from his innermost soul.

There are many Jews, some from without, others who are among us, who sadly stifle that cry. They are acutely aware of its existence, but they are afraid of the implications of allowing it to emerge from within. We should all shed a tear for them.

**ואמרת לפני ד' אלקיך ביערתה הקדש מן הבית
Then you shall say before Hashem, your G-d, "I have
removed the holy things from the house." (26:13)**

Viduy Maaser, the confession one makes proclaiming that he has fulfilled his sacred duty to give the various tithes and other gifts apportioned from his crops, is a *mitzvas ase*, positive commandment. The commentators struggle with the term *viduy*, a word reserved for confessing a sin or wrongdoing. In this case, however, the person is carrying out a *mitzvah*. Why would confession be necessary? The *Satmar Rebbe*, *zl* (*Divrei Yoel*), met with the *Vishnitzer Rebbe*, *zl*, (*Ahavai Yisrael*) and, in the course of the conversation, this question came up. The *Vishnitzer* quoted *Horav Levi Yitzchak*, *zl*, *m'Berditchev*, who comments concerning the verse recited in *Mussaf Shemoneh Esrai of Rosh Hashanah*, *Ki zocher kol ha'nishkachos Atah*, "For it is You Who eternally remember all forgotten things." When a person performs a *mitzvah* and allows his positive action to go to his head, Hashem "forgets" the good deed. He does not countenance arrogance, even regarding a positive commandment. If a person commits a sin and is troubled by his misstep, if he is unable to forget his wrongdoing – Hashem "forgets" it. The mere fact that the person is troubled is comforting to Hashem. Likewise, if a person "forgets" his positive *mitzvos*, not allowing his good deeds to turn his head, Hashem will then "remember" them. This is the meaning of *Zocher kol ha'nishkachos*, "He remembers the good deeds that we forgot."

The *Satmar Rebbe* added that, based on this, we may understand why *Viduy Maaser* is called *viduy*, although no sin has been committed. When a person recites *Viduy Maaser*, he declares, *Lo avarti mimitzvoecha v'lo shochachti*: "I did not transgress Your *mitzvos* and I did not forget" (Ibid 26:13). What the person is saying (we may interpret his words as) is, "While I did not transgress Your *mitzvos*, I fulfilled each *mitzvah* correctly in accordance with

Your directions. On the one hand, *v'lo shochachti*, "I did not forget." This means, "I did not forget the good that I have done. It has remained with me, giving me great satisfaction." While there is certainly nothing wrong/inappropriate about having satisfaction, one should not allow it to go to his head. After all, he is only carrying out Hashem's command.

This idea applies to life, as well. All too often, someone does well and it is all he can talk about. He feels that he need go no further, do no more, nor continue on. He simply rests on his laurels and basks in the accolades that he has received. Life is about constant upward, forward movement. When one stops moving, he stagnates. When one constantly talks about the wonderful things that he has done, it becomes boring. No one is interested in listening to the same story over and over again. We need new growth; resting on past laurels is still resting, and it does not reflect progress.

**השקיפה ממעון קדשך מן השמים וברך את עמך
ישראל
Gaze down from Your abode, from the heavens and
bless Your people Yisrael. (26:15)**

Rashi explains that this prayer implies: "Hashem, we have carried out Your wishes. We have done that what You decreed upon us; now, You do what behooves You." The word *hashkifah*, "gaze (down)" is unique in that it is almost always used to denote careful examination to determine the appropriate punishment. In other words, it is not used in connection with something positive about to occur. *Rashi* observes this in his commentary to *Bereishis* 18:16, *Vayashkifu al pnei Sodom*; "They (the angels) gazed towards Sodom." The angels who had come to visit and participate in the healing of Avraham *Avinu*, now gazed on the city which would be their next stop – the city in whose destruction they would participate. Apparently, the *hashkifah* of *Viduy Maaser* is different (as explained by the commentators), because when Jews contribute to the poor (when Jews act as they should, being kind and compassionate to their fellow Jew), the *Middas HaDin*, Attribute of Strict Justice, is transformed into *Middas HaRachamim*, the Attribute of Mercy.

It makes sense, but is it necessary to distinguish between the two instances of "gazing" between the gazing on Sodom, and Hashem's gazing down on us? Apparently, since the distinction is made, it indicates that some commonality between the *hashkifah* of *Viduy Maaser* and that of Sodom must exist. What could this possibly be?

Horav Elazar HaKohen Kahanov, *zl*, explains that the angels who gazed at Sodom did so for a good reason. Actually, it was of a positive nature. Prior to punishing a person, especially a large community, it must be discerned whether they are sinners or they committed a sin, an external act of iniquity, which does reflect upon their actual *hashkafah*, outlook, perspective, on life and living. In other words, to put it simply: Are they evil, or did they just commit an act of evil? Why did the people of Sodom act in such a reprehensible manner? Was it caused by outrage: they simply could not tolerate outsiders, especially beggars who came to take their hard-earned money? Was their sin a temporary lapse, an error in judgement, a one-time deferment to the wiles of the *yetzer hora*, evil-inclination? Or was it their outlook, the way of life that they chose for

themselves? When it is a temporary lapse caused by an extraneous influence, there is hope. If, however, it is already imbedded in one's *hashkafatah*, it is much deeper than a simple deviation. This person is evil incarnate. He deserves the ultimate punishment.

We know from studying *Chazal* that the evil of Sodom was not walk in the park; it was no temporary lapse. These people had developed an entire *hashkafah*, outlook, of evil. *Chesed*, acts of lovingkindness, were an anathema to them, a symbol of weakness. They waged war with kindness; they despised goodness. For such people, whose *hashkafas ha'chaim*, outlook on life, is so perverted, there is only one solution: they have no place in society.

The *hashkifah* that accompanies *Viduy Maaser* is also about outlook – a Jew's outlook, a Jew's *hashkafah*, a Jew's true way of life. While it is true that we all have temporary lapses, downfalls which must be corrected, our intrinsic *hashkafah*, our outlook on life, is replete with compassion and sensitivity for our fellow. When we bring our *matanos*, gifts for the *Kohen*, *Levi* and *ani*, poor man, we do so out of pride, love and empathy. We come to the *Bais Hamikdash*, our hearts filled with joy, bursting with enthusiasm and excitement, knowing that we are carrying out Hashem's Will wholeheartedly. No one is bending our arms, because this is who we are. Thus, we ask Hashem to *hashkifah*, gaze down from upon High, and observe that our actions are a reflection of our true selves.

Yes, a connection exists between the *hashkafas*/gazing of the angels to that which we ask Hashem to do concerning our *matanos*. They both focus on the true essence, the *hashkafah*, of the person. Sodom's *hashkafah* warranted their destruction. We pray that our *hashkafah* will be our source of merit for life, good health and spiritual reward.

**והיה בעברכם את הירדן תקימו את האבנים האלה...
בהר עיבל
It shall be when you cross the Jordan, you shall erect
these stones... on Har Eival. (27:4)**

Har Gerizim was the site of the blessings; *Har Eival* served as its counterpart, the site reserved for the curses. Would it not make sense that the *Mizbayach*, Altar, upon which the *Korbanos Shelamim*, Peace-offerings and Festive-offerings were brought, would be situated on *Har Gerizim*, the mountain of blessing? *Har Eival* was the mountain upon which the curses were pronounced. One would consider it an unlikely candidate for the *Mizbayach*. *Horav Moshe Feinstien*, *zl*, illuminates us with an insight into the meaning of -- and the distinction between -- blessing and curse.

Blessing is defined as abundance, fulfillment of all one's needs; curse means the opposite: *Chisaron*, insufficiency, privation, an awareness that one's life is unfulfilled. The problem arises when he who is "blessed" with abundance begins to think that he deserves it, because he is a *tzaddik*, righteous man. He warrants blessing as reward for his good deeds and virtue. Such a person falls into the danger zone of complacency, of thinking that he has it; he has done it all; he is there; there is no longer a need on his part to strive for higher and better. Such a person risks having his blessings become the source of curse for him. Man's sole purpose in life is continued, consistent Torah study and *mitzvah* performance. Whatever causes him to

pause, to halt his striving for more, is a curse.

The optimum blessing is experienced when one is satisfied with the material gifts that Hashem has granted him, but actually dissatisfied with his own Torah and *mitzvos*. Blessings are granted on the basis that one not become spiritually complacent, not rest on the laurels of past spiritual achievements. It is logical that when one is "deprived" of material abundance, he will place greater focus on his spiritual striving. Simply, when he thinks he has already received his reward, he thinks he should not have to bother with more spirituality: "I seem to be doing quite well." This attitude has the ability to transform a blessing into a curse. Being satisfied with what we have only applies to material gifts – not spirituality.

Hashem conveyed this message to the people when He had the Altar which is used for festive sacrificial service placed on *Har Eival*, the mountain reserved for the pronouncement of the curses. In this way, the nation will realize that privation and lack can lead to blessing.

Perhaps we may elaborate on this theme. Blessing and curse are relative, a matter of perspective. A three-year-old boy wants to eat an entire chocolate cake. His mother knows that if he succeeds in devouring the cake, he will become quite sick. Second vignette: Ask a young child what his mother does all day. The reply will probably be, "Nothing." The mother will invariably give you a long list of motherly duties, which began at 5:00am when she groped her way out of bed. Third case: A group of men stab a person with knives. Soon after this, they knock him unconscious, saw open his chest, proceed to suction out his blood prior to removing a vital organ. Such a scene will definitely raise one's ire, until he realizes that he is observing open-heart surgery.

By now, the reader understands that it all depends from what vantage point one gazes on an occurrence. We often feel deprived and wonder why Hashem does not grant us what we ask. Why are we "cursed"? We view occurrences from the seat of emotion, rather than from intellect. We lack the patience to perceive the larger picture. A blessed person trusts, is intelligent, is reasonable, waits to see and grasp the whole picture. The *Mizbayach* was placed on *Har Eival* as a message for those who always think they have received the short end of the deal. They are wrong!

**אלה יעמדו לברך את העם... ואלה יעמדו על הקללה
These shall stand to bless the people... and these shall
stand for the curse. (27:12,13)**

There appears to be a change in the vernacular between blessing and curse. Concerning blessing, the Torah writes *l'varech es ha'am*, "to bless the people," implying proactive blessing, while regarding curse, it states, "stand for curse," almost as if the curse happens by itself. The *Kli Yakar* explains that this is, indeed, the case. Blessing is actively bestowed by Hashem to the person who deserves it. Curse, however, is the result of *hastaras Panim*, Hashem concealing Himself (so to speak) from he whose actions warrant curse. Hashem removes Himself, takes off the protective covering that spares us from pain. Once our protection is gone, it is no wonder that we fall prey to the forces of evil, to curse.

This is a powerful lesson from which there is much to be derived. Hashem is there for us – if we want Him.