

Our *Parashah* opens: "See, I place before you today a blessing and a curse. The blessing--in order that you will listen to the commandments of *Hashem*, your *Elokim*, that I command you today. And the curse--if you do not listen to the commandments of *Hashem*, your *Elokim* . . ." R' Yisrael Lipkin z"l (1810-1883; "R' Yisrael Salanter"; founder of the *Mussar* movement) notes that *Hashem*'s blessing is given on credit, before it is earned, as a tool for doing good in the future ("in order that you will listen"). In contrast, *Hashem* punishes only when it is deserved, after bad has been done ("if you do not listen").

R' Yisrael continues: The *Gemara* (*Pesachim* 118a) comments on the verse (*Tehilim* 136:1), "Give thanks to *Hashem* for He is good"--Give thanks to *Hashem* for He collects a person's debt from His own goodness. [Until here from the *Gemara*.] The *Gemara* refers to the fact that *Hashem* blesses a person in two ways--one is that He pays a person for his *Mitzvot*, the other is that He advances blessings to a person so that he can use those blessings to do good. When *Hashem* punishes a person, it would be just to take back what the person previously earned, since that is all that truly belongs to the person. But *Hashem* does not do that. Instead, He takes back His "own" goodness--i.e., what He advanced to the person so the person could do good with it. Although that never belonged to the person, *Hashem*, in His kindness, acts as if He is taking something that belongs to the person. (*Ohr Yisrael* #30) – **Continued in box inside –**

Shabbat

The traditional greeting on Friday night is: "*Shabbat Shalom U'me'vorach*" / "A Sabbath of harmony and blessing." Why are these two adjectives ("*Shalom*" and "*Mevorach*") paired?

R' Avraham Abba Leifer z"l (1918-1990; Pittsburgher Rebbe in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Ashdod, Israel) explains: We read (*Devarim* 11:26--the opening verse of our *Parashah*), "*Re'eh* / See [singular], I present *Lifneichem* / before you [plural] today a blessing . . ." Why does the verse begin with a singular verb and continue with a plural verb?

The *Mishnah* (*Uktzin* 3:12) teaches, "*Hashem* did not find any container capable of holding *Berachah* / blessing except for *Shalom*." This means, R' Leifer writes, that in order for a person to retain *Hashem*'s blessings, he must first prepare a vessel in which to hold them. By analogy, if one person wants to pour another person a drink of wine, the recipient must have a cup capable of receiving the wine, and that cup must not have any holes or cracks. The same is true when it comes to receiving *Hashem*'s blessings.

This, R' Leifer continues, is why our verse makes a point of using a singular verb, which hints at the need for harmony in order to hold on to *Hashem*'s blessings. (The use of the plural verb later in the verse highlights the use of the singular earlier.) And this is why we say, "*Shabbat Shalom U'me'vorach*"--if the day is full of harmony, it can be blessed as well.

(*Emunat Avraham* p.103)

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"You shall not harden your heart or close your hand against your destitute brother. . . Beware, lest there be a lawless thought in your heart, saying, 'The seventh year approaches, the *Shemittah* year,' and you will look malevolently upon your destitute brother and refuse to give him . . ." (15:7, 9)

Rabbeinu Yonah Gerondi z"l (1210-1263; Spain) writes: We learn from here that one who refuses to give a loan to a needy person transgresses two negative commandments, (1) "Beware" and (2) "Lest . . ." If we are commanded not to withhold a loan on the eve of the *Shemittah* year (notwithstanding that many loans are automatically forgiven at the end of the *Shemittah*), then certainly, writes R' Yonah, we may not withhold loans when there is no risk of loss. So great is the sin of withholding a loan that the Torah labels a person who does so as "lawless"! The *Gemara* (*Ketubot* 68a) teaches: "If one turns a blind eye toward a need for charity, it is as if he has worshiped idols." The *Gemara* derives this from the fact that both are referred to as "lawless" (one in our verse and one in *Devarim* 13:14; see also *Shmuel* I 25:25, where a stingy person is called "lawless"). On the other hand, the *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 63a) teaches that one who gives a loan is more meritorious than one who gives charity. (*Sha'arei Teshuvah* 3:67)

"You shall observe the month of springtime and perform the Pesach-offering for Hashem, your Elokim, for in the month of springtime Hashem, your Elokim, took you out of Egypt at night." (16:1)

We read in the *Pesach Haggadah*, "*V'hee she'amda* / It is this that stood by our fathers and us. For not only one has risen against us to annihilate us, but in every generation, they arise against us to annihilate us." R' Dr. Isaac Lewin z"l (1906-1995; member of the Lodz, Poland city council, professor of Jewish history at Yeshiva University, and a leader in efforts to rescue Jews in Occupied Poland and, later, Holocaust survivors) wrote just before *Pesach* in 1943: This passage can be read, "*She'lo Echad* / For the Only One has not risen against us to annihilate us, but in every generation they arise against us to annihilate us." In other words: why have all the enemies that arose against us to annihilate us not succeeded? Because *Hashem*, the Only One, has not risen against us. He does not stand with them, but with us.

Reflecting on his disappointment with the Roosevelt administration's unwillingness to assist Europe's Jews, R' Dr. Lewin adds: The *Gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 97a) teaches, "*Mashiach* will not come until [the Jewish People] have despaired of being redeemed, as it is written (*Devarim* 32:36), 'None is saved or assisted'--as if *Yisrael* has no supporter." Heaven forbid that the Jewish People will ever despair of righteousness prevailing and of *Hashem* redeeming us! R' Dr. Lewin writes. Rather, the *Gemara* means that *Mashiach* will come when we despair of being redeemed through natural means, through the kindness of other nations. (*Mi'boker L'erev* p.229)

"See, I place before you today a blessing and a curse." (11:26)

Why are we told to "see" the blessing and the curse? R' Yekutieli Yehuda Halberstam z"l (1905-1994; the "*Klausenberger Rebbe*") answers:

We read (*Devarim* 1:32-33), "Yet in this matter you do not believe in *Hashem*, your *Elokim*--Who goes before you on the way to seek out for you a place for you to encamp, with fire by night to show you the road that you should travel and with a cloud by day!" R' Elimelech of Lizhensk z"l (1717-1787; early *Chassidic Rebbe*) explains that Moshe Rabbeinu was rebuking *Bnei Yisrael* for not trusting in *Hashem* despite the many miracles that they had witnessed firsthand. *Bnei Yisrael* said (1:28), "Our brothers [the Spies] have melted our hearts, saying, 'A people greater and taller than we, cities great and fortified to the heavens, and even children of the giant have we seen there!'" You were wrong to be afraid, Moshe told *Bnei Yisrael*, considering the wonders that you saw *Hashem* perform for you up to that point. [Until here from R' Elimelech]

The *Klausenberger Rebbe* (whose wife and ten of his eleven children were murdered in the Holocaust) elaborates: Even in our times, one who looks can see clearly the miracles and wonders that are with us evening, morning, and afternoon. This is true on a national level, when we consider what has been rebuilt after the Holocaust and how we are constantly protected from our enemies, especially in *Eretz Yisrael*. This also is true on a personal level, where every discerning person can see that *Hashem* performs wonders for him that are beyond the laws of nature.

The *Klausenberger Rebbe* relates a story that involved his relative, R' Yeshayah Zvi Heller z"l. The priest in R' Heller's town once challenged him, "You Jews are more wicked than your ancestors!" "How so?" R' Heller asked. The priest responded that this clearly was true because *Bnei Yisrael* in the desert received *Mahn* from Heaven, and Jews today do not. R' Heller answered him, "Look how many Jewish wagon drivers, how many tailors, and how many shoemakers there are in this small village! Is there enough work to sustain all of them? Clearly, they are sustained by *Mahn*. The difference between now and then is that, in the desert, there were no Poles to steal the *Mahn*, so it fell openly. Here, G-d must hide it." The *Klausenberger Rebbe* concludes: Although R' Heller meant this tongue in cheek, the reality is that we are sustained miraculously, if we would only "see" it.

(*Shefa Chaim* 5742)

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R' Shlomo Hoffman z"l (1922-2013; Torah scholar and educator noted, among other things, for his 40 years working in the Israeli prison system) elaborates with a parable: A person borrowed money in order to open a store, but the store failed. The borrower has, in a sense, lost twice: First, he has nothing to show for his effort, and second, he needs to repay the loan. *Hashem*, likewise, should impose two consequences on a sinner: confiscating something that is already his, and not trusting him with further "credit." In His kindness, however, *Hashem* does not do that. Instead, He accepts the repayment of the goodness He gave on credit (to be used for good) as if that is full payment for a person's sins. (*Va'adim B'inyan Osin Teshuvah* p.53)