



Light Lines

Light Insight

"See! I am putting in front of you today a blessing and curse..."
(Deuteronomy 11:26)

The Talmud teaches that a person should constantly imagine that the whole world is in a state of precise balance tottering between merit and guilt. He should consider that if he does just one *mitzvah*, he will tip the world's scales of judgment to the side of credit, but if he commits one transgression he will tip the scales to the negative side.

This passage itself, then, is telling each individual, "See!" Every single action that you do, "I am putting in front of you a

blessing and a curse." You have the power to tip the scales in either direction.

Rags and Riches

"See! I am putting in front of you today a blessing and curse..." (Deuteronomy 11:26)

Wealth and poverty do not always have the same effect on a person. There are those whose wealth influences them for the better, and through the blessing of their wealth they come to a greater appreciation of G-d. However, had they been poor, they would have been so occupied with scraping by, that they would have forgotten their Creator entirely. This was the case in Egypt, where the Jewish

People were so exhausted by the hard labor that they didn't listen to Moses.

On the other hand, there are those whom wealth removes from the path of righteousness, as we so often see in our history. The Jewish People become successful and self-satisfied and forget Who gave them what they have. However, when a person is poor and "broken," G-d never ignores his supplications.

Perhaps this is what the passage is teaching: "See! I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse." Don't think that the blessing is wealth and the curse is poverty; rather everything depends on how a person deals with his riches or poverty. Whether he be rich or poor, if he turns his focus to the Torah and *mitzvot*, then whatever his status is in life he receives the blessing.

LOVE of the LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel

The Talmud records Rabbi Zeira's arrival in Israel. When he finally realized his dream of reaching the Land of Israel, only a river separated him from his goal. Rather than wait for the next ferry to take him across, he decided to use a primitive log bridge that stretched

across the river. The only way to keep from falling in the water was by holding on to a single overhead rope strung above the log.

A non-Jewish observer of his rickety crossing cried out to him, "Impulsive people that you are, who put your mouths before your ears¹, you are still acting impulsively. Why don't you wait for the ferry in order to make a safer and more comfortable crossing?"

To this Rabbi Zeira sighed, "A land which Moses and Aaron did not merit to enter — if I wait any longer, who knows if I will have the privilege of entering it!"

1. When the Jewish People stood at Sinai and accepted the mantle of Torah, they said, "We will do," before they said, "We will hear," thereby accepting the Torah without even knowing what it required of them. In other words, they spoke before they listened, 'putting their mouths before their ears.'

Light Update

Jewish Learning Week Draws Thousands in London

Thousands of young people in the London area participated in Jewish Learning Week marking the conclusion of a remarkably successful first year of the new Jewish Learning Exchange Center in the Golders Green community of the UK capital.

The Scholar-in-Residence was Ohr Somayach senior lecturer Rabbi Dr. Akiva Tatz whose extremely popular talks created a demand for him to join the Jewish Learning Exchange staff as a full-time member.

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The Other SIDE of the Story

GIVING PEOPLE THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

Judaism teaches that people are innocent until proven guilty. If you assume that others are acting with the best of intentions, you will often find that you are absolutely right.

This past Rosh Hashanah I went to a large, well-known shul in Jerusalem. As soon as I arrived, I noticed a sign in Hebrew and English in large bold letters firmly requesting that no children be brought to

shul unless they are old enough to behave themselves appropriately during prayer. Imagine my surprise later when someone sitting one row in front of me brought five children with him, ranging in age from 4-10, equipped with bags of nosh! They were not especially noisy but nor were they praying or just sitting quietly. After going through half of the morning with a bit of annoyance, I realized that on Rosh Hashanah of all days, when we ask G-d to judge us favorably, I should do the same. So I thought for a few minutes before coming to the conclusion that probably their mother wasn't feeling well — maybe she even had a high fever — and so this man had no choice but to bring the kids to shul with him.

But the real solution wasn't long in coming. At the end of the morning prayers, the children all stood up to say *kaddish* for their mother who had passed away a few months before.

• A true story submitted by one of our readers.

Response Line

Mrs. Alexis S. Berman wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I would like to know where in the Torah it discusses the topic of anger. Thank you very much.

Dear Mrs. Berman,

Anger is considered one of the most destructive human traits. Jacob strongly admonishes his children Simon and Levi, "Accursed is their rage for it is intense, and their

wrath for it is harsh..." King Solomon warns, "Anger resides in the bosom of fools." The Talmud criticizes Moses himself for becoming angry: "Rabbi Eliezer states: in three instances (Moses) became angry and thus came to err: Upon being angry at Elazar and Itamar the sons of Aaron, after being angry with the commanding soldiers who returned from battle with Midian, and upon being angry at the Children of Israel when they demanded water."

It is puzzling that "anger" is so destructive and is nevertheless not the subject of a direct command-

ment. There is no *mitzvah*, "Thou shalt not be angry." Rabbi Chaim Vital in his classic work *The Gates of Sanctity* addresses this question, and answers it with a very profound concept. Before we ever get to the point of performing a *mitzvah*, there is a need to develop our basic character. The traits that comprise our character determine the way in which we fulfill the *mitzvah*. We must spend our energy in perfecting these aspects of ourselves — once our character is properly developed we can perform *mitzvot* with relative ease. Since overcoming anger is actually a *foundation* for the proper fulfillment of the entire Torah, it is therefore not counted as a separate, individual *mitzvah*.