

Our *Parashah* opens: "See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse." *Rashi* z"l explains that the blessing and the curse refer to the blessing and the curse that would be given on Har Gerizim and Har Eval, respectively, after *Bnei Yisrael* would enter *Eretz Yisrael*, as described in our *Parashah* and later in *Parashat Ki Tavo*. The Torah instructs that six tribes stand on Har Gerizim and the other six tribes stand on Har Eval when the blessings and the curses are recited.

R' Pinchas ben Pilta z"l (rabbi of Wlodowa, Poland; died 1663) asks: Why does the opening verse change from singular to plural-- "See (singular), I present before you (plural) today a blessing and a curse"? Also, why did *Rashi* point out that the blessing and curse referred to here are those delivered at Har Gerizim and Har Eval?

R' Pinchas explains: The *Gemara* (*Kiddushin* 40b) teaches that a person should always view the world as exactly half meritorious and half "guilty," such that his next act will determine the fate of the world. How can one person have such an impact? Because, R' Pinchas explains, "*Kol Yisrael Areivim Zeh B'Zeh*" / "All Jews are responsible for one another." [This is why, for example, one person can recite *Kiddush* for another.] When did this inter-relationship come into being? Only, say our Sages, once *Bnei Yisrael* stood at Har Gerizim and Har Eval.

In this light, R' Pinchas concludes, our verse can be understood as follows: Each of you should see, and take responsibility for, the blessing and the curse that I am placing before all of you. When? *Rashi* answers: Once you stand at Har Gerizim and Har Eval. Perhaps, R' Pinchas adds, the purpose of placing six tribes on each mountain was to illustrate the idea that the world is half meritorious and half guilty, such that each person can tip the balance. (*Berit Shalom*)

## "Shemittat Kesafim"

While the agricultural aspects of the *Shemittah* year apply only to the land and produce of *Eretz Yisrael*, the *Mitzvah* of *Shemittat Kesafim* / releasing loans applies between Jews anywhere in the world. The source for that *Mitzvah* is in this week's *Parashah*.

The anonymous sage known only as "a *Levi* from Barcelona" z"l (Spain; 13<sup>th</sup> century) writes: One is commanded to abandon debts in the *Shemittah* year, as it is written (*Devarim* 15:3), "Over what you have with your brother, you shall remit your authority." It also is written (verse 2): "This is the matter of the remission: Every creditor shall remit his authority over what he has lent his fellow; he shall not press his fellow or his brother, for He has proclaimed a remission for *Hashem*."

The *Levi* from Barcelona continues: Among the purposes of this *Mitzvah* is to teach ourselves, among other lofty *Middot* / character traits, the *Middah* of generosity, and, also, to implant in us *Bitachon* / trust in *Hashem*. In that way, we prepare our souls to receive goodness from the Master of all. Also, forgiving loans builds a strong fence and an iron barrier between us and the sins of theft and desiring more than is good for us. This is because we reason to ourselves: If the Torah requires me to forego even that which is mine, certainly I should not take that which is not mine.

Among the laws associated with this *Mitzvah* is that the remission of loans occurs at the end of the *Shemittah* year, i.e., when the sun sets on the eve of *Rosh Hashanah*. Debts for purchases made on credit and workers' wages are not released. [In coming weeks, we will discuss some of these laws, but please consult a rabbi for practical applications.]

The *Levi* from Barcelona concludes: This *Mitzvah* applies according to Torah law in *Eretz Yisrael* and everywhere else, but only when the *Mitzvah* of *Yovel* / the Jubilee Year also is in effect. [The *Mitzvah* of *Yovel* is not in effect unless the majority of Jews live in *Eretz Yisrael*.] Both men and women are obligated in *Shemittat Kesafim*. When the *Yovel* is not in effect, *Shemittat Kesafim* applies only by Rabbinic enactment [--a distinction that will be discussed in a future issue.] (*Sefer Ha'chinuch* 477)

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**"You shall observe the festival of *Shavuot* . . . You shall rejoice . . .**

**"You shall make the festival of *Sukkot* . . . You shall rejoice . . ." (16:10-11, 13-14)**

R' Moshe Yitzchak Ashkenazi z"l (1821-1898; Trieste, Italy) writes: There is no doubt that, on *Pesach*, one must reflect on the wondrous deeds *Hashem* performed when He took us out of Egypt. But, while the Torah commands us to rejoice on *Sukkot* and *Shavuot*, it does not command us to rejoice on *Pesach*. Indeed, our Sages record that *Hashem* rebuked the angels who wished to praise Him at the *Yam Suf*: "My handiwork is drowning in the sea, and you are singing?!"

Rather, R' Ashkenazi concludes, on *Pesach*, we should reflect on how *Hashem* punishes those who defy His will, and we should take heed and repent from any wrongdoing. (Simchat Ha'regel: Drush 3)

R' Meir Simcha Hakohen (1843-1926; rabbi of Dvinsk, Latvia) writes similarly: Other nations turn the day they defeated their enemies into an annual celebration. That is not the Jewish way! We do not rejoice at the downfall of our enemies, as it is written (*Mishlei* 22:17), "When your enemy falls, do not rejoice. . . lest *Hashem* see, and it will be bad in His eyes." Therefore, on *Pesach*, we recall *Hashem's* miracles, but we do not celebrate our enemy's downfall. Similarly, we do not observe *Purim* on the date when Haman was hanged, but only "on the day when they rested from their enemies" (see *Esther* 9:22).

R' Meir Simcha adds: The Egyptians drowned in the *Yam Suf* on the seventh day of *Pesach*, which is a festival. However, the *Mitzvah* to observe that day was given before the Exodus, not after the splitting of the sea. *Hashem* did this so that we would not mistakenly think we are celebrating the Egyptians' demise. To the contrary, we do not even recite the full *Hallel* on that day.

(Meshech Chochmah, Shmot 12:16)

What then is the purpose of the seventh day of *Pesach*? R' Moshe Schwerd *shlita* (Queens, N.Y.) explains:

As noted, *Hashem* did not permit the angels to sing when the Egyptians drowned. Yet, *Bnei Yisrael* did sing! Commentaries explain that there is a difference between one's spontaneous song when he is saved from death and the commemorative song one sings when he recalls that event later. Our ancestors were permitted to sing spontaneously at the *Yam Suf*, but we, who were not there, do not recite the full *Hallel*. (On the first night of *Pesach*, when we are obligated to feel as if we, too, left Egypt, we do recite the full *Hallel*.) The song of the angels--bystanders to the drowning of the Egyptians--is more like commemorative song than the spontaneous type; thus, it was not permitted.

R' Schwerd concludes: On the seventh day of *Pesach*, we do not celebrate the downfall of our enemies. Rather, that day is an opportunity to strengthen our *Emunah*--an end that trumps the imperative to not rejoice, at least to the extent that we may recite "Half-*Hallel*." (Az Yashir: Pesach p.504-505)

**"Safeguard and listen to all these words that I command you, in order that it be well with you and your children after you forever, when you do what is good and right in the eyes of *Hashem*, your *Elokim*." (12:28)**

*Rashi* z"l writes: "'What is good' refers to that which is proper in the eyes of *Hashem*. 'What is . . . right' refers to that which is proper in the eyes of men."

R' Pinchas Naftali Schwartz z"l (1828-1885; Khust, Hungary) asks: How can *Rashi* write that "What is right" refers to an action that is proper in the eyes of men, when the verse says expressly, "What is good and right in the eyes of *Hashem*?" He explains:

The *Gemara* (*Chagigah* 15b) relates: The sage Rabbah bar Shelah encountered Eliyahu Hanavi and asked him what *Hashem* was doing at that moment. Eliyahu answered, "He is repeating teachings in the names of all of the sages except for Rabbi Meir." "Why not Rabbi Meir?" Rabbah bar Shelah asked, and Eliyahu responded that it was because Rabbi Meir studied Torah under a heretic. "Nevertheless," Rabbah bar Shelah protested, "Rabbi Meir found a pomegranate; he ate the seeds and threw away the peel" [*i.e.*, he took the good teachings that the heretic offered and disregarded anything inappropriate]. Eliyahu said, "Now *Hashem* is saying, 'Meir, my son, says . . .'"

Commentaries ask: Surely *Hashem* knew that Rabbi Meir took only good from his teacher. Why did He wait for Rabbah bar Shelah to say so? They answer: A person must be "clean" not only in the eyes of *Hashem*, but also in the eyes of men. Otherwise, even *Hashem* is not pleased with him.

That, writes R' Schwartz, is what *Rashi* is teaching as well. In order to be "good and right in the eyes of *Hashem*" you must not only be proper in the eyes of *Hashem*, but also proper in the eyes of men. (*Nefesh Tovah*)

**"You are children to *Hashem*, your *Elokim* . . ." (14:1)**

R' Yaakov Moshe Charlap z"l (1882-1951; rabbi of Yerushalayim's Sha'arei Chesed neighborhood and *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav) writes: We have one relationship with *Hashem* as children to a father, and another relationship with Him as servants to a master. Each has its place. The greatness of serving *Hashem* as a servant is that it is a relationship that is always fresh. Each time one accepts *Hashem's* yoke upon himself, he renews his relationship as a servant to Him. In contrast, a child is born to his parent only once, so that relationship is static.

How does one renew his relationship with *Hashem* constantly? R' Charlap asks. By recognizing that *Hashem* renews Creation at every moment, thus renewing His relationship with each individual. [R' Chaim of Volozhin z"l (Belarus; 1749-1821) explains in *Nefesh Ha'Chaim*: Man, like all of Creation, has no independent ability to exist. Only because *Hashem* wills our existence constantly do we exist from one moment to the next.] This recognition is a lofty level, and very few have merited to serve *Hashem* as a servant--among them Moshe Rabbeinu (see *Bemidbar* 12:7--"Moshe *avdi*") and King David (see *Tehilim* 132:10--"David *avdecha*"). (*Mei Marom: Sha'arei De'ah*, Vol. 19, p.511)