

“feet” to stand on. There are those whom the slightest winds knock off, while there are others whom even the strongest winds in the world will not move. The *Torah* teaches us that one must stand firmly on his feet and not be ashamed before those who scoff and try to point him in other directions.

מעשה אבות סימן לבנים

כי לא יחול אביון מקרב הארץ על כן אנכי מצוך לאמר פתח תפתח את ירך לאחריך לעניך ולאבינך בארצך וגו' (טו-יא)

In the aftermath of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, the fledgling State of Israel had taken a terrible toll in casualties (more than 1% of the country's population was killed), and the nation's economy was devastated. Israel faced economic demands unique to the new state, most especially the arrival of hundreds of thousands of immigrants, mostly Holocaust survivors and Jewish refugees from Arab countries. The end of the British Mandate and the establishment of Israel removed all impediments to immigration. As a result, a large portion of the surviving remnant of European Jewry quickly set sail for Israel. Meanwhile, Jews from throughout the Middle East, who fled, were expelled, or were rescued through missions such as Operation Magic Carpet, added to the enormous influx of immigrants. Israel's chronic lack of funds forced the government to settle the wave of immigrants in primitive shelters. Food was scarce and strictly rationed.

With his country financially overwhelmed, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion convened a meeting of American Jewish leaders where he proposed issuing bonds to help provide Israel with a more secure economic foundation. He hoped to obtain millions of dollars in funding for immigrant absorption and the construction of a national infrastructure. The American Jewish leaders supported Ben-Gurion's plan and, the following spring, the Israeli prime minister traveled to cities throughout the United States to help launch the inaugural Independence Issue. Expectations for first-year sales were \$25 million. Instead, final results for 1951 more than doubled projections, exceeding \$52 million.

Typically, a benefit or ball was hosted in each city on the prime minister's behalf, and people came out in droves to meet him and contribute to the new State of Israel. In Chicago, in the winter of 1951, Ben-Gurion attended a State of Israel Bonds dinner as the guest of honor and featured speaker. The ballroom was packed. The non-kosher event attracted members of Chicago's Jewish elite: the wealthiest businessmen, politicians, statesmen and professional secular Jewish leadership, all who braved the frigid temperatures to support the fledgling state. They mingled about the ballroom in their fine-tailored suits, offering considerable contributions, while carefully balancing both their martinis and their checkbooks.

Not surprisingly, there was not a *yarmulke* in sight. However, one individual, who stood in a corner of the massive lobby, outside the ballroom, was markedly unique. **R' Mendel Kaplan ZT"l** wore a long dark frock and sported a large black fedora. His beard encircled a face that was lined with the creases of hours of *Torah* study. His piercing eyes darted about the scene, observing the philanthropic flurry of activity. An ancient relic tucked in the corner of a sea of modernity, he stood stoically, observing the entire scenario, a slight smile emanating from his lips.

R' Mendel did not walk into the main ballroom but preferred to stand outside and observe the proceedings. After some time, he had seen enough and was about to leave the hotel and return to the *yeshivah* at which he taught when a loud voice boomed from behind him. "Rabbi Kaplan! What brings you to the Israel Bonds Dinner?"

R' Mendel turned around. He stood face to face with one of Chicago's wealthiest philanthropists. Though a very secular Jew, the man was still a major supporter of the *yeshivah* at which R' Mendel was employed. The man found it strange that Rabbi Kaplan, who was known as a zealous individual who disapproved of many of the policies surrounding the *medinah* (State), the Labor party and the Prime Minister, would attend a benefit which promoted all that he was against. The wealthy man was baffled and continued his mocking inquisition.

"Surely you did not come to pay your respects to the Prime Minister and join us in this event!" He added sarcastically. Then he broke into a wide grin. "I am positive you did not come here to partake in a little shellfish!" The man let out a guffaw.

R' Mendel did not return the tease. Instead, his answer was open, honest, and quite blunt. "I came here for one reason," he said, "to stand and watch how the children of Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov stand in line in order to give charity."

משל למא הדבר דומה

כי יסיתך אחיך או רעך אשר כנפשך בסתר לאמר נלכה ונעבדה אלהים אחרים אשר לא ידעת אתה ואבתיך וגו' (יג-יז)

משל: A man walked into a crowded restaurant and looked around for a table. All the tables were taken and the man began doing mental gymnastics trying to figure out which table would be the first to become vacant.

There were a number of families seated all about as well as quite a few couples. Then he saw a large group of men sitting in the far corner - apparently they were celebrating something because they all looked quite happy and content. When one of the men motioned to the waiter for a check, he knew this would be the next available table.

One by one, the men bade each other goodbye and after paying their share, departed the restaurant. The man waited patiently until all but one man stood up and left.

As he watched, the man at the table kept himself busy with all sorts of activities; however, he refused to get and leave. The man watching became impatient and soon angry and was about to go over and tell the man off, when he happened to look under the table. It was then that he noticed that the man seated at the table - had no legs! He couldn't get up even if he tried. He was waiting for someone to come and get him.

ונתת את הברכה על הר גריזים
ואת הקללה על הר עיבל וגו' (יא-כט)

Har Gerizim and Har Eival are both located in the mountain range of *Shevet Ephraim*, and the contrast in their appearances can be clearly seen. Mount Gerizim, located to the south of the valley of Shechem, is verdant, lush, with gardens covering the terraces on its slope. Mount Eival, on the north side, is steep, barren and desolate. Mount Eival is approximately 2,900 feet high, a few hundred feet taller than Mount Gerizim, which rises to about 2,700 feet.

Accordingly, writes **R' Shamshon Raphael Hirsch ZT"l**, these two mountains, standing side by side, present a striking visualization of blessing and curse. Both of them rise from the same soil; both are watered by the same rain and dew. The same air passes over both of them; the same pollen blows over both of them. Yet, *Har Eival* remains starkly barren, while *Har Gerizim* is covered with lush vegetation to its very top. In the same way "ברכה וקללה" - blessing and curse - are not dependent on external circumstances, but rather on a person's inner receptivity to one or the other; on our attitude towards that which brings about blessing.

When *Bnei Yisroel* crossed the *Yarden* (Jordan River) and took those first steps on the soil of a Holy Land that sanctified them, the sight of these two mountains taught them that they, by themselves, by their own moral conduct, will decide whether they were headed for Mount Gerizim or Mount Eival - for blessing or for curse.

Avraham Avinu, too, came first to these mountains when he entered the Land of Canaan, and built the first *mizbeach* (altar) to *Hashem*, when He appeared to him at *Elon Moreh*. The word "מורה" translates as "teaching" because the lesson that Avraham was taught when he beheld the two mountains is that it is up to him to choose which way his life will go - closer to the Creator of the World and His *Torah* - blessing - or *chalilah*, the opposite - towards curse.

EDITORIAL AND INSIGHTS
ON THE WEEKLY MIDDAH OF ...
תגובה

Moshe is talking to the people, guiding them: "*See, I place before you all today a blessing and a curse. The blessing is if you follow the ways of Hashem and keep His mitzvos, and the curse, if you go against Hashem and His commandments.*" If Moshe is talking to the entire nation, why does he express himself in a singular term "ראה" - and not the plural "ראו"?

Every individual sees things differently. Two people can experience the exact same event and each one sees and interprets it completely different. An example of this is Holocaust survivors. Some survivors say, "There is no G-d. How *could* there be a G-d to allow such terrible things to happen?" However, other survivors respond, "I saw G-d so clearly at every step during the war. I felt him there, miraculously keeping me alive. How could there NOT be a G-d?" If each person sees things differently, how could Moshe tell the people "ראה" - to see and interpret the *Torah* and *mitzvos* individually?

What Moshe is telling the people - and he talks to us today as well - is that every individual, depending on his upbringing, his nature, his personality and, of course, his free choice, has the ability to take any situation and make it a blessing or a curse depending on how he views that situation. We are not in control of occurrences in our lives. We don't even know what will happen in five minutes from now. But the one thing that we are in control of is how we REACT to situations and our reaction depends on how we view the situation. Every single person - individually - has the power to turn all situations into a blessing just by the way he views it – or *chas v'shalom*, to turn everything into a curse by seeing only the negative!

TORAH GEMS

לא תשמע אל דברי העבא הזוא
או אל חולם החלום הזוא וכר (ג-ד)

The *Torah* commands us not to listen to the words of a false prophet. The **Seferno** and **Sefer HaChinuch** write that even to hear what a false prophet says without believing him is also prohibited. The *Chinuch* explains that since a person's mind is very vulnerable, if he hears the words of a false prophet or enters into a debate with him, he may start to believe the heretical ideas. And even if a person is absolutely determined not to believe the false prophet's words, perhaps he may momentarily think that the words have some validity. Therefore, the *Torah* prohibits any form of verbal contact with a false prophet in order to prevent us from having even a moment's doubt in the truthfulness of the *Torah*.

R' Moshe Aharon Stern ZT"l notes that it is evident from the *Chinuch*, that even a momentary exposure to anti-*Torah hashkafa* can have a detrimental effect on our *neshamos*. For this reason, the *Rambam* writes that one must avoid reading any material that contains anti-*Torah* concepts as it can lead him to have anti-*Torah* thoughts (*Hilchos Avoda Zara* 2:3). R' Moshe Aharon compares a "*treifa hashkafa*" to swallowing a harmful pill. Sometimes, it can have an immediate effect. However, at times, the negative effects can remain dormant and only surface much later on.

A woman once showed a book to her *Rav* for him to review and see if it contained any negative content. The *Rav* noticed something in the very beginning of the book that was indeed bad and told the woman to discard the book. Nevertheless, the *treifa hashkafa* that he read stuck in his memory. The *Rav* told R' Moshe Aharon that for three years he tried to rid his mind of these thoughts, but to no avail. He just couldn't forget them. Finally, one *Yom Kippur* during *Ne'ila*, he begged *Hashem* to please remove these thoughts from his mind. His *tefillos* were answered and immediately after *Ne'ila*, he could not remember even one word of what he had read.

דרגה יתירה FROM THE WELLSPRINGS OF
R' GUTTMAN - RAMAT SHLOMO
ראה אנכי נתן לפניכם היום ברכה וקללה וגו' (יא-כו)

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