

"Behold I set before you today a blessing and a curse." (11:26)

This phrase is usually interpreted as, "*I put before you two things, a blessing and a curse, of which you must choose one.*" This translation emphasizes two distinct paths which are available to man: the path of good which leads to life and the path of evil which leads to the contrary.

Horav M. Swift, z.l., offers another interpretation for this *pasuk*. He renders "*blessing and curse*" literally as being one unit. Every blessing carries within it the potential that through misapplication will be transformed into a curse. People who have been endowed with wealth may shower this blessing upon their children in various ways, only to discover that this blessing has been the source of their child's failure in life. This same fortune spoiled them and led them astray. How many fortunes have destroyed marriages and families? An abused blessing thus contains the ingredients of a curse. The converse also holds true. Sometimes that which seems to be a curse can be transformed into a blessing.

Horav Swift explains that this idea is expressed during our *Rosh Chodesh bentchen* prayers. We ask for "*a life in which the wishes of our hearts will be fulfilled for (the) good.*" What is the meaning of the added expression "*for (the) good*"? Does anyone desire something that is not for good? Unfortunately, some things, although they may seem fine in our eyes, are not "viewed" by Hashem in the same positive light. Hashem knows what is truly "good" for us. We, therefore, entreat Him to grant us the "good" which only He knows is truly beneficial for us.

We may advance this thought further. Due to a misguided sense of values, people often lose the ability to discern between blessing and curse. They perceive an individual who "appears" blessed, but in reality is cursed -- and vice versa. Some individuals view the apparent lack of material excess consistent with the lifestyle of many *Bnei Torah* as a bitter curse. On the other hand, other insecure individuals are secretly envious of the success attained by those who have deserted the *Torah* lifestyle. The *Torah* emphatically states that blessing is only "*if you shall listen*" and curse is "*if you shall not listen.*" The prescribed guidelines for success, happiness, and blessing are clear. We have only to open up our eyes and see!