

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

The *Torah* is expressing the basic principle of *bechirah chafshis*, free-will. The blessing, which results from one's good deeds, is catalyzed by one's own positive decision. Similarly, one effects the curse by a negative decision. The *Sfas Emes* posits that there is a *bracha* for thanking Hashem for the gift of free-will, which distinguishes man from all other creatures. The ability to discern between good and evil and to decide which path to take, raises man above all other creations. Everyday we recite this *bracha*, *vkhk ihcu ouh ihc ihjcvk vbhc hufak i,b rat* "Who gave the rooster understanding to distinguish between day and night." The word *hufa* can also be understood to mean heart. This blessing thus refers to one's understanding, which is renewed each day. The capacity for differentiating what is good from what is evil is renewed daily. In this context, day and night allude to the distinction between good and evil. By reciting this *bracha* daily, we acknowledge and express our appreciation to Hashem for granting us this gift.

Horav Eli Munk, zl, notes that the three blessings that follow acknowledge the fact that Hashem has not made him a non-Jew, a slave or a woman. These are three traits - race, social and gender -- over which man has no control. Accordingly, these three *brachos* contain a condensed characterization of free-will. Inasmuch as we can choose between good and evil, certain areas remain about which only Hashem can decide. If we would only recognize the fact that Hashem ultimately decides what we become, we might even take greater pride in our position.