

## See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse. (11:26)

There are no grey areas in Judaism. One either listens to the word of G-d and is blessed, or he is cursed for refusing to listen. Moshe *Rabbeinu* seems to underscore the significance of the word, *ha'yom*, "today." Does it really make a difference if it is "today" or "tomorrow"? The message is the same. If you listen – blessing; you do not listen – curse! Why does he emphasize that he is presenting it "today"? In the *Likutei Moharan*, **Horav Nachman Breslover, zl**, is quoted as saying: "A man has in this world only 'that day,' 'that hour,' 'that moment,' during which he is presently dynamic. Tomorrow is a completely different day altogether."

In explaining the *Breslover's* statement, **Horav Yaakov Meir Shechter, Shlita**, cites the *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* in his commentary to *Parashas Vayechi*, who quotes the **Arizal**- who explains that man's *neshamah*, soul, is comprised of many variant *nitzotzos*, Divine sparks of holiness. (Lurianic *Kabbalah* views every element of life and the physical universe as containing Divine sparks which need to be released and redeemed, so that our existence is able to reach a higher state of being. These Divine sparks are concealed within *kelipos*, shells, which prevent the *shefa*, Divine flow of energy, from reaching them. By performing *mitzvos*, one erodes these barriers, thereby revealing the Divine sparks.) These Divine sparks are divided throughout man's lifespan, with each day receiving its sustenance from its individual spark. The more *nitzotzos* one has, the longer his lifespan will be.

*Rav Yaakov Meir* takes this to the next level, observing that each day an individual has the ability to repair the *nitzotzos* of that day. Therefore, on specific days of the yearly cycle, such as *Shabbos*, *Moadim*, Festivals, *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, Ten Days of Repentance, one should be exacting and execute the *mitzvos* to the fullest degree of stringency. If one misses it "today" – it is gone – forever. We cannot make up for "today." Indeed, those *nitzotzos* which are Divinely selected for *Shabbos* and other holy days are unique and carry more "fire power," greater ability to sustain and nourish life. To denigrate the *chumra*, stringency, to seek the easy way out is to impugn one's ability for greater spiritual growth. As the *Rav* explains, just as there are organs in the body that play a crucial role in one's life-- such as the heart, liver, and brain-- so, too, do the *nitzotzos* of certain holy days have greater critical significance.

We now understand the deeper meaning of *ha'yom*, "today." Moshe underscores the importance of not losing even one day, because what is lost today is lost forever. Man should concern himself with the present, valuing every moment that has been Divinely granted to him. Do not push off until tomorrow that which should be done today. While there might very well be a tomorrow – there will no longer be a "today."

**Horav Zelig Reuven Bengis, zl**, was the consummate *masmid*, diligent in his Torah study, never wasting a moment. As a result of his unparalleled diligence, he merited to complete *Shas*, the

entire *Talmud*, many times. During one particular *siyum ha'Shas*, festive meal honoring the completion of the *Talmud*, Rav Bengis was in an especially festive mood. Indeed, he went out of his way to prepare a king's banquet for the *siyum*. When one of his students asked why this *siyum* was different, Rav Bengis replied, "This *siyum* is for the *Shas* that I completed during periods of 'downtime,' such as: waiting for the baby to arrive for a *bris*, circumcision; waiting at weddings for the proceedings to begin; and various other occasions where people just sit around waiting. He would keep a miniature copy of *Talmud* in his pocket and learn whenever he was "waiting." By making good use of these downtime opportunities, he was able to complete the entire *Shas*.

Rav Yaakov Meir concludes with an inspirational thought that he heard from a *tzaddik*. This righteous person once took an apple out of his pocket and said, "Observe this apple. This apple was not here before and soon will be gone forever." Imagine a man takes this precious apple which is here just for "now" and eats it without reciting a *brachah*; he is destroying this gift from G-d – forever! On the other hand, if he makes that blessing and eats the apple properly, with the correct intentions as per His will, he is achieving something eternal for himself, the fruit and the moment.

Upon addressing the inestimable value of time, a story comes to mind that is well worth repeating. **Horav Moshe Yitzchak, zl**, the *Kelmer Maggid*, spoke in Bialystok and made the following point: "Imagine if the Heavenly Tribunal granted all those who are buried in the Bialystok cemetery a thirty-minute leave. Yes, they could leave their place of eternal rest and come 'above ground' for a very short liberty. It sounds incredible. Now, let us see what would be the reaction of everyone involved.

"There is a great and mighty sound like an earthquake, as the individual earth above each grave in the cemetery opens up, allowing for the corpse which is interred there to rise up and leave. The graves open and a multitude of corpses clothed in their white shrouds run out. Meanwhile, their family members are waiting to anxiously to get a glimpse, to say 'hello,' to embrace, to *schmooze*. That is not happening, however, because the 'dead' are running. They only have thirty minutes, and the clock is ticking, time is running out. They all rush to the *bais ha'medrash* to grab any *sefer*: a *Gemorah*, *Mishnayos*, *Chumash*, *Siddur*, *Tehillim* – anything – just as long as they are learning. Thirty minutes go by very quickly. The relatives are waiting: 'Please *Zaidy! Ta!* My brother! 'What happened to you?' 'Do you not recognize me?' The dead do not hear. They are too busy savoring the thirty minutes. One of the dead screams, "We have five minutes left. Hurry! Learn what you can!"

Suddenly, the *Maggid* stopped and looked at the assemblage and cried out to them, "What about us? We, who have more than thirty minutes, are we using our allotted time properly, or are we squandering it? This is the only chance we will have. A moment of *teshuvah* and good deeds is worth all of the reward in the World to Come. Once we arrive there it is over; we 'collect' whatever we have accumulated in this world. If we wasted our time here, we will have very little over there!"