

It shall be when you cross the Jordan, you shall erect these stones... on Har Eival. (27:4)

Har Gerizim was the site of the blessings; *Har Eival* served as its counterpart, the site reserved for the curses. Would it not make sense that the *Mizbayach*, Altar, upon which the *Korbanos Shelamim*, Peace-offerings and Festive-offerings were brought, would be situated on *Har Gerizim*, the mountain of blessing? *Har Eival* was the mountain upon which the curses were pronounced. One would consider it an unlikely candidate for the *Mizbayach*. *Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl*, illuminates us with an insight into the meaning of -- and the distinction between --blessing and curse.

Blessing is defined as abundance, fulfillment of all one's needs; curse means the opposite: *Chisaron*, insufficiency, privation, an awareness that one's life is unfulfilled. The problem arises when he who is "blessed" with abundance begins to think that he deserves it, because he is a *tzaddik*, righteous man. He warrants blessing as reward for his good deeds and virtue. Such a person falls into the danger zone of complacency, of thinking that he has it; he has done it all; he is there; there is no longer a need on his part to strive for higher and better. Such a person risks having his blessings become the source of curse for him. Man's sole purpose in life is continued, consistent Torah study and *mitzvah* performance. Whatever causes him to pause, to halt his striving for more, is a curse.

The optimum blessing is experienced when one is satisfied with the material gifts that Hashem has granted him, but actually dissatisfied with his own Torah and *mitzvos*. Blessings are granted on the basis that one not become spiritually complacent, not rest on the laurels of past spiritual achievements. It is logical that when one is "deprived" of material abundance, he will place greater focus on his spiritual striving. Simply, when he thinks he has already received his reward, he thinks he should not have to bother with more spirituality: "I seem to be doing quite well." This attitude has the ability to transform a blessing into a curse. Being satisfied with what we have only applies to material gifts – not spirituality.

Hashem conveyed this message to the people when He had the Altar which is used for festive sacrificial service placed on *Har Eival*, the mountain reserved for the pronouncement of the curses. In this way, the nation will realize that privation and lack can lead to blessing.

Perhaps we may elaborate on this theme. Blessing and curse are relative, a matter of perspective. A three-year-old boy wants to eat an entire chocolate cake. His mother knows that if he succeeds in devouring the cake, he will become quite sick. Second vignette: Ask a young child what his mother does all day. The reply will probably be, "Nothing." The mother will invariably give you a long list of motherly duties, which began at 5:00am when she groped her way out of bed. Third case: A group of men stab a person with knives. Soon after this, they knock him unconscious, saw open his chest, proceed to suction out his blood prior to removing a vital organ. Such a scene will

definitely raise one's ire, until he realizes that he is observing open-heart surgery.

By now, the reader understands that it all depends from what vantage point one gazes on an occurrence. We often feel deprived and wonder why Hashem does not grant us what we ask. Why are we "cursed"? We view occurrences from the seat of emotion, rather than from intellect. We lack the patience to perceive the larger picture. A blessed person trusts, is intelligent, is reasonable, waits to see and grasp the whole picture. The *Mizbayach* was placed on *Har Eival* as a message for those who always think they have received the short end of the deal. They are wrong!