

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

*Hayom*, today. Does the word “today” hold significance? Is the choice of blessing or curse applicable only today? What about tomorrow? Will we still have the opportunity for choice? I was thinking about this question when I came across an article by a respected rabbinic author in which he explained why he was not celebrating his birthday. He attributes this to the fact that, upon perusing the Torah, one notes that the only birthday we read about is that of Pharaoh. When we think about it, the only day that we Jews seem to deem worthy of celebration is the anniversary of one’s death, his *yahrzeit*. It seems strange that we neglect birthdays and instead celebrate the end of life. It definitely comes across as morbid.

The answer to this disparity should inspire us all to some degree of introspection. A birthday links us to the day of birth, the day in which we enter this world, a day that is filled with incredible potential, a day that does not denote any tangible achievement whatsoever. When we are born, we enter into a world fraught with challenge, a world that offers us no assurance that we will successfully navigate its encumbrances and emerge triumphant, either physically or spiritually. We enter into a world replete with choices, that of blessing and that of curse. It is up to us to decide between them.

On the anniversary of one’s death, we (hopefully) celebrate a life of achievement, a life of accomplishment. We acknowledge and affirm his legacy as we mull over the memories imparted to us. Indeed, we can now celebrate a life well-lived.

The milestones in life – such as *Bris Milah*, *bar mitzvah*, wedding – are wonderful milestones, which everyone should be fortunate to enjoy, both individually and with family, but, at the end of the day, these are all nothing more than wonderful beginnings. A beginning, regardless of its distinction, is nothing if does not portend a good ending. We must set goals and do whatever is in our ability attain these goals. When we start something, we are instructed to finish it. Otherwise, we have not achieved *shleimus*, completion. What is a *bar mitzvah*, if it is nothing more than the beginning of the end? Marriage is a wonderful milestone if it leads to the building of a *bayis neeman*, a faithful home, that is loyal to Hashem.

We often fall prey to the obstacles and challenges that confront us throughout our lives, impeding our ability to attain success, reach our goals and, thus, achieve completion. Our greatest obstacle is overcoming ourselves: fear of failure; lack of self-confidence, which cause some to give up and quit before they have even gotten started. Without persistence and commitment, success remains elusive. Others lack conviction to their goals or faith in themselves. They rationalize their mistakes/failure, or they demonstrate a lack of self-esteem, which may be coupled with a fatalistic attitude. Any of these traits might inhibit success, but the real culprit, the all-inclusive “word” which most often defines one’s ability to achieve success in life is: attitude – the position one takes in his

mind based upon his awareness of what lies before him.

*Hayom*/today is reference to the day on which we embark on our journey, when we make the decision to grow, to achieve our goals. It is on that day that we must be acutely aware that before us lay two options: blessing and curse. Our attitude most often determines our ability to succeed. We should seek blessing, and never for one moment forget that curse is the other option. We must stay focused on blessing, because it is only with such an attitude that we will achieve our goals.

Is life about choices? I do not think so. Choice implies two viable options. We have no option but blessing. Curse is not an option, and, hence, not a choice.