

See I present before you a blessing and a curse. The blessing that you listen... The curse, if you do not listen. (11:26,27)

Our *parshah* begins by informing us of our mandate to choose between blessing and curse, good and evil. The blessing is the result of our listening to Hashem's Torah; the curse is the consequence of our not listening. The obvious question is: Who in his right mind would choose curse over blessing? The simple explanation is that it is not an issue of choice; rather, the Torah alludes to the idea that, on the surface, some of our actions present as a blessing, while actually concealing beneath their external façade less than satisfactory options. In other words, blessing and curse are not always black and white. When one listens to the Torah and performs *mitzvos*, he is protecting himself from the pitfalls of not listening. A noticeable difference exists however, between *tishme'u*, listening, and *lo tishme'u*, not listening. The Torah writes: *Es ha'brachah asher tishme'u*, The blessing: that you listen (to Hashem's *mitzvos*). The curse: Im lo tishme'u, if you do not listen. The Torah should have simply said: If you listen, Hashem will bless you; if you do not listen, Hashem will curse you. Why, concerning blessing, does the Torah underscore *asher*, that, as if to say that listening in and of itself bring about boundless satisfaction and pleasure. The *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* writes: *Ki ha'shmiyah baTorah hu taanug mufla u'mechayeh ha'nefesh*, "Listening in its own right brings about extraordinary pleasure and enlivens the soul." The mere fact that we are able to listen to Hashem's word is in and of itself a salient opportunity.

Horav Shmuel Birnbaum, zl, Mirrer Rosh Yeshivah, was well-known for his all-consuming love of Torah. At one point, he was gravely ill and had absolutely no strength. When it came time for his daily *shiur*, lecture, however, he rose from his sick bed and prepared to go to the *yeshivah*. His son, who was at his side to assist him, looked at his father incredulously and declared, "Abba! The doctor was very clear with his instructions that you not exert yourself during these days of recuperation. For you to go out and teach would be a demanding exertion."

Rav Shmuel replied, "You are correct. The doctor did say that I should not exert myself. He did not, however, say that I may not attempt to heal myself. If I am to be relaxed and feel alive, I must give my *shiur*. This will strengthen me."

Horav Moshe Schwab, zl, studied in *Yeshivas Kaminetz* under its venerable *Rosh Yeshivah, Horav Baruch Ber Leibowitz, zl*. The *Rosh Yeshivah* was wont to say that one who takes a moment to contemplate *Bircas HaTorah*, the blessing we recite upon studying Torah – *Ha'melameid Torah l'Amo Yisrael*, "Who teaches Torah to His nation, *Yisrael*," – will have a new (and esoteric) approach to studying Torah. Hashem Himself, in all His Glory, studies with us when we study His Torah. If we would know how to value and appreciate the Torah properly, we would never interrupt our learning when someone needs/wants to speak with us. Could we possibly ignore Hashem and speak to our friend? Could we take our eyes off the *Gemorah*? If we answer in the affirmative, then, in our minds, Torah study is a distant second behind everything else.

A *menahel* presented the *Chazon Ish* with the following question: One of his students had become influenced by the winds of heresy which were making an attempt to pull young, unassuming Jews from their commitment to Hashem. Unfortunately, the boy's influence went beyond himself, as he attempted to convince others of the new and exciting way of life awaiting them. The *Chazon Ish* listened to the *menahel's* tale of woe and responded, "I would like to meet with him."

When the boy arrived the next day, the sage warmly greeted him and directed him to his "office." The *Chazon Ish* closed the door and the two proceeded to converse for a half an hour, after which the boy walked out with a different visage than when he had entered. A short time passed, and the boy became one of the premier *masmidim*, diligent students, in his *yeshivah*. He grew into a distinguished *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar.

The *Chazon Ish* was later asked about the conversation that had ensued between him and the boy. He replied, "I did not inquire about his *matzav*, present situation, his ideas and outlook on Judaism. I just learned with him for thirty minutes. The power of Torah imbues a person with such extraordinary pleasure and joy. This made the difference for him."

Horav Eliezer Gordon, zl, Telzer Rav and *Rosh Yeshivah*, was a scholar without peer – during a generation that had produced the greatest *gaonim*, brilliant scholars. When *Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl*, married off his son, he asked that *Rav Leizer Telzer* (as he was called) not be invited. When he was asked why, he explained that, for *Rav Leizer*, Torah study was life itself and to invite him would mean asking him to give up some of his precious time from learning to attend the wedding. It would be best not to invite him."

Rav Chaim explained, "How do I know that this would be *bitul Torah*, wasting time from Torah study, for *Rav Leizer*? Let me relate to you what occurred a few years ago. *Rav Leizer* asked me to become a *maggid shiur*, lecturer, in the *Telzer Yeshivah*, where he was the *Rosh Yeshivah*. My response was that at present I am the *Rav* of Brisk. When he heard this, he took the written appointment making him *Rav* of Telz from his pocket and tore it up in front of me. I was shocked by this. He said, 'I am giving you the position of *Rav* in Telz – anything – as long as you will come and be *marbitz Torah*, disseminate Torah, in Telz.'"

I learned then that, to *Rav Leizer*, nothing is as important as Torah. He was prepared to give up his position as *Rav*, just so that I would join his *yeshivah*. Since he possesses such extraordinary love of Torah, I refuse to trouble him to come to my wedding."

The day of the wedding arrived, and scholars from across the area came to join in this auspicious occasion. Suddenly, they saw that *Rav Leizer Telzer* had arrived – uninvited. A number of participants asked him why he had come. Was it because of the tremendous *simchah shel mitzvah*? *Rav Leizer* replied, "It has nothing to do with the wedding. It has been a number of weeks that I am having difficulty with a *sugya*, topic, in the *Talmud*. I remember that *Rav Chaim* was making a wedding at which, I am certain, many *talmidei chachamim* will be in attendance. I am

certain that, among them, will be one scholar who could enlighten me.” This allows us a glimpse into the meaning of *ahavas Torah*.