

## **Behold! I set before you this day a blessing and a curse... A blessing – if you obey (the commandments) ... And a curse – if you do not obey (the commandments). (11:26–28)**

In a homily (*Erev Rosh Chodesh Elul*, 1941, Warsaw Ghetto) passionately rendered to a group of Jews interned in the Ghetto, the Piaseczna Rebbe, z”l, focused on the opening *pesukim* of our *parsha*. *Hashem* instructs us to see the justice and truth in all things – blessing for one who obeys and observes, and curse for one who does not. The result of this perception will be that one will see “this day” that *Hashem* has set before us, that He is behind and involved in everything that goes on in our lives, both blessing and curse.

A Jew must believe and perceive that everything happens by the hand of *Hashem*, and that He does not execute judgment without justice. A reason exists for everything. This is one of the Thirteen Principles: “I believe, without a doubt, that *Hashem* rewards those who observe His commandments and punishes those who violate them.” The *Rebbe* quotes the *Baal-HaTanya* who writes: “If a person, while in pain, acknowledges his sins (because everyone knows his own flaws) and sees why this particular punishment was justly dealt him, he will not complain. (He will face the brutal truth – he is guilty, *Hashem* is meting out justice.) On the contrary, he will assume that, just as *Hashem* has punished him, so will He nurture him when he regrets his sins and, like a father reconciling with his son, *Hashem* will comfort him.” If a person reflects on his situation, despite the bitter pain he experiences, he will be courageous in his endurance, and ultimately his mood will also change.

Having said this, we address the *hester panim*, a concept which weighs heavily on everyone’s mind. He is in pain; he is suffering; he understands that *Hashem* has concealed Himself from him. Thus, he feels lost and abandoned. The *Rebbe* now explains that our idea of *hester panim*, Divine concealment, is wrong. Does *Hashem* not say (*Tehillim* 91:15) *Imu anochi b’tzarah*; “I am with him in suffering”. [Which part of “with him” eludes our understanding? If He is with us, then He is not concealed.] We know in our hearts that He is there, but instinctually, when we are afflicted, when the shadow of hardship and adversity clouds our lives, we recoil; we feel abandoned; we despair—and, in anguish, we (unthinkingly) ask, “Where is G-d?!”

The answer to the question is: *Hashem* is not hiding His face from us – but rather, our eyes are closed. Pain and affliction distort our vision. Suffering becomes the concern. Instead of peering through the facade we look at it - and stop, because we have convinced ourselves that nothing is there.

Therefore, the *Torah* gives us a profound lesson to internalize concerning how we, “Re’eh,” look at life. Blessing and curse are not signs of Divine Presence versus Absence. They both come from *Hashem*, and they are both threads in the tapestry of His will. *Hashem* is with us all of the time. We have only to open our eyes and look through the curtain.

Ostensibly, it takes a great man of faith, whose unwavering devotion to *Hashem* offers a powerful lens to pierce the fog, to gain clarity and perceive the reality that he's not alone – *Hashem* is with him. I often record the stories of these great men for the purpose of inspiring those of us who are willing to learn from them. They traversed the road of adversity and, regardless of the obstacles/speed bumps along the way, completed their journey knowing that *Hashem* was there; He was their lodestar.

*HoRav* Michael Dov Weismandel, z"l, was *Rosh Yeshiva* of *Nitra Yeshivah* in *Slovakia*. He was a towering *talmid chacham* who is remembered for his heroic and desperate efforts to save European Jewry during the Holocaust. He bribed Nazi officials to halt deportation of Jews and sent desperate detailed letters to Jewish leaders and governments around the world, pleading for action to stop the annihilation of the Jews. He famously warned the world about the mass murders that were taking place in Auschwitz. He had every reason to be broken and angry because he was acutely aware of how much more he could have achieved had the many doors of government and secular organizations under the umbrella of Judaism not been slammed in his face. He persevered and did not allow apathy to prevail. He reestablished the *Nitra Yeshivah*, one of the first *Yeshivos* on American soil modeled after its European predecessor. He lived with profound grief, having lost his wife and children in the war.

The unfathomable tragedies of the last decade did not deter him from rebuilding his life. He remarried and had five children. At the *bris* of his fifth child, *Rav Weismandel* rose to address the gathering. He exclaimed the holy words of *kedushah*: "*Nikadesh es Shimcha b'olam*. I pray that my five sons sanctify Your Name in this world; *K'shem she'makdishim oso bishmei marom*," In the same manner that my five martyred sons sanctify His Name above from Heaven." *V'kara zeh el zeh v'amar*, and let them call out and urge one another to say, *Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh Hashem Tzivakos, melo kol haaretz Kevodo*;" Holy, Holy, Holy is Hashem of Hosts, the whole earth is full of His Glory."

How could a father who had experienced such indescribable tragedy, such immense loss, speak with such clarity and such faith? *Rav Weismandel* understood that *Hashem* is present within the deepest *hester panim*. We just have to look harder and deeper for Him. He did not see darkness – he saw purpose. He realized that *Hashem* expected him to move forward and use his G-d-given strengths on behalf of *Klal Yisrael*. He did not interpret loss as abandonment, but as a charge to rebuild, to sanctify, to continue living with faith.