

A BLESSED ADVENTURE

by Rabbi Label Lam

See I place before you today blessing and curse... (Devarim 11:27)

This is similar to the situation of someone sitting by a fork in the road. There was before him two paths. One way was straight in the beginning and thorny in the end. The other was thorny in the beginning and straight in the end. He warned the passers by: "See this road is straight for two or three steps but it comes out thorny. This road is thorny for two or three steps but in the end it comes out straight."

So Moses said to Israel: "You see bad people are successful in this world for a period of time but in the end they are frustrated... You see very good people struggling in this world but they will ultimately rejoice. (Midrash Devarim Piska)

Maybe it's already obvious but it would be interesting to know what word in the verse inspired this little story about deceptive paths.

The Chovos HaLevavos (Duties of the Heart) tells a little moralistic story about two brothers and their varying investment strategies. Both inherited plots of land that needed an equal amount of work. One hired himself out part of the day to pay his way. When he had extra time he went to work on his own field. When he had sufficient wages he put his time into fixing up that inherited field. After a few seasons he was earning sufficiently from his own land. Taking only what he needed for himself, he reinvested the profits into acquiring and developing other properties. Eventually he was able to live comfortably from all of his hard work.

The less thoughtful brother also hired himself out initially but when he had spare time he partied and lazed around. With a little extra money in his pocket and time on his hands he went out to pursue all kinds of amusement. His field not only remained desolate but it grew more thorny and unworkable over time. The fence was eventually broken down and flood waters eroded the good soil. Healthy trees were washed off the field. His bad habits caused him to remain forever in debt and dependent. He never lost the taste of poverty.

The Chovos HaLevavos explains: "A wise and insightful individual will distill from this world the knowledge of its spirituality and its subtleties, and using this knowledge like a ladder he will attain proofs of the Creator and devote himself to His service... He will select for himself from the physical elements of the world things that support his body and promote his material well-being, but only enough to meet his needs and provide for his livelihood. He will give up the luxuries and the

precious things of this world, which turn his heart away from G-d and try to work for his final home and destination...

An individual who is ignorant of the ways of the world and unaware of the wisdom found in it, regards it as his permanent home and place of residence. He invests in it all his efforts and puts his whole heart and energies into it, thinking that he furthers his own interests. He does not take into account that the fruit of all his labors and all the possessions he has amassed will go to others...and so he totally neglects his interests in the next world."

The verse, "See I place before you today blessing and curse" is teaching the most basic element of "free-choice". The time for choosing and acting is "today". Yet the "today" of this world is coated with a thick layer of materialism. One can get lost at the mall and become hypnotized by the flickering blue screen night after night. The vital energies of youth are spent in pursuit of that which eventually only frustrates.

The trick is to see in the mundane stuff of "today" the pulse of profound wisdom and kindness and to become more and more magnetized to that super-intelligent source. Sure it's harder than channel surfing but it's a direction that yields a happier result and it makes each and every day a blessed adventure.

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