

A BLESSED UNIVERSE

by Rabbi Label Lam

"See (singular) I place before you (plural) today blessing and curse. The blessing if you listen to the Mitzvos of HASHEM your G-d that I am commanding you today. And the curse if you do not listen to the Mitzvos of HASHEM your G-d and you turn from the path that I am commanding you to go after other gods that you do not know." (Devarim 11:26-28)

Why are the blessings hinged only upon listening while the trigger for the curses is activated by actually turning away to do the wrong thing? Why does "seeing" start out in a singular mode and the "before you" is expressed in plural? How can one see today the blessing and the curse that are dependant upon listening well and remaining obedient to Torah and Mitzvos?

We find a similar pattern in a verse (Mishle' 10:6) attributed to the wisest man Solomon: "Blessings devolve to the head of the Tzadik while the mouths of the wicked ones conceal violence."

The Vilna Gaon in his commentary on Mishle' wonders similarly, "Why the "Tzadik" is singular and the "wicked ones" are plural?" Why is the righteous one receiving a "blessing to the head", while the wicked ones depend upon the work of the mouth?

He combines two Talmudic principles. 1- (Brochos 33A): A person with a generous eye not only blesses but he is also the recipient of blessing. He attracts to himself what he wishes for others. If one curses and defames people then he becomes a magnet for negativity.

2- (Kiddushin 40A): The Holy One Blessed Be He considers a good thought as an action. He explains that immediately when the righteous one thinks to bless, even before the words are formulated in his mouth he is considered blessed. He becomes, with the power of a good thought a lightning rod for blessings. Therefore it is to "the head of the Tzadik".

However, by the wicked ones, their foul thoughts are not considered real until the words of evil speech are uttered from their mouths. Their negative thoughts are not counted until they are actualized. Then by their own low grade verbiage they attract the opposite of blessing.

Let us now take a real world example. Who has never been behind the red flashing stop signs of a school bus? We're in a hurry. The bus stops and sometimes the traffic is backed up in both directions waiting for one little kid to be carried onto the big yellow school bus kicking and screaming. All we can think of at moments like those are murmurings like, "Lady, get his coat on before the bus arrives!" Then the bus crawls a few houses further to repeat the whole scene again.

The verse in Mishle' opens our eyes to see two things. 1) What an opportunity we have before us daily and 2) What a shame to waste it. 1) The productive approach would be to express some blessing or good wishes for the welfare of that child. "He should learn well in Yeshiva and grow to be a great source of Nachas to his parents." It doesn't cost a dime. With thought and speech alone we can become great beneficiaries. 2) Even if we remain upset and frustrated, it's worthwhile not to say anything denigrating out loud. If it would remain a thought alone it would be much less damaging but now that it has found expression it becomes a magnet for the worst.

Each day visits all of us with a myriad of situations and tests. There are too many to enumerate. It's within the reach of every individual to seize any one of those blessed opportunities. Rabbi Avigdor Miller ztl. suggested that even after having greeted someone with, "Good Shabbos" you might pause again after they have passed to say sincerely, "I wish them a good Shabbos!". The first one may only have been a simple social formality but the second time can quietly transform your own four cubits into a blessed universe. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.