

# SEE WHAT CAN BE SEEN

by Rabbi Label Lam

*See I place before you today blessing and curse. The blessing that you listen to the commandments of HASHEM your G-d that I command you today, and the curse if you do not listen to the commandments of HASHEM your G-d and you turn away from the path that I command you today to go after other gods that you did not know. (Devarim 11:26-2)*

These words are spoken to the entire Nation of Israel, at the very end of a forty year term in the desert. Two distinct mountains were on open display. Mount Grizim is plush, rich, and flowering with the promise of life. Mount Eivil in stark contrast is conspicuously barren and empty. This visual aid is employed to etch into the psyche of the assembled the lesson of remaining loyal to the task and mission of Torah and Mitzvos. In the recording of the event Moshe refers to that day as- "today". What's so special about that day? Every day he spoke was also a "today". Why was that day worthy of a title for all time "today"?

The Ohr HaChaim answers that that day they were capable of understanding his lesson based on the statement of the sages, "A person does not stand on (truly grasp) the knowledge- opinion of his teacher until after forty years" (Avodah Zara 5B).

That means that now after forty years they can begin to truly comprehend what Moshe had told them back then. Why does it take forty years? Were these not brilliant people? Surely they understood what Moshe had spoken to them and they followed along all that time. Why is now the teachable moment for anchoring this all-time lesson?

Reb Chaim Soloveichik ztl. wired the Chofetz Chaim ztl. to come to St. Petersburg immediately for an emergency meeting with the sages of the generation to discuss and remedy a decree by the government that rabbis are required to be certified with a secular education.

Since the train left once a day the Chofetz Chaim had wait many hours before departing. During the time of preparing and waiting to leave he walked about with a somber face and tears in his eyes. He was asked, "Is it such a disaster for rabbis to need a fourth grade secular education?"

The Chofetz Chaim answered, "If we look into the near future we can foresee frightening consequences to the Torah. Think of what happened with choosing Shochtim (one who slaughters animals in a way obedient to the laws of Kosher). It used to be that a Shochet was chosen for his fear of G-d, his knowledge of the laws of Shechita, and his expertise in slaughtering animals. If, in

addition, if he had a good voice and could lead the prayers on the High Holy Days and sing at weddings, it was all the better. But in recent times with the decrease in learning and fear of G-d, the priorities have been reversed.. The Shochet is chosen because of his voice; the other qualifications have become secondary. The same thing is liable to happen with selection of rabbis. Secular education will become the main qualification, and the requirement of Torah scholarship will become secondary."

Just to be able measure how prescient were the words of the Chofetz Chaim more than seventy years ago, when we read the story, many of us are no doubt left wondering quietly within our heads, "What's so bad about that?"

Now we can understand even the emotion of Moshe's appeal. With the wisdom of perfect hindsight, based on forty-years of empirical observation, "today" you can best verify the validity of the value of all you have heard. Those who did not make it this far deviated from the proven path and dead-ended in the desert. Those who have survived to this point have made it for one reason alone. This generation, poised now to enter the "Promised Land", must project into the future and **see what can be seen!** DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).