

YOU MAKE THE DIFFERENCE!

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Our Parashah opens: "See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse." Rashi z"l explains that the blessing and the curse refer to the blessing and the curse that would be given on Har Gerizim and Har Eval, respectively, after Bnei Yisrael had entered Eretz Yisrael, as described in our Parashah and later in Parashat Ki Tavo. The Torah instructs that six tribes stand on Har Gerizim and the other six tribes stand on Har Eval when the blessings and the curses are recited.

R' Pinchas ben Pilta z"l (rabbi of Wlodowa, Poland; died 1663) asks: Why does the opening verse change from singular to plural--"See (singular), I present before you (plural) today a blessing and a curse"? Also, why did Rashi point out that the blessing and curse referred to here are those delivered at Har Gerizim and Har Eval?

R' Pinchas explains: The Gemara (Kiddushin 40b) teaches that a person should always view the world as exactly half meritorious and half "guilty," such that his next act will determine the fate of the world. How can one person have such an impact? Because, R' Pinchas explains, "Kol Yisrael Areivim Zeh B'Zeh" / "All Jews are responsible for one another." [This is why, for example, one person can recite Kiddush for another.] When did this inter-relationship come into being? Only, say our Sages, once Bnei Yisrael stood at Har Gerizim and Har Eval.

In this light, R' Pinchas concludes, our verse can be understood as follows: Each of you should see, and take responsibility for, the blessing and the curse that I am placing before all of you. When? Rashi answers: Once you stand at Har Gerizim and Har Eval. Perhaps, R' Pinchas adds, the purpose of placing six tribes on each mountain was to illustrate the idea that the world is half meritorious and half guilty, such that each person can tip the balance. (Berit Shalom)

"Come to the place that Hashem will choose." (12:26)

Why does the Torah not identify the site of the Bet Hamikdash?

R' Chaim Zaitchik z"l (1906-1989; Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Bet Yosef-Novardok in Buczacz, Ukraine; later in Israel) offers three reasons:

1. So that the nations will not fight extra fiercely to hold on to it.
2. So that whoever is occupying it will not destroy and deface it.
3. So that the tribes of Bnei Yisrael will not fight over it.

Also, R' Zaitchik writes, human nature is to long more for the unknown. If we had known all along where the Bet Hamikdash would be, it would have become "old news" by the time it was actually built.

For this reason also, R' Zaitchik adds, Halachah prohibits building structures using the same design as the Temple and making implements (for example, a Menorah) using the design of the Temple implements. If we were permitted to do that, we would forget what we are missing by not having the Bet Hamikdash. (Ohr Chadash: Mo'adim p. 425)

"Safeguard and listen to all these words that I command you, in order that it be well with you and your children after you forever, when you do what is good and right in the eyes of Hashem, your Elokim." (12:28)

Rashi z"l writes: "'What is good' refers to an action that is proper in the eyes of Hashem. 'What is . . . right' refers to an action that is proper in the eyes of men."

R' Pinchas Naftali Schwartz z"l (1828-1885; Khust, Hungary) asks: How can Rashi write that "What is right" refers to an action that is proper in the eyes of men, when the verse says expressly, "What is good and right in the eyes of Hashem"? He explains:

The Gemara (Chagigah 15b) relates: The sage Rabbah bar Shalah encountered Eliyahu Hanavi and asked him what Hashem was doing at that moment. Eliyahu answered, "He is repeating teachings in the names of all of the sages except for Rabbi Meir." "Why not Rabbi Meir?" Rabbah bar Shalah asked, and Eliyahu responded that it was because Rabbi Meir studied Torah under a heretic. "Nevertheless," Rabbah bar Shalah protested, "Rabbi Meir found a pomegranate; he ate the seeds and threw away the peel" [i.e., he took the good teachings that the heretic offered and disregarded anything inappropriate]. Eliyahu said, "Now Hashem is saying, 'Meir, my son, says . . .'"

Commentaries ask: Surely Hashem knew that Rabbi Meir took only good from his teacher. Why did He wait for Rabbah bar Shalah to say so? They answer: A person must be "clean" not only in the eyes of Hashem, but also in the eyes of men. Otherwise, even Hashem is not pleased with him.

That, writes R' Schwartz, is what Rashi is teaching as well. In order to be "good and right in the eyes of Hashem" you must not only be proper in the eyes of Hashem, but also proper in the eyes of men. (Nefesh Tovah)

"If there shall be a destitute person among you, any of your brethren in any of your cities, in the Land that Hashem, your Elokim, gives you, you shall not harden your heart or close your hand against your destitute brother. Rather, open! You shall open your hand to him; you shall lend him his need, whatever he is lacking . . . Give! You shall give him, and let your heart not feel bad when you give him, for in return for this matter, Hashem, your Elokim, will bless you in all your deeds and in your every undertaking:" (15:7-10)

R' Yosef David Sinzheim z"l (1736-1812; Chief Rabbi of France; author of the Talmud commentary Yad David) asks: The verses seem to be repetitious--"you shall not harden your heart," "you shall not . . . close your hand," "Open! You shall open your hand," "Give! You shall give." Why?

He explains: When a needy person asks for charity, the first reaction of a stingy person is to "harden his heart," i.e., to refuse to give. If the needy person pleads for help, the stingy person's heart may soften, and he will reach into his pocket. But, he will "close his hand" inside his pocket, i.e., he will regret his sudden "generosity" and will find it difficult to remove the money from his pocket to give the needy person. "You shall not harden your heart or close your hand!" says the Torah. To the contrary, "Open! You shall open your hand." Open your hand quickly!

Do not worry, the Torah adds, that giving repeatedly will harm you. "Give! You shall give him, and let your heart not feel bad," for Hashem will bless you, the Torah promises. (Shelal David)

A Torah Tour of the Holy Land

Who will build the third Bet Hamikdash? (Continued from two weeks ago)

The Zohar (Pinchas 421a, as explained by the commentary Matok Mi'dvash) relates: Rabbi Eliezer once was approached by a wise man of the gentiles, who said, "Old man! Old man! I have three questions to ask you.

"First, you say that you will have another Bet Hamikdash. In fact, only two were promised to you, while a third one is not mentioned in the Tanach. All that were to be built already have been built [i.e., the First and Second Temples], and there never will be another! Only two are mentioned in any verse; specifically (Chagai 2:9), 'The glory of this last Temple will be greater than that of the first.' You see that the Second Temple is called 'the last.' . . . [The other questions were unrelated.]

"Old man! Old man!" the gentile concluded, "Do not tell me anything, for I will not listen to you nor accept what you say." . . .

Rabbi Eliezer related: I asked Eliyahu [Hanavi] and he said that the assembly discussed these questions and their answers in front of Hashem Himself. The answer [to the first question] is as follows:

When Bnei Yisrael left Egypt, Hashem wanted them to be the equivalent on earth of the angels in the Heavens, i.e., like Adam before his sin. Hashem wanted to build them a Bet Hamikdash in the Heavens and lower it to earth, as it is written (Shmot 15:17), "You will bring them and implant them on the mount of Your heritage." Where? The verse answers: At "the foundation of Your dwelling-place that You, Hashem, have made." There, and nowhere else. "The foundation of Your dwelling-place that You, Hashem, have made" refers to the first Temple. "The Sanctuary, my Master, that Your hands established" refers to the Second Temple. Both of them were to be the handiwork of Hashem.

However, when Bnei Yisrael angered Him in the desert, they died, and Hashem took their children into the Land instead. [As a result,] the Temple was built by humans; therefore, it could not last. King Shlomo knew this and therefore said (Tehilim 127:1), "If Hashem does not build a house, its builders toil in vain," for it has no permanence.

In the days of Ezra [when the Second Temple was built], the sin of intermarriage caused the Temple to be built by human hands. Therefore it had no permanence. Until this point, the Temple that Hashem had made had never entered this world.

Regarding the future, it is written, "Hashem builds Yerushalayim." He and no other will build Yerushalayim and the Temple. That is what we are waiting for, not for a building built by humans, which has no permanence.

In the future, the First Temple and Second Temple [that Hashem made but never "gave" us] will come down together from the Heavens. (This answers the gentile's question: We are not waiting for a "Third" Temple, but rather for the original Temple.)