

CREATING HOLINESS

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

Parshas Reeh

Creating Holiness

By Rabbi Shlomo Jarcaig

"See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse." (Devarim/ Deuteronomy 11:26) As we are taught that the Torah contains no extraneous letters, no less extra words, the commentators note that the word "see" is perplexing. Why would the Torah tell us to "see" when there is nothing upon which to directly look?

Sforno (1) explains that "see" sends a message to everyone today. Pay attention and take note to the consequences of your actions. Do not allow yourselves to be complacent the way most people are, because I am placing before you a blessing and a curse, two extremes. If you take advantage of your opportunities you will be blessed exceptionally; if you do not there will be tragic repercussions. This concept is elaborated upon in the explanation of Chovos Halevavos (2) that explains that even mundane daily activities, such as eating, drinking, or sleeping, are not viewed as mere activities. If they are done in order to serve G-d they are mitzvos (Divine commands). If they are done for other reasons, they can be transgressions.

The parable is told of two men who died at the same time and together awaited judgment before the Heavenly Court. The first man had spent much of his time involved in prayer, Torah study, and other spiritual endeavors while the second had not. When the first one was judged, he was rewarded not only for his Torah study and prayer, but also for his meals and other mundane activities. The second man saw this and got excited, for although he did not dedicate much time to mitzvos he certainly ate plenty over his years. When the second man was judged he received no reward for those activities. In response to his objections he was told that the first man needed to eat, drink and sleep, to perform the basic activities of life, to enable him to fulfill mitzvos. Since those were his intentions, those activities were themselves considered mitzvos and he was justly rewarded for them. In contrast, the second man ate only for himself, his time and energies were not directed toward spiritual activities, and when he ate it was not to enable him to do mitzvos. Such

activities did not deserve any rewards.

Indeed, in every single moment of our lives we make choices. The Torah is telling us not to think that we can put ourselves into a spiritual cruise control, but we need to "see" the opportunity of each moment. To let it pass is an incredible curse; but to capture it and create holiness out of the mundane is the most fantastic blessing.

Have a Good Shabbos!

- (1) 1470-1550; classic Biblical commentary of Rabbi Ovadiah Sforno of Rome and Bologna, Italy
- (2) lit. Duties of the Heart; a classic medieval work of Jewish ethics

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