

GOOD, AND NOTHING BUT GOOD

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"And all the blessings will come upon you, and overtake you..." [28:2]

The way the verse reads, you would think that the blessings would be chasing us, and we would be running away. Who runs away from blessings? We all want happy and healthy families, comfortable homes... and probably wouldn't turn down the winning lottery ticket, either. So why does the Torah talk about blessings which "come upon us" -- as if we weren't looking for them, and "overtaking us" as if we were even running away?

The Sha'ar Bas Rabim answers: many times, people do run away -- from something that is actually good for them, but that they do not recognize as a blessing. Since they do not see the good which will come from it, they think it is bad and attempt to escape it. Thus the Torah tells us that G-d will be so anxious to bless us, that the blessings will pursue us and "overtake" us, even if we try to run away.

That which appears to be a blessing may be a curse, while, at the same time, that which appears to be a curse may be a blessing.

The Sha'ar Bas Rabim explains that this was King David's prayer in the Psalm [23:6], "May only good and kindness pursue me all the days of my life." His prayer was: may good and kindness pursue me, even when I do not realize what they are, and run away. (And, of course, may they be the only things to pursue me.)

When I was thinking about this, my wife showed me a book -- "The Other Side of the Story," by Rebbetzin Yehudis Samet. It is filled with true stories and lessons concerning the Mitzvah to judge others favorably (Dan L'Kaf Z'chus), and more than one of these will strike "close to home" for most any reader. (<http://artscroll.com/linker/torahorg/link/Books/othh.html>)

Reading the book, it occurred to me that there is a connection between the lesson of the Sha'ar Bas Rabim, and judging favorably -- because our tendency to judge others unfavorably does not apply only to other human beings. We think we know so well what is "good" for us, that we complain to G-d! Why didn't I win the raffle? Why didn't this happen to me? Why did that happen to me?

[Of course, when we see this in other people, we may leap to judge them unfavorably. There are

those who lived through and experienced things which we did not experience. This is, at least in good part, because G-d knows we could not handle them. So we have no right to judge others in this area.]

When we find this tendency in ourselves, we must turn to the lesson the Torah is teaching us: G-d so wants to bless us, that He will send his blessings out to overtake us. That which we pray for, which we think will be so wonderful, might be a curse if it arrives when we are not equipped to handle it -- but, on the other hand, might be a tremendous blessing only a year later. Thus let us learn to be patient, to pray for our needs, and to remember -- that G-d knows what is good for us far more than we, and is anxious to send it our way.

Good Shabbos!
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