

STAYING ON TOP OF ONE'S BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

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Staying On Top of One's Blessings

In the prelude to the Tochacha (section of chastisement), the Torah says "...And you will be only on top and you will not be on the bottom..." [Devorim 28:13]. What does the verse really mean? Is it not redundant after having said, "you will be on top" to say, "you will not be on the bottom"?

Perhaps we can explain this verse with an insight from Rav Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin. In Divrei HaYomim (I:4:10) we find a prayer uttered by a person called Ya'avetz. In this prayer he says "If you will bless me and extend my borders..." Why does he ask for both a blessing and an extension? Rav Tzadok makes the following point: Many times we see people that merit unbelievable blessing and bounty, but they don't know how to handle it. They are ill equipped. They are not suited to handle the blessing.

Rabbi Berel Wein gives two classic examples of people who merit blessing but are not equipped to handle it: movie stars and athletes.

We find people in the field of entertainment who become overnight sensations. Because of their voices, acting abilities, or good looks they become sudden stars. They become millionaires overnight and are flooded with more money than they know how to handle.

What happens to them? Per capita, there is more drug abuse, divorce, broken and ruined lives in Hollywood than anywhere else in the world. The reason is because very very ordinary people had the great fortune of receiving bountiful blessing. But they didn't know how to handle it. They didn't know how to deal with it. As a result the blessing becomes a curse.

We find the same with athletes. A fellow can throw a ball 95-mph. Another person has a talent for knocking people down. All of a sudden they are making \$10,000,000 a year. People are hanging on

their every word.

"What did you think of this? What did you think of that?"

"Think? What does that mean?"

The guy is a millionaire, his picture is on magazines everywhere and kids are asking him for autographs. He thinks he is 'someone' and he is nothing! He received a blessing, but he is not equipped to handle it.

That was the prayer of Ya'avetz. "If you bless me, whatever it may be, please also expand me as a person. Expand my horizons so that I am not the same little person I was yesterday before I had the ten million dollars. Now I have it. Make me a bigger person so that I am equipped for it."

How does one become a 'bigger person'? The Talmud [Temurah 16a] elaborates on the prayer of Ya'avetz: "If you will bless me WITH TORAH, you should expand my borders WITH DISCIPLES". The way one becomes a bigger person, expands his horizon, and grows as an individual, is by giving to others. "If You give me all this Torah, give me the disciples to share it with so that I can grow as a person."

The way to expand one's horizons is to focus outward and not to focus inward. Anyone who has the privilege of having children, can certainly attest to the fact that we are different people as parents than we were as single people. We have grown from the experience of being parents. We had to. We could no longer remain self-centered, only concerned about ourselves. We grew as individuals because people needed us. We expanded. This is the blessing of expanded borders.

We see people who we knew in their youth, we knew them when they were in Yeshiva. Perhaps we did not expect the greatest things from them. They were perhaps nothing special intellectually, just another bochur. Sometimes these people go out and blossom. How do they do this? By getting involved, by becoming community-minded individuals (anshei haTzibur). Not only do they have family; they have friends and community. This makes them grow. This growth turns one into a different person -- bigger, broader, more sensitive -- a person with expanded horizons.

Rav Tzadok says that this concept explains the statement of the Talmud: [Tanis 9a] "Tithe in order that you become rich". Everyone thinks that this is some type of Segulah (mystical charm) -- write out the check, invest the next day and wealth will be on its way! Rav Tzadok says that is not what the Rabbis had in mind.

"Tithe, give more money away, make people more dependent on you, and you -- as a result of that - - will have to become bigger. The more your needs will be, the more G-d will have to give you; the more your spheres of influence will grow, the bigger you necessarily will have to become."

For this is the nature of things. The more one makes oneself indispensable to others, the more one grows. The more one grows, the more one is capable of handling it.

This perhaps is the interpretation of the verse "You will be only on top, and you will not be on the bottom". Not only will G-d shower us with gifts and help us to the top, but He will also help us learn to handle it. The verse is saying that we will not become stingy, disgusting individuals -- like some people who only have the wealth, but don't have the expanded boundaries and personality to handle it.

One can have \$20 million, but he can be 'beneath'. He can be down in the gutter because he can't handle the blessing. We ask G-d not only to shower us with blessing, but also to give us the expanded horizons to properly use it, and not let the blessing become a curse.

Glossary

bochur -- young single man

Sources and Personalities

Rav Tzadok HaKohen (1823-1900) of Lublin -- Chassidic sage and thinker; author of Pri Tzadik.

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