

"DO YOU LEARN?" "WHENEVER I HAVE TIME"

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Ki Savo

"Do you learn?" "Whenever I have time"

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 780, Can You Sue Your Father? Good Shabbos!

This week's parsha contains the terrible Tochacha - the 98 curses delineated in graphic detail, through which the Almighty warns us of what we will be subject to if we do not keep His Torah. Before the Tochacha begins, the Torah provides some "good news". Namely, "If you will keep all my commandments then you will have abundant blessing..." [Devarim 28:1-14]

Immediately following the "good news", the Torah launches into a description of what will happen "If we do not listen to the commandments of the L-rd our G-d..." The curses contain the mirror image of the blessings. Rather than being "blessed in the city and blessed in the country, blessed in our coming in and blessed in our going out" we will be "cursed in the city and cursed in the country, cursed in our going in and cursed in our going out".

The Targum Yonasan Ben Uziel translates the pasuk "Cursed will you be when you come in and cursed will you be when you go out" [28:19] as follows: "You will be cursed when you come in" means "you will be cursed when you come into the theaters and when you come into the circuses - because you wasted your time on frivolous entertainment rather than spending it learning Torah." "You will be cursed when you go out" as "you will be cursed when you go out to make a living".

Rav Pam asks, what is wrong with making a living? A Jew needs to support his family and earn a living. This is implicit in the pasuk "and you shall gather in your produce" [Devarim 11:14]. We can understand the curse associated with lewd or inappropriate forms of entertainment, but what is the meaning of the curse associated with one's trying to earn a living?

The Gemara in Gittin [34a] discusses the concept of "Ones B'Gittin". A person has granted a conditional divorce (I hereby divorce you with this 'get' document on the condition that I do not return within 30 days) and then is prevented by circumstances beyond his control from returning. The Hafla-ah in Maseches Kesubos writes that the whole discussion in Tractate Gittin is only about a

case where a person wanted to return but was prevented from doing so by external circumstances (e.g. - an airline strike). However, in a case where the person would not have come back anyway, then the external circumstance that also prevented him from returning is not a valid claim to nullify the divorce.

Rav Pam said that there is nothing wrong with earning a living and that earning a living is not in and of itself 'bitul Torah', because one is obligated to support a family. However, people do not work 16 hours a day. What does he do with his leisure time? If he spends his free time learning, spending time with his family, and helping around the house, that demonstrates that he only spent time working because he was forced to do so (ones). However, if learning or attending a shiur is on the bottom of the totem pole, it proves that the time at work was also not just because he had to, but was because he would rather be doing anything other than learning. He will find any excuse not to learn. It is about such a person that we say "Cursed are you when you come in (to the theaters and circuses) and cursed are you when you go out (even to earn your living)". A person must earn a living. However, he must have the attitude that whenever I have the opportunity to do so, I want to use my time wisely from a spiritual perspective.

Rav Henkin, zt"l, once met the Chazon Ish when they were both yet in Europe. At the time, he did not even know the Chazon Ish and he certainly did not realize his greatness. They were both coincidentally in the parlor of a certain Rabbi, waiting to see the Rav and began talking with one another. Rav Henkin asked the Chazon Ish "What's your name?" and he replied "My name is Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz." "What do you do?" inquired Rav Henkin. "I own a store", replied Rav Karelitz. (This was true because the Chazon Ish's wife ran a store and that is how he earned a living." Rav Henkin then asked, "Do you set aside fixed times for learning Torah daily?" The Chazon Ish responded, "When I have time I learn."

Later, when Rav Henkin got in to see the Rav who he was waiting to talk to, the Rabbi told him that he was about to leave his position for several months and travel to Russia. He was planning on leaving his community in the interim with the gentleman in the parlor named Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz, who was proficient in all areas of Talmud." What the Chazon Ish told Rav Henkin was absolutely true. Whenever he had time, he learned! That is why he became the Chazon Ish.

The Hidden Blessing of Being Unchanged -- By Blessings or By Curses

The Torah writes, "All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you (v'heeseegucha)" [28:2]. There are many interpretations given to this strange use of the word v'heeseegucha. Part of the challenge in interpreting the word is that the exact same word is used in the later verse "And all these curses will come upon you and overtake you (v'heeseegucha)" [28:15].

The Shemen haTov gives a homiletic interpretation, which even if not an accurate translation of the word in context, it does provide insight into a concept that is fundamentally true. The Shemen haTov says that the pasuk means, "The blessings should come to you and remain with you as YOU." So

many times in life, we see that when a person is showered with blessings, they change him. He is not the same person anymore. Success in business, wealth, or prestige all tend to change a person. The thrust of the pasuk then is that the blessings you receive should not go to your head. They should remain with you and you should be the same person who you always were.

This is also the silver lining to the "curse" "And all these curses shall befall you v'heeseegucha." Sometimes a person has so many bad things happen to him that those negative experiences change him as well. He cannot handle all his misfortune and he is changed by it. The pasuk is hinting at the fact that even curses should not have the corrosive effect on a person that sometimes comes with misfortune.

We need to pray that this be the case with our brethren in Israel when tragedies befall them (the terrible terrorist incident, which killed Dr. David Applebaum and his daughter, Nava, Hashem Yinkom Damam, occurred in Israel the week this shiur was given.) We hear of tragedies happening there all too often and unfortunately, one almost gets immune to the shock of it. However, the tragedy of a father and a daughter killed in a terrorist incident the night before her wedding is one which makes even the most shell-shocked amongst us break down and cry. What can we say about the fate of a young girl who has a levaya the day of her chasuna! Can we begin to imagine the pain of the mother and the wife? Rather than taking her daughter down to the Chuppah with her husband, she has to attend the levaya of both of them the same day. The head cannot imagine such a tragedy. We ask - how can people go on after such a tragedy?

The Almighty has His calculations and we have to accept them, the Rock His Actions are Pure (haTzur Tamim Pealo), but even if we will understand it as 'good' in the next world, in this world it is clearly 'bad'. The hope always is however, that people will be able to overcome tragedy and misfortune. It should not change them. It should not corrode or warp their personalities. We pray that people should have the strength to go on and live their lives in a semblance of the way they lived it before. G-d is a Healer of broken hearts. There are so many broken hearts amongst us. It is horrible.

Even though all these curses befall us - and we do not understand why they happen - we hope that the victims and the witnesses to the tragedy should not be changed by these misfortunes and they should have the strength to carry on despite the curses that have befallen us. May Hashem help us achieve this.

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