



Re'eh – The Choice
Rabbi Shmuel Silber

“Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse.” (Devorim 11:26).

Life is filled with choices. From what we wear to what we eat to how we act, we must condition ourselves to think and choose wisely. This was the simple, yet profound message Moshe was conveying to our ancestors. There are blessings and curses. If you follow in the way of God, blessing awaits. If you ignore your spiritual responsibilities and engage in negative behaviors, there will be consequences. Each and every day these two paths are in front of us and we must choose which one to travel.

The great Chassidic master, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810) advances a slightly different interpretation:

“Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse;’ before ‘you,’ it is blessing and a curse, but from before God it is a simple light, simple letters and it is man who connects them together. If man is good, the combination (of the letters) yields blessing, and if not (if man is evil) then the opposite will occur (negative results). For before God there is no combination of the letters, there is no blessing or curse.”
(Likutei MoHaran 1:36)

From the cryptic words of the Rebbe emerge a life altering lesson. God delivers circumstances and it is up to us do decide if it will be a blessing or a curse. Everything God does is good, sometimes we see and understand the good and sometimes the good is obscured by difficulty, pain and suffering, but the result is always *tov* (good). Moshe Rabbeinu tells the people, *“Re'eh anochi noseyn lifneychem ha'yom* (see that I, God am placing life circumstances in front of you. You must now decide), *beracha u'klalah*, (will it be a blessing or a curse.)” More often than not, we don't get to choose our circumstances, but we absolutely choose our disposition and attitude. We choose whether a particular life situation will be a *beracha* or a *klala*. Similarly, we each have strengths and abilities; they are neither good nor bad. They represent energy that God has given us, the nature of which will be determined by how they are used. This was the lesson Moshe was trying to teach us. Life is a series of choices. We must choose how to use our innate traits and abilities. We must choose how to channel the incredible strengths we possess. We must choose how to look at life. It is easy to see the good times as blessings but are we able to see the blessing in adversity? And even if we can't see the blessing in our challenges, can we find the strength to believe that blessing is present and hopefully will one day be recognizable? These are the choices we must make today and every day.

This Shabbos is Rosh Chodesh Elul. The last month of the year 5779. This sacred month serves a dual role, it affords us the opportunity to end the current year with meaning and purpose while simultaneously paving the way for a successful and uplifting year ahead. There are things we promised ourselves to accomplish and aspects of our life and identity we pledged to change. Hopefully, we have made good on our promises, but if we haven't, there is still time. There are challenges which can derail our dynamic activity and there are character flaws and negative traits which hold us back. As we enter this most opportunity-laden month let us remember the words of Moshe Rabbeinu. God gives us abilities and circumstances. It is up to us to use our *kochos* (strengths) for good and see the Divine blessing in every situation.