

רֵאֵה אֲנֹכִי נֹתֵן לְפָנֶיכֶם הַיּוֹם בְּרָכָה וּקְלָלָה

Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse.

This week's parsha sets out a straightforward proposition. Bnei Yisrael have two choices - they can choose to follow the ways of Hashem and in return they will be blessed. Alternatively they can stray from the path and they will be punished for their choice.

Sounds simple enough.

But what if it's not so clear what is the 'right path'. What if following the 'right path' nevertheless involves enormous challenges, hurdles and sometimes pain and sacrifice?

The answer may be found later on in the parsha. Moshe foretells the people of their future success and wealth such that they will be able to consume meat.

כִּי־יִרְחִיבֶיךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת־גְּבוּלְךָ כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּר־לְךָ וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲכַלְהָ בֶשֶׂר כִּי־תִתְאַוֶּה נַפְשְׁךָ לֶאֱכֹל בָּשָׂר בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ נַפְשְׁךָ תֹאכַל בָּשָׂר:

When the Lord, your God, expands your boundary, as He has spoken to you, and you say, "I will eat meat," because your soul desires to eat meat, you may eat meat, according to every desire of your soul.

The Mei HaShiloach (R'Modechai Yosef Leiner) of the Izbicz-Radzyn hasidic dynasties has an innovative read on this passuk.

כי ירחיב ה' אלקיך את גבולך וכו' ואמרת אכלה בשר וכו' בכל אות נפשך תאכל בשר. לא נאמר שיצאו חוץ לגבולם רק שגבולם יתרחב, כי באמת משם הוי"ה היינו מצד הש"י אשר בחר בישראל אין שום גבולין רק מותר להתפשט בכל הטובות, אך משם א"ד"נ"י היינו הכרת האדם וגבול תפיסתו מזה נצמח כל הגבולין שעד כאן מותר להתפשט ומכאן ואילך אסור, היינו כמה שימצא באדם כח עבודה כך יכול להתפשט את עצמו בטובות.

It does not say "when you cross over your borders", but rather, "when your borders expand". From G-d's point of view, when G-d, whose name is YHVH, chooses Israel, there are no boundaries of any sort. It would be permitted to expand into all desires and every pleasure. It is only through the name ADONAI (literally - my master), that our boundaries evolve; that we learn to recognise the extent of our capabilities, to know where to stop. To be able to say with certainty "I am permitted up to this point but beyond here is forbidden to me." So inasmuch as a

person is in service of G-d, to that same extent he can permit himself to expand into and enjoy pleasures.

Here the Rebbe is contrasting two types of meat (read: pleasure) consumption. One is from crossing over boundaries, the other is when your borders are expanded such that the meat is now in your territory. The Rebbe uses this as a metaphor for enjoying the pleasures in our life. If we are pursuing pleasures for incorrect reasons (ie: at the expense of others, against the path of Hashem) then we have crossed the boundary. However, if we are focused on serving Hashem, then our borders will expand, we will be blessed and in that context the pleasures are permitted and we can go ahead and enjoy the blessings that have come into our lives.

There is a delicate balance between boundaries and pleasure. That which is beyond our range may seem irresistibly enticing and our pursuit of these delights may lead to us going beyond our territory. However, "we have set before us a blessing and a curse" and we must make the right decision. If we are focused on following the ways of Hashem, that is, the ways of kindness, compassion, holiness and ethics then what is permitted to us expands and then we will have many more pleasures available to us. Indeed, perhaps we will even find joy within our own boundaries.

Wishing you a shabbat of finding delight within our limitations and pleasure in serving what is Good.

שבת שלום