## DIVREI MENACHEM

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# Our "Sweet-smelling" Mission

This week's Parsha opens with the following: "See that I am giving you this day the blessing and the curse."

On this *passuk*, the Netivot Shalom asks:

What exactly are we supposed to see or comprehend?

Why does the narrative stress "today"?

Is there a substantive difference between Reward and Punishment and Blessing and Curse?

In this context, what is meant by the term "I am giving you"?

Starting with the last question, we usually interpret the term "giving" positively, such as giving someone we care for a present. How then can that expression be applied to a curse? Moreover, while one can "see" a specific reward or punishment for good and bad behavior, how does one become aware of having received a blessing or a curse?

This line of questioning brings us to the issue of understanding the qualitative nature of divine blessings and curses. In essence, argues the Netivot Shalom, *every* life circumstance – "good" or "bad" – is an opportunity, a *gift*, to transform our actions and bring us closer to Hashem.

For we were created to offer ourselves in Hashem's service; in our vernacular, to give Hakadosh Baruch Hu "*Nachat Ru'ach*." Each of us has a unique mission in this world, a *Shelichut* to fulfill. And what we can and should do *today* should not be put off for tomorrow. If we procrastinate, the "sweet-smelling odor" of our enthusiasm to fulfill a Mitzva or act *LeShem Shamayim* turns sour and putrid, as it were.

The Netivot Shalom posits that the blessing referred to in our Passuk is our God-given ability to rise to our spiritual potential. Thus, for example, to see in any adverse suffering (*Yissurim*) the hand of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* that has sent us a wake-up call. For this world is a composite of good and evil – and we were blessed with "*Bechirah Chofshit*," the power to take *every* situation to a higher place.

The curse, then, is of our own making; it is not a punishment, *per se*: The curse befalls us when we refuse to attend to our animal-like desires, opt out of our unique Shelichut, and no longer care to maximize our spiritual potential in this life.

On that note, may Hashem grant us the blessing that we recognize our roles in this world and have the willpower to strive to achieve our personal and national missions successfully.

Shabbat Shalom ■

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