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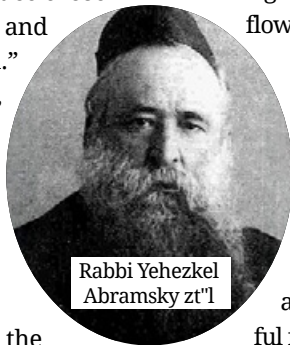
Positive Potential

Am Yisrael has reached the end of their desert journey and they are approaching the border of the Land of Israel. Our *parashah* opens with the commandment to “place those blessings upon Mount Gerizim, and those cursing upon Mount Eval.” (*Devarim* 11:29) Rashi expounds, “that when speaking of the blessings, the Levi’im were to turn to Gerizim, and when mentioning the curses to turn to Eval.” What can we learn from this momentous event?

Rav Avraham Gurvitz quotes the *Midrash Talpote*: the two mountains were exposed to the same physical conditions conducive to growth and thriving. They were both open to sunshine and both had ample water sources. However, we know that while Mount Gerizim was beautiful, lush and green, Mount Eval was empty and dry. Here we learn that goodness is solely the by-product of Hashem’s blessing, it is not one’s material features or attributes that guarantee success.

The message is profound. Oftentimes we lay blame for our failures on circumstances or outside factors. These two mountains clearly teach us that fortune and prosperity are in Hashem’s hands. We can, however, increase our worthiness of Hashem’s grace

and kindness by growing and developing our good *middot*, and *avodat Hashem*. When we focus on the goodness in life, when we are growth-oriented, then even when faced with difficult situations, we can flourish and transform it into blessing. Likewise, one can have the best of circumstances, but a negative attitude can destroy everything good. Appreciation, recognizing our blessings despite the challenges, conducts goodness and helps it flow all around us.



Rabbi Yehezkel Abramsky zt”l

A story is told of Rav Chatzkel Abramsky that beautifully illustrates this lesson. Rav Abramsky was sent to Siberia for the terrible crime of teaching Torah. Upon awakening one morning, he started saying *Modeh Ani* and asked himself, “What am I thankful for? I cannot properly learn Torah and my mitzvah observance is severely limited!” The harsh conditions made basic functioning extremely challenging. Then he stopped as he said the words, “*rabbah emunatecha*.” He realized that he still had the mitzvah of *emunah* — that could never be taken from him or compromised. The thought strengthened him and he survived. Such is the power of finding blessing even in the harshest circumstances.

This is the lesson Hashem wanted to convey to *Am Yisrael* upon entering the land. Living with blessing or curse is up to each person. We are all blessed with a storehouse of bounty, material and spiritual. It is our choice to use it or abuse it. ■