



***Authentic Kabbalah - Sephardic Studies
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Blessing & Curse, How Much Is In Our Own Hands? *Commentary to Parashat Ki Tavo*

*By Rabbi Ariel Bar Tzadok
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In this parasha we read one of the most ominous sections of the entire Torah – the blessings which come along with our observance of the mitzvot and the curses which come about as a result of our rebelliousness. While the blessings are sublime and lofty, the curses boggle the mind. How could so many bad things happen just because one doesn't observe the mitzvot?

Many who read this parasha understand the section of the blessings and the curses with a childlike simplicity. Their attitude is one that says "if I am good, then "daddy" HaShem will give me good things and if I am bad then "daddy" HaShem will "spank" me." While childlike understandings are quite innocent, they are also quite immature. When we view HaShem's blessings and curses as simply being Divine impositions on us and our world, we lose sight of the essential matter - how much of what happens is our own responsibility?

One of the finest lines that a religious person must walk is the razor's edge between faith in HaShem and individual responsibility. As Benjamin Franklin put it, "G-d helps those who help themselves." When it comes to examining the blessings and the curses in light of 2,500 years of Jewish persecution, some disturbing questions arise.

How much effort are we supposed to put into molding our own destiny? In other words, are we able to affect and/or neutralize HaShem's curses, based on the actions that we take? When should we simply stand back in faith and allow HaShem, through nature, to take its course? When is too little mitzvah observance not enough? When is enough enough? I believe that if we had the answers to these questions and lived by them Mashiah would have been here a long time ago and our world would have achieved the

long sought after utopia. Nonetheless, I will endeavor to address these important issues, B'ezrat HaShem.

It is interesting to note that as our understandings of science and technology grow, we begin to see a connection between disciplines that were previously thought to be unrelated. According to classical Newtonian physics, to every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. While Newton discussed this law of physics with regards to physical objects, we also see that it is applicable in the realms of psychology and spirituality. Therefore, depending upon what we do and how we live, will define for us the type of lifestyle we lead and in what type of environment we will live.

According to Newton, everything is in our hands. Everything operates by the Divinely ordained laws of nature that G-d set into motion in the beginning. Since then, Newton postulated, HaShem stepped back from the world and allows nature to operate by itself. According to Newton, everything is set in its path, with no alternatives available. If this is true, then human responsibility means everything! Whatever actions we perform, we create its reaction, whether for good or for bad. This is a very mechanical view of the world, where everything is very simple.

Yet, as modern physics developed, we soon recognized another view other than Newton's. Einstein and others discovered that there is a lot more to this universe of ours than meets the eye. Just as this is true of the laws of physics so is it true of the realms of psychology and spirituality. Things are much deeper and more complicated than we can possibly imagine. The apparent simple cause and effect relationship is seen in physics to be not entirely accurate. This is also true in the realms of psychology and spirituality.

Modern physics has discovered that there is a peculiar measureless random element at work in the universe that seems to have the power to affect things. This random element has the power to neutralize the cause and effect relationship. Indeed, the random element itself can be the cause of an effect, or cause there to be no effect. Random means that there is no rule of relationship.

Sometimes, unpredictably, things can end up one way and at another time, end up in a totally different way, without apparent rhyme or reason. Does the universe operate so "haphazardly"? Is there no measurable mechanics by which our universe of both outer space and inner space make sense? The universe of Quantum Mechanics looks quite different from Newton's universe.

There is an saying recorded in the holy Zohar, "as it is below, so it is above." In other words, inner space and outer space reflect each other's reality. They are both created and formed according to the same Divinely ordained model. Therefore, the laws of physics are the laws of psychology and spirituality and vice a versa. As it is below in the realms of outer space, so it is above in the realms of inner space.

The existence of a random element seems to be all too evident when one wishes to explore psychology or spirituality. Neither of these disciplines can truly and fully be measured, analyzed and thus understood. The human mind, especially the unconscious part thereof, definitely expresses the random element. In other words, why people are the way they are, why one accomplishes what another does not and similar type questions can never be definitively answered using methods of Newtonian physics applied to psychology. Sometimes there just is no rational answer. Sometimes there is just no visible cause and effect relationship.

If Sir Isaac Newton would have only studied inner space before he studied outer space, he might have discovered Quantum Physics hundreds of years ahead of its time. Indeed, Sir Isaac Newton, Gentile as he was, still studied the original Hebrew Bible, convinced that there was a secret code therein. Yet, it was not until the birth of the computer age that the mathematical Bible Codes were finally discovered. Just as there are layers of understanding the Torah, so are there these same levels when it comes to understanding G-d and how He interacts with His creation.

Blessings and curses; are they the natural results of our actions in purely Newtonian mechanical fashion, i.e., we do this and that happens? Alternatively, is there any Divine intervention, a random element, present that could influence, if not outright change the natural course of cause and effect? How much are we in control of our own destiny? How much free will do we really have? We can hotly debate these topics all we wish, but will our discussions have any affect upon the reality of how things really are?

Recently, there was a large controversy regarding comments made by HaRav Ovadiah Yosef about the Holocaust. He offered a mystical explanation as to why six million innocent souls were so ruthlessly murdered. While the path of mysticism may soothe the aching hearts of many, it still doesn't help us to recognize how to avoid such horrors in the future. Rather than inquire as to the reasons HaShem had for allowing such an occurrence, we should ask what we did that allowed such an occurrence. Then we must ask what we can do to avoid such things in the future. It is easy to pass off blame to HaShem and say He is responsible. It is much harder for us to self introspect and say what did we do to cause this thing. Everyone likes to pass the buck. No one likes to say, "the buck stops here."

"The buck stops here!" We are responsible for our own actions! We ourselves are responsible for the Holocaust and thousands of years of Jewish persecution. We violated G-d's covenant and therefore nature took its course and we were punished thereby.

Wait a minute! Is this really true? It sounds very Newtonian, very mechanical. If we are the cause and we bring about the effect, then we certainly do not have to consider the random element. Yet, science teaches that we must. In all due respect to science, as misguided as it is sometimes, scientists do share one thing in common with Rabbis, we both are searching for the ultimate truth of the universe. While scientists grope in the dark and find whatever they can, our holy Rabbis have the Torah, the master

blueprints of creation. Thus, when studied in depth, the Torah reveals to us all answers and all science.

Indeed, there is a random element in creation. Yet, unlike scientists who do not understand it, we students of Torah do understand it. This random element is none other than the Hand of G-d. In other words, G-d does not leave His world to operate on its own as Newton thought. No, HaShem is involved in every detail of everything. While we, like Newton, view the world as operating in a measurable cause and effect relationship, nothing could be further from the truth.

The Quantum physicists of our day have finally learned what our holy Rabbis knew centuries ago. Each and every moment in time and space is unique. The variables of cause and effect are multiple, if not infinite. One thing does lead to another, but not necessarily to the "other" that we would predict. The universe is random and affected by invisible powers beyond the present realm of scientific understanding. Beyond science, yes; beyond Torah, no!

Blessings and curses should operate in a cause and effect relationship with our actions. If we do what's right this cause should produce the effect of a blessing. If we do what's wrong, this cause should produce the effect of a curse. Yet, we see that those who do what is right, i.e., the righteous, often suffer. They do not receive what would be understood as a blessing for their righteousness. Those who commit evil seem to get away with it. They apparently are not cursed for their bad actions. Based on the human experience, I must conclude that Newton's law of physics does not apply in the arena of human behavior.

Yet, the verse comes to warn us, "Behold the Guardian of Israel, does not slumber or sleep" (Ps. 121). HaShem is very much in control of His universe. He sees all and operates in dimensions that modern science cannot even begin to imagine. Indeed, HaShem does operate His universe in a cause and effect relationship, even as Newton has said. Einstein said it best when he said, "G-d does not play dice with the universe."

However, mind boggling and impenetrable G-d's ways might be, rest assured the righteous are indeed blessed for their actions in direct cause and effect relationship, while the wicked will be punished accordingly. The random element in the universe is G-d's Hand that traverses dimensions and rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked, not according to our meager understandings of these things, but in accordance to the Divine wisdom of G-d!

Thus, there really is no contradiction between Newton and the Quantum physicists. Both principles of cause and effect and randomness work in harmony, both in the service of HaShem. HaShem operates His universe in cause and effect relationship, but we cannot always understand the relationship of cause and effect. Thus, the scientist calls it random. Rabbis call it the Hand of G-d. Often, Rabbis too do not

understand the movement of G-d's hand. Yet, rather than call it random, we call it Faith!

Blessings and curses; we do bring them upon ourselves. Yet, with regards to the curses we can remove them from ourselves. Even if we have caused the effect of the curse, we can remove it. All we have to do is apply the lessons of Ellul and the Ten Days. We must repent of our wrong ways. We must do Teshuva and return to HaShem.

When we do this, HaShem's Hand intervenes in human affairs and neutralizes the effect caused by our sins. This intervention is called G-d's mercy. It is the mightiest power in the universe. We must not underestimate it. Eventually the scientists will discover this to. When they do, they will see the Face of G-d reflected in His Hand. They will thus see the Torah. They will have no choice but to accept it and to convert to Judaism. Maybe this is how Mashiah will come.

Blessings and curses are in both of our hands; G-d's Hands and man's hands. If we do our share, G-d will surely do His. As Benjamin Franklin said, G-d helps those who help themselves."