

A BLESSING AND A CURSE*

רָאָה אֲנֹכִי נֹתֵן לְפָנֶיכֶם הַיּוֹם בְּרָכָה וּקְלָלָה:
אֶת־הַבְּרָכָה אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמָעוּ אֶל־מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מִצְוֶה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם:
וְהַקְלָלָה אִם־לֹא תִשְׁמָעוּ אֶל־מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
וְסָרְתֶם מִן־הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מִצְוֶה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם
לָלֶכֶת אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים אֲשֶׁר־לֹא יָדַעְתֶּם:

See, I set before you today a blessing and a curse.
The blessing, that you hearken to the commandments of Adonai your God,
that I command you today.
And the curse, if you do not hearken to the commandments of Adonai your God,
but turn from the way that I command you today,
to go after other gods, which you have not known.

See—You are not as other nations but face “two extremes,” blessing and curse (Sforno). *I set before you today a blessing and a curse*—The choice of good or evil is present every day of your life, because God has put “your future fate most blessed or most accursed entirely in your own hands” through the gift of Torah (S.R. Hirsch). *The blessing, that you hearken to the commandments of Adonai your God, that I command you today*—The root of the word blessing (ברך) is related to the knee joint, “the essential lever for moving forward” (S.R. Hirsch). You shall receive the blessings by demonstrating to yourself that you are able to respond with all the goodness you have been given, thereby tilting the world toward goodness, as it is said: “Because . . . if he performs one good deed, happy is he for turning the scale both for himself and for the whole world on the side of merit; if he commits one transgression, woe to him for weighting himself and the whole world in the scale of guilt . . .” (Kiddushin 4Ob). *And the curse, if you do not hearken to the commandments of Adonai your God*—The root of the word curse (קלל) is related to “becoming empty, devoid of self-substance” (S.R. Hirsch). If you ignore the teachings of Torah, you shall estrange yourself from God and the Jewish people, becoming empty in your own eyes. *But turn from the way that I command you today*—You will curse yourself if you trade the truth of Torah for the momentary diversion of secular, material values, which have no lasting power, and if you fail to remember that your blessings may come in the midst of poverty and your curses may come in the midst of riches. *To go after other gods, which you have not known*—“Every step away from the Torah is a step toward עבודה זרה [strange worship],” because to believe in God as a Jew requires not only mere belief but acceptance of God’s “rule” over us and our submission to God’s “control” of all our actions (S.R. Hirsch).

* Deuteronomy 11:26-28 (in Reeh)