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A VORT FROM THE ROSH YESHIVA מורינו הרה"ג ר' אברהם גורביץ שליט"א

פרשת ראה

וְהָיָה כִּי יְבִיאֲכֶם ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֶתֶּהּ בָּא שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ וְנִתְּתָה אֶת הַבְּרָכָה עַל הַר גְּרִזִּים וְאֶת הַקְּלָלָה עַל הַר עֵיבָל. (דברים י"א, כ"ט)

It shall be that when Hashem, your G-d, brings you to the Land to which you come, to possess it, then you shall deliver the blessing on Har Gerizim and the curse on Har Eval. (Devorim 11:29)

In this week's *Sidrah*, Moshe informed Klal Yisroel about the blessing and curse that would later be pronounced on Har Gerizim and Har Eval. Although this would only occur after they crossed the Yarden, Moshe explained to the people now what the formula of the blessings and curses would be. The Levi'im who blessed the nation stood in the valley between the two mountains. They would turn their faces towards Har Gerizim and begin with the blessing: 'בְּרוּךְ הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה פֶסֶל וּמַסֵּכָה וְגו' *Blessed is the man who shall not make a graven or molten image etc.* Each of the curses mentioned in Ki Savo (27:11-26) was said first in the language of blessing while facing Har Gerizim, and afterwards, they turned their faces toward Har Eval and began with the curse.

The Rosh Yeshiva *shlita* questions why these blessings and curses were transmitted to Klal Yisroel in this particular manner. What was the significance of this procedure and how did this setting make it more effective?

The Rosh Yeshiva shares an insightful idea from R' S. R. Hirsch who derives a fundamental lesson from this *parshah*. R' Hirsch cites a contemporary explorer (printed Frankfurt, 1852) who observed that these twin mountains are both located in the mountain range of Shechem and the contrast in their appearance can still be clearly seen. Har Gerizim is lush with gardens covering the terraces on its slope, while Har Eval is steep, barren, and utterly desolate. Astoundingly, even though they stand side by side, in the same region with the same soil and nutrients, and receive identical sunlight and rainfall, these mountains are entirely different. This miraculous difference demonstrates how even apparently natural results are entirely an outcome of Klal Yisroel's allegiance to the Torah and *mitzvos*. At this crucial juncture of Klal Yisroel entering the Land, the events and undertakings at these two mountains instilled in them a crucial lesson: blessings and curses are totally dependent on doing Hashem's will and not any external circumstances.

Many times, people make mistakes, and fool themselves by blaming a lack of success in their spiritual or general life on external factors. They might say, "If I were in a different place or situation, things would be so different". However, the experience of Har Gerizim and Har Eval teaches the opposite. External influences and circumstances are not the deciding factor; a person can rise above the situation they find themselves in. The true determining factor for success in life is a person's inner will and drive to improve. When one possesses an inner drive, one can achieve success and blessings in any situation.

When the Netziv completed his *sefer* on the Sheiltos, he hosted a grand celebration for his family and explained that the cause for this celebration was something greater than just the conclusion of his *sefer*. He recounted that when he was a child, he was not applying himself to his learning and as a result of being unsuccessful, his parents decided to apprentice him to a watchmaker. Despite being a young child, the Netziv realised that his entire future was at stake and pleaded with his parents to grant him another year with which to prove himself. From that point on, he devoted himself to learning and eventually became the great Rosh Yeshivah of Volozhin and author of multiple *seforim*. The Netziv shared, "Just imagine if I had not made that crucial decision. Most likely, I would be an *ehrlische Yid*, devoted to Torah and *mitzvos*, content with my life. However, imagine the moment I arrive in Olam HaEmes and they inquire about my commentary on the Sheiltos. I would be bewildered by the connection between myself, a simple watchmaker, and such an extraordinary *sefer*!" With this, the Netziv explained that this celebration was about him fulfilling his mission in life. At that critical moment, he had made the right decision and changed his life. It was not his intelligence or life situation that enabled him to succeed and reach great heights, but rather his inner conviction and will to strive further. Choosing to sacrifice an easy life and dedicate himself to the Torah was the key to his achievement.

There is another account brought about a student who wanted to learn in the Chasam Sofer's *yeshivah*. The bachur was older, in his twenties, and wanted to be accepted to the prestigious *yeshivah*. Despite being far behind his peers and lacking the necessary intelligence, the Chasam Sofer decided to accept him due to his strong determination to learn and grow. The Chasam Sofer arranged for twelve of his best *bachurim* to teach the boy, each for one hour. Initially, there was little success, as the boy would forget what he had learned in the first hour and have to start over in the next hour. However, over time, due to his resiliency, he transformed and became one of the best of the *yeshivah*. He eventually married a family member of the Chasam Sofer and became one of the respected Rabonim in Hungary. This story illustrates how natural circumstances and abilities are not decisive in life, and how this bachur's determination and will to thrive led to his success.

The Rosh Yeshiva emphasises that even if one does not become the greatest *Talmid Chacham*, Torah learning in itself is still tremendously worthwhile. It enables a person to better themselves and rise to great heights. Torah has the power to purify a person and lead them to become a *tzaddik*.

Let us heed the message from Har Gerizim and Har Eval. Blessings and curses are not determined by natural situations and external circumstances. Success is completely dependent on an individual's inner will and conviction. Every person has the ability to achieve *brochah* in life by making the right decisions.

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