

Torah Tidbits – August 18, 2014

"See? I am placing in front of you today blessing and curse. The blessing? When you listen mindfully!" (a bit of a paraphrase and Midrashic verse license)

I'd like to take a step back from the text, to get a better handle on what it is saying. Moses is presenting two things, as if those things are completely understood - and I am not sure that they are. We say brachot (blessings) quite often, and when I was growing up it was always explained that we were blessing God. I took what was said at face value, even after being able to translate the Hebrew directly. "Blessed are you," when recited quickly enough, appears to fulfill the purpose of blessing God. If we don't tell God that God is blessed, maybe God won't be.

Of course, that isn't what the Hebrew actually says. God is blessed in the same fashion that a book is written. When I say that a book is written, I am not usually implying that I have written the book, or that I am writing the book in the process of making a statement about the book's nature. So, too, when I say "Blessed are You," referring to God, I am making a statement about God's nature, and nothing further.

So what does God's nature have to do with what Moses wants? For the purposes of this Midrash, God is that entity which listens to us when we communicate, and understands what it is that we actually mean, despite any lack of clarity we might exhibit during the communication. If we want to have God's blessed nature reflect upon us in "a blessing," then it behooves us to act Godly.

So, always pay attention. Not only to the other person, but to your own thoughts and actions. When a person talks with you, are you listening in order to hear the other person, or are you listening so you can figure out what your response will be? The one is a blessing, and the other is a curse - so please act in such a way that your blessings are increased.