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CHOOSING BRACHAH OR KLALAH

Today, we're going to study the first subject in this week's *parshah*. The *parshah* starts off with the words, ראה אנכי נותן לפניכם היום (Devarim 11:26). Moshe Rabbeinu is at the end of his life, he is talking to Klal Yisrael, and he's saying to them: ראה, see, אנכי, I, נותן, am placing in front of you today, ברכה וקללה, a blessing and a curse. Moshe Rabbeinu continues and says, את הברכה, you want *brachah*? אשר תשמעו אל מצות ה', if you will listen to the *mitzvos* of Hashem Elokeichem, אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם היום, which I am commanding you today; והקללה, and you want *klalah*? אם לא תשמעו אל מצות ה' אלקיכם, if you don't listen to the *mitzvos* of Hashem Elokeichem, וסרתם מן הדרך, and you veer off from the *derech*, אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם היום, which I command you today, ללכת אחרי אלקים אחרים, to follow strange gods, אשר לא ידעתם, which you do not know (v. 27-28).

Now, let's understand this. What is Moshe Rabbeinu saying to them? The message of these *pessukim* is as follows. Moshe Rabeinu told them before he passed on, "I want you to understand, what is the Torah?" When somebody asks you what the Torah is, what are you going to answer? You know what most people say? "It's the law. It's the religion. It's a Jewish way of doing things."

The correct answer is that Hashem architected, created a blueprint for us to have *brachah*. The Torah is a means for you to have *brachah*. Not fulfilling the Torah is a means to have *klalah*. It's not *pareve*. It's black or white. You either have *brachah* or you have *klalah*. You have a guy who wants to know, "Why do I have *klalah*?" Because he had a choice. He had a choice to choose *brachah* or *klalah*. He simply got what he chose.

Moshe Rabbeinu says to them like this: *Re'eh*, see. "See" means to be *mesbonen*. Think into this, like it says in the *passuk*, והבט, look, ושלומת רשעים תראה, you will see eventually all *reshaim* are getting paid up (Tehillim 91:8). It's very simple. It's *brachah* or *klalah*. If a person is observing the Torah, he is attached to *brachah*. Let's say a guy goes to the rebbe. He wants a *brachah* from the rebbe. Why not just attach yourself to Hashem and you've got *bracha*?! You go away from Hashem, you get *klalah*. It doesn't make a difference. If

you don't follow the *mitzvos* of Hashem, you ain't away. You're just going to be worse off. That's all.

THE VILNA GAON'S QUESTIONS

Now I'm going to tell you a number of questions on this *passuk*, because the Vilna Gaon says that this *passuk* tells us an amazing message which is very apropos for erev Rosh Chodesh Elul and all year long. So listen to what he says. We're going to present several questions on these *pesukim*, and I want everybody to write these questions down (speaking to his talmidim).

The *passuk* begins with *re'eh*, which is a *lashon yachid*. *Re'eh* means "see." *Re'u* is plural. *Re'eh* is singular. It starts off with *re'eh*, singular, as if he is addressing one person, but then it says אנכי נותן לפניכם, I am placing before you - it doesn't say *lefanecha* (in the singular), it says *lifneichem* (in the plural), before all of you. It starts off in the singular, and then shifts to the plural. It should have said ראה אנכי נותן לפניך or ראו אנכי נותן לפניכם. That's question number one.

Question number two is what is the expression of ראה אנכי? The word *anochi* seems superfluous. If I'm talking to you, I can say ראה נתי, I have placed before you today *brachah* and *klalah*. What is the emphasis of the word *anochi*? If I'm talking to you, it's obviously "I" who is talking!

Number three. Why does it say *nosen*? *Nosen* means giving. That's the present tense. You know what it should have said? *Nasati*, I gave - in the past tense. That's what it should have said.

Then it says *hayom*. What is the idea of *hayom*?

And one more question. Why does it say *lifneichem*, "before you"? It should have said *lachem*, to you, instead.

You have to know that everything in the Torah is meant to give you a message. The Vilna Gaon says the message here is as follows. Moshe Rabeinu was conveying a message that teaches *darkei avodah*, the *derech* of *avodah* for a *ba'al teshuvah*, and how to counter the *ta'anos* of the *yetzer hara*. A person has to know that he faces the *yetzer hara*. That's the *metzius*. And the *yetzer hara* has *ta'anos*. Forget about the fact that you *like* waking up late. Forget about the fact that you *like* to do *aveiros*. You enjoy them. But the *yetzer hara* has a separate school. It's called "The Propaganda School." He has a propaganda school. Over there is where he makes his sales pitch, and it's called, "There are *ta'anos*." This *sugya* that Moshe Rabeinu was talking about is addressing the *ta'anos* against the *milchamos* of the *yetzer hara*. Listen to this *mehalech*.

THE TA'ANOS AND THE TORAH'S TACTICS:

“Nosen”

The *yetzer hara* doesn't want a person to do *teshuvah*, so he comes with *ta'anos* (claims). One of his *ta'anos* is like this: “You've been bad for so long, and you've done so many *aveiros*. Don't fool yourself. There's no hope for you. You're not going to change. You have lost the ability to make a choice between good and bad.” That's one of the *yetzer hara's ta'anos*. A lot of people say, “I know I'm bad. But my *yetzer hara* convinced me already that I really have no choice. I've been doing it for so long, so that's it.”

To counter that *ta'annah*, it says over here the word “*nosen*.” *Nosen* is in the present tense; it means, “I am giving.” Every single day, until the *yom hamisah*, you have a choice to make. Hashem says: Today אני נותן, I am placing before you today *brachah* and *klalah*. Don't tell me you're already so deep into the *klalah* that you can't get the *brachah* anymore! אני נותן, today, *hayom*, the *brachah* and the *klalah* is yours. Right now, the *brachah* is yours. The choice to start fresh is given to us every day.

“Hayom”

Nu, if you get past the *yetzer hara* on that one, then he comes and says: “But still, how do you think you're going to change? You've got to get rid of your old baggage. You compiled a sack full of junk, and you're *malei avonos*. Do you think *teshuvah* is really going to help you?” To that, the Torah tells you, “*hayom*.” *Hayom* means you have to know if a person does *teshuvah*, he is בקטן שנוולד דמי, he's like a new person. That's the message of *hayom*.

So again, *nosen* counters the *ta'annah* that regardless of my past, I still have a future. That's number one. *Hayom* is telling me that when I do *teshuvah*, I become בקטן שנוולד, like a newborn. I start again - anew.

But the *yetzer hara* comes back, and says to you: “Okay, you'll do *teshuvah*. You'll be new. You'll get rid of your old baggage. But do you really think that you'll be able to withstand the *yetzer hara* in the future? Do you really think you can turn over a new leaf?” That's what people tell themselves. They say, “Okay, the past, I can take care of. I'll do *teshuvah*. I'll bang my heart a lot. I'll start again. But what are my chances of success? I'm going to fall again. I'm already *murgul*. I'm already trained to listen to him.”

“Anochi”

So to answer this *ta'annah*, the *passuk* says, אנכי נותן לפניכם, remember the “*anochi*.” You know what *anochi* is? אנכי ה' אלקיך - Who

took you out of Mitzrayim. Hashem took you out. Hashem gave you a whole new future. You have to know, nobody could naturally do that, says the Vilna Gaon. No one could naturally beat the *yetzer hara*. It's impossible. No one in this world has the *koach* to naturally fight and to overcome the *yetzer hara*. It's an open *gemara*. The *gemara* (Kiddushin 30b)¹ says, אלמלא הקב"ה עוזרו אין יכול לו. Hakadosh Baruch Hu has to help you. This is a fight you don't do on your own. You can't look at the odds of success. You have to just do what you can do, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu will assist you, and you need His assistance. אנכי אהיה עמך.

“Lifneichem”

Then *yetzer hara* says: “Okay. So you're going to do *teshuvah*. You're going to change. You're going to become a different person. But *lema'aseh*, maybe it's not good for you to go on this path.” That's the thing. The *yetzer hara lema'aseh* is *geshmak*. The *yetzer tov* may be the right thing, but it's not enjoyable. It's not *tov*. I like *tov*. I like pleasant things. To that, Hashem says אנכי נותן לפניכם. The word *lifneichem* counters this *ta'anah*. How is that? Hashem says: “I'm not forcing you to choose *tov*. I am presenting it before you. *Lifneichem* means I am presenting you with an opportunity. I am placing an opportunity before you.” When you go to a guy and pull out a gun, you are not saying, “I'm putting something before you.” You are saying, “I'm making you do it.”

But Hashem says *lifneichem*. You know why? Hakadosh Baruch Hu says: “This is the *os* that it's a *derech tovah*. When I want to sell something and I know I have something good, I don't have to push the sale.” You know why car salesmen are notorious as big *ganavim*? Because they're selling garbage. They're pushing everybody's garbage that they dumped on the market. These guys picked it up and now they want to dump it on you. When somebody has a good product to sell, he presents it to you. If you don't want it, *zei gezunt*. He knows that there are plenty of people interested in his product. Hakadosh Baruch Hu says: “You have to know the *yetzer tov* is not a *nudnik*. כאן יש פיסגה - this is the fact. The *yetzer hara* is a *geferleche nudnik*. He bothers you all day long.” You know why? Because he knows he's selling garbage. (On the other hand, the *yetzer tov* says, “What I'm selling is the best stuff, the best thing for you. Trust me.”) So *lifneichem*, that's an opportunity to answer that *ta'anah* of the *yetzer hara*. You don't see the opportunity? You're out. That's your choice. My friends, you don't make the right choice, it's your loss.

¹ ואמר רבי שמעון בן לוי: יצרו של אדם מתגבר עליו בכל יום ומבקש המיתו, שנאמר: “צופה רשע לצדיק ומבקש להמיתו”, ואלמלא הקדוש ברוך הוא עוזרו אין יכול לו, שנאמר: “אלהים לא יעזבנו בידו”.

A *mentch* has to know, any time he wants to do something good and he feels bothered and conflicted, he has to know it's *kulo yetzer hara*. It can't be the work of the *yetzer tov*, because the *yetzer tov* is not a *nudnik*. You have to know that. The *yetzer tov* says, "Go to *davening*." The *yetzer tov* says, "Go learn. You don't want to? It's not a big deal. Okay, I'll leave you alone." He's not a *nudnik*. But the *yetzer hara* says: "Go there! Go eat pizza! Go eat pizza!"

"Re'eh"

Now, if a person says, "How can I do *teshuvah* by myself? The whole world is sinning. Am I going to go up against the whole world? Am I going to be different from everybody around me? Am I going to choose the good way against everybody around me?" The *passuk* says, *re'eh*, "see." Look by yourself. Be *misbonen*, contemplate on your own that which I am placing in front of the whole world. Don't look at what the world is doing, see it, and make the choice as an individual. Yes, I'm placing this choice in front of everybody. It's *lifneichem*. I presented it to you. It's a choice. But you have to understand, don't look at the whole world. If you look at the world, you're going to be finished.

This is a big *yesod* from the Vilna Gaon that you should know. It's something that every one of us should remember. Five messages, five *ta'anos*. The *re'eh*, the *lifneichem*, the *anochi*, the *nosen*, and *hayom* are the answers to these *ta'anos*.

PUSH BACK AGAINST PROCRASTINATION

Now, since we are on this topic, I'm going to tell you about another *mehalech* of the *yetzer hara* which is very relevant to us today. In last week's *parshah* (Devarim 10:12) it says like this, ועתה, ועתה, ישראל, and now Yisrael, מה ה' אלקיך שואל מעמך, what does Hashem request of you. So *Chazal* say: You know what ועתה, "and now" means? It means *teshuvah*. The word "and now" means *teshuvah*. The *Medrash Rabah* (21:6) says it, black on white. אין ועתה אלא תשובה.² The *Chafetz Chaim* asks, where do you see *teshuvah* alluded to in the word *v'atah*? How is the *teshuvah* hinted to in this word?

The *Chafetz Chaim* says like this. After a person gets past all the *ta'anos* and has all the answers for the *yetzer hara*, and is ready to do *teshuvah*, you know what the *yetzer hara* tells him? You know what the *ikar koach* of the *yetzer hara* is. The *yetzer hara* says: "Okay, you won. You're right. But I'll tell you what. Today is not the right day. Start tomorrow. Today, you don't have the ability. Your

² ועתה פן ישלח ידו (בראשית ג, כב), אמר רבי אבא בר כהנא מלמד שפתח לו הקדוש ברוך הוא פתח של תשובה, ועתה, אין ועתה אלא תשובה, שנאמר (דברים י, יב): ועתה ישראל מה ה' אלהיך וגו', והוא אומר פן, ואין פן אלא לאו. אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא ישלח ידו ואלך גם מעץ החיים, אתמהא, ואם אוכל הוא חי לעולם, לפיכך (בראשית ג, כג): וישלחה ה' אלהים מגן עדן, כיון ששלחו התחיל מקונן עליו ואמר: הן האדם היה כאחד ממנו.

mind is still fajujued. You don't have the ability to be *osek* in Torah and in *mitzvos* and to be *mesbonen* how to *mekayem Torah*. Do it tomorrow. Do it next week. Do it next month. Push it off." And if a person does that, he's going to go through his whole life like that. That's what Shlomo Hamelech says in *Mishlei* (3:28): אל תאמר לרעך, don't say to your *reiacha*, your friend, לך ושוב מחר, go and come back tomorrow, ומחר אתן, and tomorrow I'll give you, ויש איתך, It means like this. Don't tell your friend, the *yetzer tov*, "Go and come back tomorrow." It has to be, says the Chafetz Chaim, *hayom hazeh*. You have to understand Hashem is commanding you the *mitzvos* this second, this minute.

The Chafetz Chaim says, quoting the Vilna Gaon, that a person has to always think the following three things: "One - I only have one day left to live. Two - "I only have to learn what's before me, this page. That's it. That's all I need to learn. I don't have to learn a lot. Just what's right here, in front of me. Just today." And three - "I'm the only Yid in the world that could fulfill my mission. The job that I have to do, I'm the only one in the world who can do it."

Let me conclude by sharing with you a *gevaldige vort* from Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld on this issue. If you look at the *passuk* at the end of *parshas Beshalach* (Shemos 17:9), it says over there Moshe gave a directive to Yehoshua to choose people to go to war with Amalek. It says ויאמר משה אל יהושע, Moshe said to Yehoshua, וצא והלחם בעמלק מחר אנכי נצב על ראש, choose for us men, בחר לנו אנשים, and go out and battle Amalek, tomorrow, I'm going to be standing on the top of the hill. The *Gemara* (Yoma 52b) says, it's not clear what the word *machar*, **tomorrow**, refers to. Is it part of the second half of the *passuk*, and Moshe is saying, "Tomorrow I will be standing on the top of the hill"? Or is part of the first half of the *passuk* and Moshe is saying מחר בעמלק מחר, "Go fight with Amalek tomorrow?"

Now, if it's part of the first half and refers to the battle against Amalek, you know that the Torah is teaching us? Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld explained it in the following way. One of the greatest *nekudos* of Amalek, and why you have to destroy them, what you have to get rid of, is the attitude of *machar*, the tomorrow. The *yetzer hara* is always out to get a person away from Hashem. And one of his biggest strategies is to tell you: "Now you can afford to enjoy yourself. You could take some time off and *im yertzeh Hashem* tomorrow..." What this does is that it creates a *kaltkeit*, a coldness toward Avodas Hashem. Many people say, "Well, I'm still young. When I get older, then I'll become a *yarei Shamayim*." You hear this all the time. "I'm just starting out in my life, so I don't have to get so involved in *yiras Shamayim*. When I get older, then

I'm going to become *chashuv*." Everybody goes through this. That's what the *derech* of the *yetzer hara* is. He sees a *mentsch* is *mekayem mitzvos* and he can't overcome him, so what he does is, he just tells the guy *l'machar*. The *etzem dechiyah*, the very act of pushing off a *mitzvah* itself, is a degradation and a denigration and a weakness and a *rifyon yadayim*. That's why it says in the pasuk to go and fight with Amalek in the *inyan* of *machar*. *Machar* means the *machar* that Amalek wants from you. The *machar* that Amalek always tells you to do – make sure you fight against it.

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IN SUMMARY

An analysis of the first five words in the *parshah* by the Vilna Gaon reveals five amazing tactics we can employ against the wiles of the *yetzer hara*. The passuk says: *Re'eh anochi nosen lifneichem hayom*. Each word is a different *ta'anah* of the *yetzer hara* that we can sidestep if we recognize it for what it is. *Re'eh* - Don't be convinced by what everyone else is doing; be *misbonen*, contemplate on your own, and do what is right. *Anochi* - Always recognize that we need Hashem's help to overcome the *yetzer hara*; take the first step, and He will help. *Nosen* - We always have a choice between good and bad; the potential to choose *brachah* is here today! *Lifneichem* - Recognize when the offer comes from the *yetzer hatov* or the *yetzer hara*; the *yetzer hara* is a major nudnik. *Hayom* - You can always improve; make this your slogan, "Regardless of my past, I still have a future". Additionally, Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld and Chofetz Chaim (quoting the Gr"a) warn us of a sixth tactic, that of admitting that change is necessary but putting off ever making the change. This week, I will (*bli neder*) choose one tactic to focus on and think about it every day.

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