

When I was growing up there were a series of books that I loved to read, the choose your own adventure series. For those that are unfamiliar with these books, they had series of multiple plots and endings that fluctuated depending on the choices that the reader makes. I believe that these books were very popular, because it was the only books that actually empowered the reader to participate in its authorship. In a sense the reader played a key role in the outcome of the tale. The transformation of simple reader to partial author was a rare, yet, truly enjoyable experience.

A similar sense of empowerment is conveyed to us at the very beginning of this week's Torah portion. The Parsha begins, "Reeh Anochi, Noten Lifneichem Hayom Brachah Uklaalah - See, I have given you this day a blessing and a curse". This opening verse while certainly encouraging and even inspiring us to choose our very own daily adventure, yet, it can be very intimidating, unlike a simple book, this choice has serious consequences. If we choose wisely we have chosen the blessing of life and if we choose unwisely we have chosen the very essence of curse, death. However, how can we be expected to choose wisely in the game of life without the necessary skills or knowledge? Can it be that this most consequential of all choices G-D has left us entirely to our own devices without any aid or advise?

The Sfas Emes, Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter (1847–1905), explains that indeed G-D would not leave us unprepared in this most fundamental of all challenges; in fact we were given the most helpful tool to make the wise decisions of life. G-D endowed each one of us with an innate intelligence and awareness of right and wrong, blessing and curse. It is this gift that is in fact the subject of the very first blessing we recite when we arise in the morning. The opening blessing of the morning blessings reads, Blessed are You, Hashem our G-D who has granted our hearts the understanding between day and night. This blessing is not referring to the simple ability to read a clock and know when it is daylight outside, even a simple chicken has that awareness, rather says the Sfas Emes it is referring to our own divinely bequeathed moral compass. Each day when we wake up in the morning we thank G-D for giving us this inner sense of decency and fairness. We recognize that it is perhaps the greatest gift that G-D has given us and without it we fail numerous times throughout our daily lives.

Perhaps this is actually what G-D is instructing us in the first verse of this Parsha. He is not simply asking to look at the choices between good and bad, right and wrong. He is inviting us to Reeh- Look inside ourselves, to summon our own inner barometer of integrity and honest, and to find the correct answers that lie latent within our very own souls.

Although we all have the power to choose our own adventure, we do not have the power to choose ignorance of the goodness and godliness that G-D has bestowed upon us.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Meir Tannenbaum

