

“AND YOU SHALL REJOICE BEFORE HASHEM YOUR G-D”
(DEVARIM 27:7)

THE S'FORNO COMMENTS on this verse, “‘You shall rejoice before Hashem your G-d’ – about your entering into a covenant with Him at *Har Gerizim* and *Har Aival*.” We know that *Klal Yisroel* received the blessings on *Har Gerizim*, and the curses on *Har Aival*. The rejoicing about *Har Gerizim* makes sense – the blessings are certainly something to be happy about. However, at first glance, the curses – the punishments promised for those who transgress the Torah – would hardly seem to be a reason to rejoice. Apparently, the S'forno is telling us that a Jew has to feel *simcha* that Hashem instituted these consequences, because they prevent us from stumbling in sin. The threat of punishment for misdeeds is a deterrent that keeps us away from *aviers*.

To whom is the Torah speaking?

Let's look a bit deeper – to whom is the Torah speaking? If the person is a sincere Jew who understands his purpose in life and wants to fulfill *mitzvos* and avoid *aveiros*, why should he rejoice in the curses? He is already trying to avoid sin even without any threat of punishment. If, on the other hand, the person is one who seeks to indulge in his desires, he would resent punishments which interfere with his life-long pursuit of pleasure – so why would he rejoice?

Even such a person should rejoice about the curses

We can safely assume that the Torah speaks to even the most righteous person. An individual who is firmly convinced that his purpose in life is not to indulge in the fleeting, sensory pleasures of this world, but rather, as the *Mesilas Yesharim* (chap. 1) says, “To delight in [closeness to] Hashem and to bask in the radiance of the Divine Presence [in the world-to-come].” This is achieved by performing *mitzvos* and avoiding *aveiros* in this world. Even such a person should rejoice about the curses. Despite his noble intentions and best efforts to avoid sin, were it not for the threat of punishment, his desires would cause him to slip and commit even serious transgressions. He may know that these worldly pleasures are empty and meaningless, but the *yetzer hara* would overpower his intellect with its demands for immediate gratification. Only the fear of unpleasant consequences can keep him on the right path.

The awareness of being judged is a powerful tool

As we approach the week of *selichos* and the days of judgment, a feeling of melancholy and depression can sometimes sneak into our hearts along with the trepidation and fear that are appropriate during the days of awe. Fear, however, does not have to mean sadness. If we really truly understand our situation, we will rejoice in our fear of judgment. “Rejoice in trepidation” sang Dovid HaMelech in *Tehilim* (2:11), because the awareness of being judged – the realization that there is the possibility of punishment for misdeeds – is a powerful tool, a gift that Hashem granted us to help fight the *yetzer hara*. Proper use of this tool, combined with the awareness that Hashem eagerly awaits our *teshuvah*, leads to happiness and not to despair.

Let us face Rosh Hashana with a perfect blend of awe and joy, appreciating Hashem's *chesed* in giving us these days to help keep us on the right path. If we see Hashem's love in every aspect of our lives, we can channel that love into a complete *teshuvah* and merit a year of sweetness and good health for ourselves, and for all of *Klal Yisroel*.