Blessings and Curses: Thoughts for Parashat Lekh Lekha

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Angel for Shabbat: Parashat Lekh Lekha

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“And I will bless them that bless you, and anyone who curses you I will curse” (Bereishith 12:3).

God called on Abram to move from his birthplace and to set off for a new land. Abram was to lay the foundations for a righteous society that recognized the One God and that repudiated all forms of idolatry. God promised Abram that he would be a blessing to all the families of the earth.

Setting new standards of faith and morality, Abram would attract followers. But he would also be the target of enemies who resented his teachings. So God reassured Abram that He will bless those who bless him and curse those who curse him. God’s promise is echoed in the blessing later given to the Israelites by Bilam: “Blessed be everyone who blesses you, and cursed be everyone who curses you” (Bemidbar 24:9).

Throughout the history of our people, surely there have been many who have been blessed by their blessing us. Many millions of people have led happier and more meaningful lives by their attachment to the Hebrew Bible. Many have blessed, and have been blessed by, the many contributions of the Jewish People to civilization.

Likewise, throughout history, there have been many who have cursed us and have committed every sort of atrocity against us. But in what ways have they themselves been cursed by God? It sometimes (often?) feels that the haters are not subjected to the wrath of God. In our own times, we see anti-Semites/anti-Zionists eagerly cursing and threatening us. Although we are blessed with a strong State of Israel and a robust diaspora community, the enemies are relentless. We wonder: in what way is God cursing those who curse us?

Perhaps God’s blessings and curses are not externally imposed, but are consequences of people’s own choices in life.

The Torah presents two paths for humanity. The positive essence of Judaism teaches us to choose life, love our fellow human beings, serve the Lord faithfully. All who attach themselves to these ideals are

themselves blessed. They live constructive, love-filled lives. Their faith strengthens them in good times and bad.

But those who curse us and our teachings are thereby choosing a destructive way of life. Their hatred poisons their lives. By cursing us and what we represent, they actually bring a curse upon themselves.

When the State of Israel was established in 1948, the Arab world exploded in hatred of the Jewish State. In all these years, Palestinians and supporters have invested billions of dollars in weaponry, tunnels, anti-Israel boycotts etc. What is the result of all this hatred? Instead of having a peaceful and prosperous Palestinian society, the Palestinians are cursed with an ongoing legacy of hatred, violence and loss of life. They have raised generations of haters rather than generations of those who choose life, who bless Israel as a partner in peace and prosperity.

More generally, those who curse and hate Israel thereby undermine their own lives. Instead of devoting their energies, talents and resources in constructive ways, they embrace a negative way of life.

When God assured blessings for those who bless Israel and curses for those who curse Israel, these were not idle promises. They are fulfilled every day of the week.

We surely would like the haters to re-think their destructive ways and free themselves of the curses they have brought upon themselves and others.

Those who choose blessing and life are themselves blessed. Those who choose cursing and death are themselves cursed.