Blessings and Curses: Thoughts for Parashat Lekh Lekha

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Angel for Shabbat, Parashat Lekh Lekha

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel

“And I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great and you will be a blessing. And I will bless those that bless you and curse the one who curses you; and through you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Bereishith 12: 2-3).

God makes a lofty promise to Abram, assuring him that he will influence humanity in wonderful ways. His teachings will be a source of blessing to all the families of the earth. But God adds a caveat: He will bless all who bless Abram and will curse anyone who curses Abram. Question: since Abram (later to be renamed Abraham) will be the epitome of righteousness and blessing, why would anyone want to curse him?

God, in his infinite wisdom, knows human nature. No matter how good or wise a person is, there will always be detractors. Some are jealous; some are malicious; some are egotists who despise anyone who seems to surpass them in any way. God informs Abraham from the outset: you will do great things but you will also attract enemies who curse you. The road to greatness is not smooth. Many will appreciate you but others will do their best to defame you and block your way. They will curse you, spread lies about you, challenge your teachings, threaten you and your followers. Don’t be deterred. God will curse those who curse you—but what will this curse be?

I suggest that the curse is included in the very passage cited above: God will curse the curser when it is realized that through Abraham “all the families of the earth will be blessed.” The curser will become increasingly miserable and bitter as Abraham succeeds. With every blessing Abraham receives, the curser is stung with envy and anger. It is an immense curse to have hatred and jealousy at the center of one’s life. Instead of living lovingly and generously, one suffers from a syndrome of internal decay.

God’s promises to Abraham have been fulfilled in many ways. Abraham’s descendants—the people of Israel—have been a remarkable source of blessing to humanity. The Hebrew Bible has vastly shaped western civilization. Individual Jews throughout history have provided humanity with vital insights in morality, science, literature, commerce, the arts etc. Although Jews are a minute fraction of humanity,

the number of Jewish Nobel Prize winners and other top thinkers is astounding. (Google reports that Jewish individuals account for approximately 22% of all Nobel Prize winners globally since 1901, despite making up less than **0.2%** of the world's population. 36-37% of American Nobel Prize winners are of Jewish ancestry, although Jews are about 2% of the American population.) The Jews of the State of Israel have created a dynamic democracy. Although a tiny nation (around 10 million people out of a world population of around 9 billion!), Israel is a world leader in technology, agriculture, defense, medicine and so many other fields.

But as God foretold to Abram, there will always be cursers and haters who seek to diminish your achievements, undermine your teachings, and seek to destroy you. The cursers will indeed be cursed: their lives will be poisoned by hatred and envy, lies and self-destruction.

Those who bless Abraham will be blessed. They will live wholesome lives dedicated to righteousness and goodness. While the cursers stew in their jealousy and malice, the blessers will enjoy loving, generous lives.

God’s promises to Abram were true then. They are true today.