

The Individual and the World

ג"ה

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Parshat Ekev

See, thou! I place before you today blessing and curse. (Deuteronomy 11:26)

Strangely, the verse begins in the singular (**See, thou!**) and then continues in the plural (**I place before you**). What are we to make of this anomaly?

The Hatam Sofer (Rabbi Moshe Sofer, who passed from this life on 10 Marheshvan 5600, 6 October 1839) interprets it in light of a Talmudic dictum (*Kiddushin* 40) that every individual is obligated to view the world as precisely balanced between good and bad and, further, to view oneself and one's deeds also as precisely balanced. The world, the Talmud continues, is judged in its entirety, and thus one's next action – at every moment – carries the potentiality of tipping the balance of the entire world for good or for bad!

The verse, as the Hatam Sofer interprets it, says to each individual, "See, understand, that I [G*d] am placing the entire world in front of thee, in thine hands, for blessing or for curse, and thou controllest the scales."

We often view ourselves as individuals. Especially is this so in the United States, with our "cult of the individual." We feel that what we do – unless another is explicitly involved or acted upon – is our own business and does not affect

others. We speak of “victimless crimes,” and many of us protest that these “victimless crimes” should be decriminalized. “No harm, no foul,” is our rallying cry. And, on a secular or political level, it may be a valid conclusion.

Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim Lunshitz of Prague (a disciple of Rabbi Yehudah Loewe who passed from this life on 7 Adar 5379, 21 February 1619), in his *Kli Yakar*, tells a parable illustrative of another point of Law, but quite applicable to our verse:

If a number of people are in a boat, one individual cannot drill a hole under his or her own seat and claim not to have responsibility for the others. A hole drilled in one spot in the boat will affect the entire boat and, hence, every individual aboard.

The Hatam Sofer makes the point that we are all interconnected. Certainly, we are individually responsible for our own actions, but it is equally true that everything we do affects those around us!

The world is precisely balanced between right and wrong, and each of us is individually just as precisely balanced. Each of us has the ability to change our individual balance and, by doing so, to change the balance of the world. What power that gives us!

G*d grant me the serenity to accept the people I cannot change, the courage to change the one I can, and the wisdom to know it is I!

Shabbat Shalom.

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