

# Cursing

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

There is a reference in this week's reading to cursing. The story of the boy who cursed God contains two elements. One is the obvious crime of publicly rejecting, attacking and demeaning God. The other is what do we mean by a curse? The Torah forbids cursing whether it is God, parents, princes, judges or even the deaf. The opposite, of course, is to bless. What does it mean to curse? What does it mean to bless?

A curse is something different to magic, hocus pocus. After all we are explicitly forbidden in the Torah to make any sort of use of magic, witchcraft or wizardry. So, God could not possibly approve of it. However, a curse in the Bible does not simply mean to want something bad to happen to someone. It means more than that; it shows one has no feelings for someone and one positively wants to distance oneself from them.

The fact that we are told not to curse judges and officers of the State also means that we must avoid undermining our leadership. This obviously does not mean one cannot disagree or try to change leadership. But one cannot undermine the institution of society. Not cursing a deaf person means not taking advantage of someone's disability. And not cursing God means not to deny the very basis of one's religious life and the structure of morality which we believe comes from God.

Cursing in the Torah is an act of alienation and this always has consequences. Bad behavior, having no values, will lead to bad endings. Of course, if a bad person curses you that is a blessing, for your values and his are diametrically opposed.

Today there are still people who pretend they can curse people in order to scare them into submission. But this cannot mean that they can do or cause someone harm unless that person is so frightened that it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. God does not curse people random. It may appear so in that often we suffer unreasonable loss and pain. But that cannot be because of Divine will if we have done nothing to deserve it. It may come about either because nature has its own rules or because we act inappropriately or carelessly.

A blessing on the other hand means that I care, that I wish you well. But it is neither a guarantee of success nor a prevention of bad things happening. It can give one love and support and the courage to carry on in the face of tragedy.

That is why I do not take curses seriously. I take God seriously and if one feels there are forces ranged against one, the answer is to connect with God directly by living a Godly life or at the very least by saying the Shema at a moment of crisis. And there is no greater reassurance than that.