

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

Published Mantua 1778*

Chapter I: Bereisheet (Gen. 1:1-6:8)

Essay 1. The Torah begins with the language of blessing.

תהלהלל הַמְתַהַלֵּל וְיִדוּעַ הַשֶּׁפֶל, לִישָׂא בְרָכָה מֵאֵת ה' וְלִלְמַד מִדַּעַת קוּנוֹ, לְהִתְחִיל כָּל מַעֲשָׂיו בְּרִמּוֹז הַרֹמֵז לְשׁוֹן בְּרָכָה, כִּי שָׁם יִצְנָה ה' אִתּוֹ אֶת בְּרָכְתוֹ, בְּרָכָה וְחַיִּים עַד-הָעוֹלָם.

He who would boast could boast in this, that he knows and understands the L-rd,¹ to carry a blessing from the L-rd² and to learn from the wisdom of his Creator,³ to start his work with a hint hinting at the language of a blessing,⁴ for there G-d will ordain his blessing, blessing and eternal life.⁵

וְכֵן מִצִּינּוֹ בְּמִדְרָשׁ יְלֻקוּט, לְמַה הִתְחִילָה הַתּוֹרָה בְּבִי"ת? שֶׁהוּא לְשׁוֹן בְּרָכָה. אֲלֵא דְקוֹשֶׁה שֶׁהָרִי קָרָא כְּתִיב, רֵאשׁ-דְּבְרָךְ אָמַת, וְאִם כֵּן הֵיךְ לוֹ לְהִתְחִיל הַתּוֹרָה בְּאֵל"ף שֶׁהוּא לְשׁוֹן אָמַת. וְהִגַּם כִּי—בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרֵא' אֱלֹהִים א'ת—סוֹפֵי תְבוֹת אָמַת? עִם כֹּל זֶה הֵיךְ מִן הָרְאוּי שְׂאוֹת הָרֵאשׁוֹנָה שֶׁל הַתּוֹרָה תִּהְיֶה בְּאָמַת כְּדֵי לְקַיֵּם רֵאשׁ דְּבְרָךְ אָמַת בְּדוֹקָא. וְאַף כִּי הִתְחִיל בְּבִי"ת שֶׁהוּא לְשׁוֹן בְּרָכָה, עִם כֹּל זֶה אֵינּוּ מִתְקַיֵּם רֵאשׁ דְּבְרָךְ אָמַת.

In fact, we find in Midrash Yalkut Shimoni (subject 2), why does the Torah begin “with the second letter of the alphabet, *bet*? Because it is the language of blessing (i.e., the Hebrew word for blessing, ברכה [*bracha*] starts with a *bet*).”⁶ Rather, it is difficult that Scripture states, “the beginning of your words is ‘truth’ ” (Ps. 119:160), and if so, [G-d] should have begun the Torah with an *alef*, which is the language of truth (i.e., the Hebrew word for truth, אמת [*emet*] starts with an *alef*). Furthermore, some commentators have noted that the first four Hebrew words of the Torah, “In the beginning, G-d created” have the final letters in words two through

* English translation: Copyright © 2019 by Charles S. Stein.

¹ As with the Preface, in the Hebrew original, the initial letters of the first four words are printed in bold, and spell the four-lettered name of G-d. The words are rearranged from the order in which they appear in Jer. 9:23: “but let *he who would boast* [could] *boast* in this, *that he understands and knows Me*, that I am the L-rd who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the L-rd.”

² Ps. 24:5.

³ Sotah 5a: “Rav Yosef says: A person should always *learn from the wisdom of his Creator*.”

⁴ As G-d has done by starting the Torah with the letter *bet*, as will be discussed below.

⁵ Ps. 133:1–3: “A song of ascents. Of David. How good and how pleasant it is that brothers dwell together. It is like fine oil on the head running down onto the beard, the beard of Aaron, that comes down over the collar of his robe; like the dew of Hermon that falls upon the mountains of Zion. *There the L-rd ordained blessing, everlasting life*.”

⁶ The Yalkut Shimoni continues, “and why not [start] with [the first letter of the alphabet], *alef*, because it is the language of a curse, (i.e., the Hebrew word for curse, ארירה [*arira*] starts with an *alef*).”

four of *aleph, mem, tav*, which spell *emet* (אמת) (truth).⁷ Nevertheless, Rabbi Nachmani rejects this proposed solution, noting that **properly the first letter of the Torah should be present in the word “truth,” in order to literally fulfill the verse, “the beginning of your words is ‘truth.’ ”** Yet this is not the case. **Even though it begins with a *bet* that is the language of blessing, nevertheless “the beginning of your words is ‘truth’ ” is not fulfilled.**

וַיֹּאמֶר דְּאֲמַרְיִנוּ בְּמִדְרַשׁ רַבָּה פְּרִשְׁתָּ מִזְרִיעַ, אֲבָן שְׁלִימָה וְצִדְקַת יְהוָה לָהּ, אִם עֲשִׂיתָ כֵּן יִהְיֶה לָּהּ מֵה לִישָׂא מֵה לִיתֵן מֵה לִיקַח מֵה לְמִכּוֹר, שֶׁהַבְּרָכּוֹת מְבָרְכוֹת אֶת בְּעֲלֵיהֶן. וְכֵן לְהַפְּךָ הַקְּלָלוֹת מְקַלְלוֹת אֶת בְּעֲלֵיהֶן לֹא יִהְיֶה לָּהּ וְכוּ'.

It is worth saying that it says in Midrash Lev. Rabbah on parshat Tazria (Lev. 12:1–13:59):

There is a positive commandment, **“You will have completely honest weights and you will have completely honest measures”** (Deut. 25:15), and Rabbi Levi said: **if you do this, “you will have” what to carry, what to give, what to take, what to sell, that the blessings will bless their masters. Likewise, the converse is true: there is a negative commandment, “You will not have in your pouch alternate weights, larger and smaller. You will not have in your house alternate measures, a larger and a smaller.”** (Deut. 25:13–14).⁸ If you do not obey this law, **the curses will curse their masters, and “you will not have”** what to carry, what to give, what to take, what to sell.⁹

- Midrash Lev. Rabbah 15:7

דְּמִשְׁמַע מִפְּאֵן שְׂאֵם יִתְנַהֵג הָאָדָם בְּצִדְקָה וְאֵמֶת תִּהְיֶה לוֹ הַבְּרָכָה, וְאִם לֹא חָס וְשָׁלוֹם לְהַפְּךָ. אִם כֵּן שְׁפִיר קֹאֲמֵר קָרָא, רֹאשׁ דְּבִרָה אֵמֶת, שֶׁהַתְּחִיל בְּבִי"ת שֶׁהוּא לְשׁוֹן בְּרָכָה לְפִי שְׂוֹ אֵינָה נִיחָנָת אֶלָּא לְמִי שֶׁדָּבַר אֵמֶת בְּלִבּוֹ, וְנִדְּוָקָה הַתְּחִיל בְּבִי"ת לְאֲשֻׁמְעִינוּ הַתּוֹעֵלֶת שִׁיְהִיָּה לָנוּ בְּדָבַר אֵמֶת.

The meaning is that if a man behaves himself with righteousness and truth, he will have a blessing, but if not, then G-d forbid he will have the opposite, i.e., a curse. If so, it's fine—as Scripture says, “the beginning of your words is ‘truth’ ”—that [G-d] began the Torah with the letter *bet*, which is the language of blessing, as this blessing would be given only to one who “speaks truth in his heart” (Ps. 15:2), and [G-d] specifically began with a *bet* to let us hear the benefit that we will have in the speaking of truth.

⁷ The first three words end with *tav, aleph, mem*, which can be rearranged to spell *emet* (אמת) (truth). However, as *Zera Shimshon* includes the fourth word in the quotation, it appears the second through fourth words were intended, with the final letters of *aleph, mem, tav*, spelling *emet* without requiring any rearrangement.

⁸ As Rashi explains on Deut. 25:13, someone with alternate weights would use a larger weight when he is purchasing materials, so as to receive a larger quantity than he is due, and he would use a smaller weight when he is selling materials, so as to part with a smaller quantity than the customer is due.

⁹ This is a paraphrase of Midrash Lev. Rabbah 15:7.

וּכְשֶׁנִּדְקְדַק בְּתִיבַת בְּרֵאשִׁית, הָאוֹתִיּוֹת שֶׁלָּהּ הֵם רֹאשׁ בֵּית, וְהִגְנוּ רֹאשׁ כְּמוֹ רֹאשׁ דְּבָרָךְ אָמַת, בֵּית לְפִי שֶׁרָצָה לְהִתְחִיל בְּלִשׁוֹן בְּרָכָה. וּבְהִכִּי מְקוּשָׁר תְּחִלַּת הַתּוֹרָה בְּסוּפָהּ, שֶׁסּוּף הַתּוֹרָה הוּא וְזֹאת הַבְּרָכָה, כְּלוּמַר לְמַה הִתְחִיל בְּבֵרֵאשִׁית בְּשִׁבִיל וְזֹאת הַבְּרָכָה.

When we will scrutinize the first word of the Torah, בְּרֵאשִׁית (*bereisheet*) (in the beginning), we will note that its letters are rearrangeable as בֵּית רֹאשׁ (*rosh bet*),¹⁰ and that is רֹאשׁ (*rosh*) (head, beginning) like “the beginning of your words is ‘truth,’ ” and בֵּית (*bet*) (the name of the letter ב)¹¹ because [He] wanted to begin with the language of blessing. In this way, the beginning of the Torah is connected to its end,¹² in that the end of the Torah is the parsha entitled “and this is the blessing” (*V’Zot HaBerachah*) (Deut. 33:1–34:12), as if to say, “why did [He] begin with ‘*Bereisheet*’ ”? Because of the ending, “and this is the blessing;” i.e., if one has truth in his heart (behaving with truth), he will receive a blessing.

אָמְנָם עַל הַמְדַרְשׁ הַנ"ל יֵשׁ לְדַקְדַק דְּבַפְרָק ח' דְּיוֹמָא אֶמְרִינוּ, תְּנִינָא אֶמְרַר ר' יוֹסִי בֵּא וּרְאֵה שְׁלֵא כְּמַדַּת הַקַּב"ה מְדַת בְּשׂוֹר וְדָם. אֵדָם מְקַנֵּיט אֵת חֲבִירוֹ יוֹרֵד עִמּוֹ עַד לְחֲזִי, אֵבֵל הַקַּב"ה קָלֵל אֵת הַנֶּחֱשׁ עָלָה לִגְג מְזוֹנוֹתָיו עִמּוֹ יֵרֵד לְקַרְקַע מְזוֹנוֹתָיו עִמּוֹ, קָלֵל כְּנָעַן אוֹכֵל מֵה שָׂרְבוּ אוֹכֵל וְשׂוֹתָה מֵה שָׂרְבוּ שׂוֹתָה, קָלֵל הָאִשָּׁה הַכֹּל רָצִין אֲחֵרִיָּה, קָלֵל אֲדָמָה הַכֹּל גִּיּוֹנִין מִמֶּנָּה עכ"ל.

Actually, regarding the Midrash Lev. Rabbah 15:7 cited above, it’s worth scrutinizing that the eighth chapter of Yoma (75a) says:

It was taught in a Baraita: Rabbi Yosi said: Come and see that the nature of flesh and blood is not like the nature of the Holy One, Blessed be He. The attribute of man is that one who seeks to provoke another harasses him in all aspects of his life, but the Holy One, Blessed be He, is not like this, but rather acts with mercy. When the snake enticed Eve (and Adam) with food (from the Tree of Knowledge), He cursed the snake with food, that it should eat dust (Gen. 3:14). And what happened? When the snake goes up to the roof, its food is with it, and when it comes to the ground, its food is with it. Consequently, the curse that it suffers does not ruin its life but rather benefits it. Similarly, He cursed Canaan that he should be a servant of servants (Gen. 9:25),¹³ but he eats what his master eats, and drinks what his master drinks, and does not worry like a free man does. He cursed the woman with discomfort in pregnancy and pain in childbirth (Gen. 3:16), yet every man pursues her. He cursed the land after the sin of Adam and

¹⁰ Tikkunei Zohar, Tikkun 3, notes that *bereisheet* is rearrangeable in this way, but instead of interpreting בֵּית as the letter *bet*, interprets the word as *bayit* [house].

¹¹ The letters of the alphabet are each given a name, just as in English, where the letter “b” is named “bee.”

¹² Sefer Yetzirah 1:7, “These ten Sefirot have their end joined to their beginning.”

¹³ While it was Noah who cursed Canaan, he was imbued with the spirit of G-d.

Eve,¹⁴ that it should sprout thorns and thistles (Gen. 3:17–18), yet **everyone is sustained from it**. Even when G-d is angry, He does not punish His creations severely.

- Yoma 75a

ומכאן משמע שפאר מי שנתקלל ויש לו הקללה, עם כל זה נשאר לו תמיד איזה צד טוב וברכה, כמו האשה ונהנחש כנען ואדמה. ומהמדרש הנ"ל של לא יתנה לך אבן ואבן וכו', משמע שבמקום שיש הקללה לא נשאר בו שום צד טוב וברכה כלל. וקשו אהר"י.

The meaning from here in Yoma is that even one who is cursed and has a curse, nevertheless always has some good aspect and blessing remaining with him, like the woman and the snake, Canaan and the land. But from the Midrash Lev. Rabbah 15:7 cited above, which quotes from Deut. 25:13 that, “You shall not have in your pouch a larger weight and a smaller weight etc.,” the meaning is that in a place where one has violated that negative commandment such that there is a curse (not having what to carry, what to give, what to take, what to sell), there does not remain any good aspect or blessing at all. These teachings appear to contradict each other.

וגש לומר דאמרינו בפרק קמא דעבודה זרה, תורה דכתיב בה אמת אין הקב"ה עושה בה לפנים משורת הדין. דלא כתיב בה אמת הקב"ה עושה בו לפנים משורת הדין עכ"ל. והכי נמי הקללות הבאות מכם התורה ומצוותיה אין בהן שום צד ברכה. והיינו שהיא של לא יתנה לך בבימה אבן ואבן. אמנם הקללות שנתקללו אדמה ונהנחש וכו' באו מכם קנס וענש, והיינו דין שעושה בו לפנים משורת הדין, ולכן יש בהן נמי צד ברכה.

It's worth saying that it says in the first chapter of Avodah Zarah (4b): “While G-d is studying the Torah, which is designated [in Scripture] as ‘truth’ . . . ,¹⁵ the Holy One, Blessed be He, will not overstep the line of strict justice (i.e., the letter of the law) to be lenient.” I.e., as explained by the Ra'avad¹⁶ and Elyah Rabbah 591:8 (note 14),¹⁷ at the time of the day when G-d is engaged in Torah study, He remembers those who keep the Torah, and becomes angry with those who do not keep it.¹⁸ In contrast, at the time of the day when He is not learning Torah but is instead

¹⁴ Rashi (following Gen. Rabbah 5:9) interprets Gen. 1:11 that the land was supposed to produce trees in which the wood had the exact same taste as the fruit. If it had done that, Adam and Eve could have then eaten the wood of the Tree of Knowledge instead of the forbidden fruit. But the land did not obey, and therefore it was cursed.

¹⁵ The Gemara quotes Prov. 23:23, “Buy truth and never sell it; and wisdom, discipline, and understanding.”

¹⁶ Abraham ben David (“the Ra'avad”) (c. 1125–1198), Provençal rabbi and commentator on the Talmud.

¹⁷ Elija Spira (1660-1712), rabbi in Prague, author of Elyah Rabbah (Sulzbach, 1757), which was published posthumously.

¹⁸ The Mevuar edition cites Judah ben Samuel Rosanes (1657-1727), who writes in Parshat Derachim (Constantinople, 1727), in the 18th essay, “Regarding truth, there's no such thing as going beyond the letter of the law, but rather truth represents strict justice. As is brought in the 12th chapter of Shabbat [104a], ‘Why do the letters that comprise the word *sheker* (שקר) (falsehood) all stand on one foot, but the letters that comprise the word *emet* (אמת) (truth) stand on bases that are wide like bricks? Because the truth stands eternal, while falsehood does not stand eternal.’”

sitting in judgment, which is not designated [in Scripture] as ‘truth,’¹⁹ but which is a process that involves mercy and compromise, **the Holy One, Blessed be He, can overstep the line of strict justice and be lenient.** Thus, the curses that come from violating the authority of the Torah and its commandments do not have any aspect of blessing. That is the case with regard to the commandment, “**you shall not have in your house a larger weight and a smaller weight.**”²⁰ **Actually, the curses with which the land, and the snake, and Canaan, etc. were cursed were not violations of the Torah and its commandments (which are directed at a broader audience), but instead were violations of G-d’s commands directed personally to them. Therefore, the violations of the snake, the woman, the land, and Canaan did not implicate “truth,” and so the curses were enforced only by a fine and punishment, and this is a judgment in which He oversteps the line of strict justice and shows leniency, and therefore there is also within it an aspect of blessing.**

וְלִשְׁוֹן שֶׁל הַבְּרָכוֹת מִבְּרָכוֹת וְהַקְלָלוֹת מִקְלָלוֹת וְכוּ' הֵינּוּ שְׂבָמִצּוֹת הַתּוֹרָה נֶאֱמְרוּ עֲלֵיהֶן בְּרָכוֹת וְקָלָלוֹת בְּהַר גְּרִיזִים וּבְהַר עֵיבָל. וְאוֹתָן הַבְּרָכוֹת מִבְּרָכוֹת לְמִי שֶׁעוֹשֶׂה הַמִּצְוָה, וּמִקְלָלוֹת לְעוֹבֵר עָלֶיהָ.

The language of the Midrash that “the blessings will bless their masters and the curses will curse their masters etc.,” regards the commandments of the Torah, about which blessings (for those who observe the mitzvot) and curses (for those who violate the mitzvot) were said upon [Israel] at Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal (Deut. 27:12–13). These blessings will bless one who fulfills the commandments, and the curses will curse one who violates [the commandments].

וּבִזְהָה יוֹבֵן מֶה שֶׁאָמַר דָּוִד הַמֶּלֶךְ עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם מִפְּקוּדֵיהֶּ אֶתְבוּנָה עַל-כֵּן שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר כָּל-אֲרֵץ שֶׁקָּרָה. דְּמַהוּ אֶתְבוּנָה וּמַהוּ עַל-כֵּן? דְּמַה תְּבוּנָה וּמַה טַעַם שֶׁיֵּיךְ כָּאֵן? הֲלֹא קָרָא כְּתִיב, מִדְּבַר-שֶׁקֶר תִּרְחֹק, וְעוֹד לֹא-תִכְחָשׁוּ וְלֹא-תִשְׁקְרוּ וְכוּ'?

In this will be understood what King David, peace be upon him, said: “I gain understanding from Your precepts; therefore, I hate every false way” (Ps. 119:104). What is the reason for this “I gain understanding,” and what is the reason for this “therefore,” i.e., why is this verse stated as a cause and effect? What is “understanding” and what is “discernment” (i.e., reaching a conclusion to hate falsehood) doing here? Isn’t it written in Scripture, “keep far from a false accusation” (Ex. 23:7), and further “you shall not deal deceitfully and you shall not deal falsely” (Lev. 19:11)? I.e., what insight is required, when the Torah explicitly says to avoid falsehood?

¹⁹ At Avodah Zarah 4b, Rashi notes that while Ps. 19:10 could be interpreted as “the judgments of the L-rd are true,” it is more properly interpreted as, “the Torah laws of the L-rd are true.”

²⁰ Misquoted slightly. Deut. 25:13-14 reads: “You shall not have in your pouch *a larger weight and a smaller weight*. You shall not have in your *house* a larger measure and a smaller measure.”

וְיִשׁ לֹאמֵר שֶׁבְּלֹא זֶה הֵייתִי אוֹמֵר, שְׂאִין צוֹרֵף לְהִתְרַחֵק כָּל כּוֹף מֵאוֹרַח שְׂקֵר, שְׂהָרִי אִף שֶׁהִיא סִימָן קִלְלָה עִם כָּל זֶה יִהְיֶה בּוֹ צַר בְּרָכָה כְּמוֹ הַנֶּחֱשׁ וְהָאִשָּׁה. אֲבָל כְּשֶׁאֲנִי מִתְבוֹנֵן בְּמִצְוַת אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָנִי לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ וְכוּ' אֶבֶן וְאֶבֶן, שְׂמִשְׁם אֲנִי לֹא מִדְּ שֶׁהַקְּלָלוֹת הַבָּאוֹת מִחֻמַּת מִצְוֹתֶיהָ שֶׁל תּוֹרָה הֵן יוֹתֵר חֲמוּרוֹת, שֶׁלֹּא נִשְׁאָר בָּהֶן שׁוֹם צַד טוֹב כְּלָל, עַל־כֵּן שְׂנֵאתִי כָּל־אוֹרַח שְׂקֵר. אֲנִי שׁוֹנֵא אוֹתָם שְׂנֵאָה גְמוּרָה, לְפִי שֶׁכָּל הַמְּרַגְּלִים עֲצָמָם בְּדֶרֶךְ שְׂקֵר לִסּוֹף עוֹבְרִים עַל הַמִּצְוָה, שְׂנֵטְמְעִים בְּטוֹמְאָה וְאִז קִלְלָתוֹן קִלְלָה גְמוּרָה.

Without this focus on the mitzvot of the Torah, I might say that there is no need to distance oneself so much from a false way, that even though it is a sign of a curse, nevertheless there will be an aspect of blessing within it as with the snake and the woman, and that I will be provided with the necessities of life. But when I meditate on the commandment, in which I've been commanded, "you shall not have in your pouch a larger weight and a smaller weight etc.," from there I learn that the curses coming on account of violating the commandments of the Torah are more serious than the punishment for violating the personal orders given by G-d to the snake etc., that no good aspect remains in them at all, "therefore I hate every false way." I hate them²¹ with a complete hatred, because all those who accustom themselves in the way of falsehood will in the end violate the commandment,^{22,23} that they will be defiled by impurity and thus cursed with a complete curse.

אֲלֵא דְלִפִּי דֶרֶךְ זֶה יִשׁ לְדַקְדֵּק בְּמֵאֵי דְאִמְרִינוּן בְּפִרְקָא קַמָּא דְבִרְכוֹת אֵל תְּהִי בְּרַכַּת הַדְּיוֹט קִלְיָה בְּעֵינֵיהּ, וּבְפִרְקָא ח' דְקַמָּא אֵל תְּהִי קִלְלַת הַדְּיוֹט קִלְיָה בְּעֵינֵיהּ. וְהִלֵּא בְּרַכָּה וּקְלָלָה זֹו אֵינְן בָּאוֹת מִכַּח מִצְוֹת הַתּוֹרָה, וּמִן הָרְאוּי הוּא שְׂתִתְקַיְיֵנָה קְלוֹת, לְפִי שְׂאִף אֵם מִן הַשְּׂמִים יִסְפִּימוּ בָאוֹתָהּ קִלְלָה יִהְיֶה בָּהּ אֵיזָה צַד טוֹב.

Rather, according to this earlier way of understanding that only a curse with the strength of the Torah is a complete curse, one should scrutinize what is being said in the first chapter of Berachot (7a), "you should not take the blessing of an ordinary person lightly," and in the eighth chapter of Bava Kama (93a), "you should not take the curse of an ordinary person lightly." This blessing and curse do not come from the force of upholding or violating Torah commandments, so we would expect them to be less serious, in that even if they were from Heaven [the sages] would agree that within this curse there will be some good aspect.

²¹ "Them" could refer to "false ways," but the Mevuar edition understands it to refer to "those people who walk in the ways of falsehood."

²² The Mevuar edition cites Sukkah 46b: "Rabbi Zeira said: A person should not say to a child: I will give you something, and then not give it to him, because he thereby comes to teach him about lying, as it is stated: 'They have taught their tongues to speak lies' (Jer. 9:4)." Even when lying doesn't expressly violate a mitzvah, one must not do it, for not only can it teach children to lie (as Rabbi Zeira said), but as Jeremiah indicates, even adults will become habituated to lying, which in the future will lead them to violate the mitzvot.

²³ Perhaps Lev. 18:20, "Do not have carnal relations with your neighbor's wife and defile yourself with her," one of the 36 sins punishable by *karet*. Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089–c.1167) says that, "whoever touches a married woman shall not become clean, but shall be forever defiled." Jer. 9:1–2 recognizes a connection between lying and adultery: "they are all adulterers . . . they bend their tongues like bows."

ועוד אם זה האיש שמקבל אותה ברכה הוא איש צדיק ששומר המצוות והולך בדרך אמת, ממילא הברכה באה עליו ואין לו צורך לברכה של אותו הדין. והוא הדין אם ההדיוט קללהו אינו מן הראוי שתחול עליו הקללה, שהרי פתיב, שמר נפשות חסידיו מיד רשעים יצילם, ועוד שהברכות מברכות את בעליהן. ובמקום הברכה, תתרחק הקללה. ולהפך אם הוא רשע והולך אחר השקר, הקללה באה עליו ואין לו צורך לקללתו של אותו הדין, ואף אם יברכהו מכל מקום אותו רשע אינו מזומן לברכה.

Further, if this man who receives a blessing is a righteous man who observes the commandments and who walks on a path of truth, the blessing comes to him anyhow, and he has no need for the blessing of this ordinary person. It is the law that if an ordinary person curses him, it's unsightly that the curse should fall upon him, as it is written, "O you who love the L-rd, hate evil! He guards the lives of His loyal ones, saving them from the hand of the wicked" (Ps. 97:10), and also, as quoted above from Midrash Lev. Rabbah 15:7, "that the blessings will bless their masters." In a place of such a blessing, the curse will be distanced. The opposite is also true: if one is wicked and walks after falsehood, the curse will come upon him and he won't need the curse of the ordinary person, and even if [the ordinary person] would bless him, regardless the wicked person would not be destined for the blessing.

וגיש לומר שאף מי שהוא צדיק, לפעמים אפשר שנגשל באיזה חטא. ואותו חטא מונע ממנו באותה השעה הטוב והברכה, ואין חבוש מתיר עצמו מבית האסורים, ובשביל זה הוכרח לאיזה סיוע מאדם אחר. וכשנה ההדיוט מסייעו, חוזר למדרגתו הראשונה, שראוי הוא לברכה בשביל שהוא צדיק. והכי נמי להפך, אם הדין אחר יתן לו קללה, הואיל שבאותה שעה נפל באיזה חטא ואינו הולך בדרך אמת, מצאה הקללה מקום לחול, לפי שלא שמר עצמו לגמרי מלידה אחר השקר.

It is worth saying that even for one who is righteous, sometimes it is possible that he will fall into some sin. This sin prevents him at this time from goodness and blessing that would otherwise be his reward for fulfilling the mitzvot,²⁴ and "a prisoner cannot generally free himself from prison" (Berachot 5b), and because of this he needs some assistance from another person. When this ordinary person assists him, he returns to his first level, in which he is fit for a blessing because he is righteous. The opposite is also true: if one ordinary person will give [the man] a curse, since at that time he has fallen into some sin and he is not walking in the true path, the curse will find him no matter what, because he did not guard himself completely from walking after falsehood.

²⁴ Jer. 5:25: "It is your iniquities that have diverted these things, your sins that have withheld the bounty from you."

והענין הוא שְׁשֵׁהצדיק נופל באינה חטא, אי אפֿשר לו להוציא עוד טובה וברכה מאוצר העליון. שְׁהואיל שְׁלצדיקים, חושב להם הקב"ה שגגות כְּדונות. לכן מדת הדין מתוחה כְּנגדו ומעפֿכת הטובה מלבוא. אָמנם שְׁשיבוא הדיוט אַחד דְּקיימא ליה שְׁעמיה ויברכהו, הואיל שְׁלהדיוט חושב להם הַדונות שגגות, מועיל שְׁפיר. שְׁתבוא טובה וברכה גם לצדיק זה, והמדת הדין אינה יכולה לעפֿב כָּלל, שְׁהרי כְּתיב, וְאִבְרָכָה מְבָרְכֶיךָ. וְהַדְּיוֹט הַזֶּה, בְּבִרְכָה שְׁנומתו לצדיק זה, מְמַשִּׁיךְ אֶצְלוֹ נְמִי טוֹבָה וְבִרְכָה, וְקִימָא לֵן מַגוּ דְּזָכִי לְנַפְשִׁיהּ זָכִי נְמִי לְאַחֲרֵינֵי. וְלַהֲפֹךְ נְמִי שְׁהַרִי כְּתִיב, וְמַקְלֶלְךָ אָאֵר וכו'.

In this case, when the righteous man falls in some sin, it is impossible for him to bring forth goodness and blessing from the Uppermost Storehouse (i.e., Heaven). This is because for the righteous, the Holy One, Blessed be He, thinks that even unintentional sins (i.e., committed out of ignorance) are tantamount to intentional sins. I.e., G-d holds the righteous to a higher standard, because they should have been more careful in their learning to clarify the parameters of the laws of the Torah. (Bava Metzia 33b). Therefore, the attribute of strict justice is tense against [the righteous man] and the goodness is delayed from coming to him.²⁵ In truth, when one ordinary person comes forward at a time that is propitious for him,²⁶ and he will bless [the righteous man]—since for the ordinary person who is ignorant in Torah, [G-d] thinks that the intentional sins are tantamount to unintentional sins—it is effective and fine. That is, the goodness and the blessing will come also to this righteous one, and the attribute of strict justice is not able to inhibit the blessing at all, as it is written, “I will bless those who bless you” (Gen. 12:3). Goodness and blessing also continues for this ordinary person by the blessing that he gives to this righteous person, and stands up for him, “since he could acquire it for himself, he could acquire it for another” (Bava Metzia 8a). And the opposite is also true, that an ordinary person will be cursed if he curses a righteous person, as it is written, “and I will curse those who curse you” (Gen. 12:3).

וּבְדִרְבָּה זֶה נִיחָא שְׁפִיר הִלְשׁוֹן שְׁאָמְרוּ, אֵל תְּהִי קִלְעָה בְּעֵינֶיךָ וְלֹא אָמְרוּ בְּרַכַּת הַדְּיוֹט וְקִלְלַת הַדְּיוֹט מִתְקַיְמִית, שְׁכּוֹנֵינְתֶם הֵימָּה לְהַזְהִירוֹ שְׁיִפְשַׁפֵּשׁ בְּמַעֲשָׂיו וְאִם חָס וְשָׁלוֹם נָפַל בְּאִינְזַה חֲטָא יָשֵׁב אֵלֶיהָ וִירַחֲמֶהּ.

In this way, the language that we said from Berachot 7a works out nicely, “you shouldn’t take lightly the blessing of an ordinary person,” and [the sages] didn’t say that a blessing of an ordinary person or a curse of an ordinary person would be fulfilled by their own force. Rather, their intent was to warn [the righteous man] that he should examine his actions, and if G-d forbid he should fall in some sin, “he should return to G-d, and He will have mercy upon him” (Is. 55:7). If the righteous one is cursed by an ordinary person, he should examine his actions and undertake necessary corrections, so that the curse won’t be fulfilled. If he is blessed by an ordinary person and the blessing is fulfilled, whereas it had previously been withheld, he should also examine his actions and undertake necessary corrections, so that in the

²⁵ As he has violated a Torah law, a curse will come upon him, without any good side to it.

²⁶ The Gemara does not indicate that blessings or curses from an ordinary person are to be taken seriously only at a time that is propitious for the ordinary person. But later in this essay, Rabbi Nachmani presents cases where G-d did not actualize a blessing of an ordinary person at a time that was not propitious.]

future other blessings will be fulfilled and not prevented, and also so that any future curse from an ordinary person will not be fulfilled.

ובמה שאמרנו נתרץ נמי מה שהקשה הר"ף ו"ל, על שהיא דשני גדולי הדור, דוד ודניאל, ברכום שני הקדושים, ארונה ודרגוש, ונתקיימה בהם ברכתם. דמגלו דהכי הוי, ודילמא זכותם עמדה להם וברכת הקדושים לא עשתה כלום.

By what we have said, we can also solve the difficulty of the Rif (Rabbi Josiah Pinto) of blessed memory,²⁷ on page 10b of Me'or Enayim (Venice, 1643), his commentary on Rabbi Jacob ibn Habib's "Ein Yaakov." In discussing the language of Berachot 7a that one shouldn't take the blessing of an ordinary person lightly, Rabbi Pinto raises a parallel quotation from Megillah 15a, where Rabbi Elazar quotes Rabbi Hanina that one shouldn't regard the blessings of an ordinary person lightly, **because two leaders of their generations, David and Daniel, were blessed by two ordinary people, Araunah and Darius, and their blessings were fulfilled in them.** David had enacted a census, to determine how many fighting men he had (instead of simply trusting in G-d), and furthermore failed to collect a half shekel from each adult male, as required by Ex. 30:11–16. This incurred G-d's wrath, resulting in a plague that killed 70,000 people over a three-day period. Araunah, a Jebusite, owned a threshing floor on Mount Moriah, and David wanted to purchase it so that he could make a burnt offering there. Araunah offered the property for free, but David insisted on paying for it, and Araunah offered a blessing that the burnt offering would be accepted by G-d and that the plague would cease, and it did. (II Sam. 24:1–25). Darius blessed Daniel that G-d would rescue him, and he was saved from the lion's den. (Dan. 6:17–24). **From where do we know this, that the blessings of these ordinary people were fulfilled? Perhaps the merit [of David and Daniel] stood for them, and the blessing of the ordinary men did not do anything.**

ולפי דרבנו איתי שפיר, שאילו היו צדיקים מפלי חטא לא היה בא לידם דבר להצטער בו כלל. אלא ודאי מדחזינון שאירע להם דבר להצטער בו כל כך, על כן צריך לומר שגפלו באינה חטא. וכמו שכתב שם הרב הנ"ל שדוד חטא שמנה את ישראל כנודע, ועל חטא זה בא מזד הדבר. ודניאל נמי חטא שהשיא עצה לנבוכדנצר להציל עצמו מן הסכנה. זה החטא גרם להם הצער וזכותם לא היתה עומדת להם בעת הזאת להצילם, כמו שלא עמדה להם למנוע מהם הסכנה מתחלה. והנה הנם בכלל אין חבוש מתיר עצמו מבית האסורים, ולכן הוצרכו דוקא לברכת הקדושים וזו בנדאי עמדה להם.

According to our way of understanding that a righteous person can have need of a blessing from an ordinary person, it works out fine. If [David and Daniel] would have been righteous men without sin, then nothing would happen to them to disappoint them as a rule. But seeing that something did happen to them to disappoint them greatly, therefore one must say that they fell into some sin. As the rabbi, Josiah Pinto, mentioned above has written there, David sinned by taking a census of Israel, as is known, and because of this sin, the plague came

²⁷ This is not the earlier and more famous "Rif" [Rabbi Isaac Alfasi (1013-1103)], but rather Rabbi Josiah ben Joseph Pinto (c. 1565–c. 1648), Syrian rabbi and preacher, a disciple of Rabbi Chaim Vital.

immediately.²⁸ Daniel also sinned in that after first giving a harsh prophecy, he offered advice to Nebuchadnezzar of how he could save himself from the danger of the prophecy, by giving charity to the poor (Dan. 4:1–24).²⁹ This is the sin that caused them sorrow, and so their merits did not stand for them in this time to save them, such as not standing for them to prevent the danger from happening to them in the first place. But here, in this place, generally “a prisoner cannot free himself from prison” (Berachot 5b), and therefore they specifically needed the blessing of the ordinary people, and this blessing certainly stood for them.

וְעַד יִין צָרִיךְ עֵינֵינוּ בְּמֵאמָר דְּבִרְכוֹת הַנַּ"ל, שֶׁהָרִי מִצִּינּוֹ בְּמִדְרָשׁ רַבָּה עַל פְּסוּק וּבְרַכּוּ אֶת־רַבְּקָה אַחֲתֵינוּ אֵת הַיַּי לְאַלְפֵי רַבְּבָה. מִפְּנֵי מָה לֹא נִקְדְּדָה רַבְּקָה עַד שֶׁהִתְפַּלֵּל עָלֶיהָ יְצַחֵק? שֶׁלֹּא יִהְיֶה אוֹמוֹת הָעוֹלָם אוֹמְרִים תְּפַלְתֵּנוּ עֲשֵׂתָה פִירוֹת וְכוּ'. וְקִשָּׁה דְמָאֵי שְׁנָא הֵתָם בְּרַבְּקָה שֶׁחֲשַׁשׁ הַקַּב"ה לְלַעֲזוֹ הָאוֹמוֹת, וְכֵאֵן בְּדוֹד וְדִנְיָאֵל לֹא חֲשַׁשׁ כְּלָל? וְכַדוּמָה לְזֶה הַקִּשָּׁה הַזֶּה תּוֹצֵר וְעֵי"ש.

Study is still required of the saying of Berachot 7a mentioned above, “you should not take the blessing of an ordinary person lightly,” because we found in Midrash Rabbah (Gen. Rabbah 60:13) on the verse “ ‘They blessed Rebecca and said to her: **Our sister! May you become thousands of myriads**’ (Gen. 24:60). **Why wasn’t she remembered to have children until Isaac prayed on her behalf** (Gen. 25:21)? **So that the nations of the world wouldn’t say, our prayer created fruit, i.e., was effective.**”³⁰ The difficulty is: what is the difference there, with regard to Rebecca, that the Holy One, Blessed be He, feared the foreign nations would say that their prayer was effective with regard to her, but here with regard to David and Daniel, He wasn’t afraid at all, i.e., G-d allowed the prayers of Araunah and Darius to swiftly come true? Similar to this is the difficulty of the Yafeh To’ar³¹ commentary on Gen. Rabbah, and see there, where he asks why the Midrash states, “so that the nations of the world wouldn’t say, ‘our prayer created fruit,’ when Berachot 7a says not to take their blessings lightly. He also quotes from the Yerushalmi Berachot 62a: “Rabbi Tanchuma said: If a non-Jew blessed you, answer ‘Amen,’ as it is written, ‘You shall be blessed above all other peoples’ (Deut. 7:14),” which suggests that an ordinary person’s prayers can be effective.

²⁸ See II Samuel 24.

²⁹ Bava Batra 4a gives this as the reason that Daniel was punished. A different view is discussed by Rabbi Menachem Azaria da Fano (“Rema M’Pano”) (1548–1620), Italian Kabbalist and commentator on the Talmud, in Asara Ma’amarot (“Ten Utterances”) (Venice, 1597). In the article *Em Kol Chai*, section 2, page 57b (siman 23), he brings a Midrash that Nebuchadnezzar was a descendant of King David, by Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, which is why Daniel gave him advice. In this view, Daniel was not punished for giving advice, but for calling Nebuchadnezzar a “king of kings,” at Dan. 2:37.

³⁰ Our text of the Midrash Rabbah uses the term “idol worshippers” instead of “nations of the world.” However, the midrash is also printed in Yalkut Shimoni 109:11, where it has the text “nations of the world.”

³¹ Rabbi Samuel ben Isaac Ashkenazi Jaffe (d. late 16th century), rabbi of the Ashkenazi community of Constantinople. Yafeh To’ar was his commentary to the Midrash Rabbah: Genesis (Venice, 1597–1606); Exodus (Venice, 1597); and Leviticus (Constantinople, 1648).

ואפֿשר לְתַרְצֵן שְׂאֵלוֹ שְׁנֵי הַדְּיוּטִים אַרְנֹנָה וְדַרְנֹשׁ בְּרִכּוֹ דְנִיָּאל וְדוֹד בְּבִרְכָה הַרְאוּהָ עַל פִּי הַדַּת וְהַדִּין. שְׁמוֹ הַרְאוּי הִנֵּה שְׂלֵא יַעֲנִשׁוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּשִׁבִיל מַה שְּׁחָטָא דָּוִד. וְכֵן דְנִיָּאל אָף שֶׁהִשְׂאִי עֲצָה לְנְבוּכַדְנֶצַּר מִכָּל מְקוֹם עַל יְדֵי זֶה הוֹעִיל לְכָל עַנְיֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁהִיָּתָה לָהֶם פְּרִנְסָה טוֹבָה. וְעוֹד שְׁשֻׁנֵיהֶם הָיוּ צְדִיקִים וְרַאוּיִים לְהִנָּצֵל.

It's possible to solve the difficulty, that these two ordinary people, Araunah and Darius, blessed Daniel and David with a blessing that was proper according to the religion and the law. Because properly, the nation of Israel was not guilty because of David's sin. Similarly, even though Daniel offered advice to Nebuchadnezzar, in any regard because of this, all the poor of Israel had a good income.³² Further, the two of them were righteous and fit to be saved.

אַמְנָם מַה שְּׁבִרְדּוֹ לְבֹן אֶת רְבֵקָה, אָף עַל פִּי שְׁמִצַּד אֶחָד הִיא בְּרִכָּה רְאוּהָ, שְׁהָרִי סוֹפָה לְהוֹלִיד יַעֲקֹב וְעִשָׂו שְׂפָאוֹ מֵהֶם אֲלֵפִים וְרִבְבוֹת, מִכָּל מְקוֹם פִּינּוֹן שְׁמִצַּד אַחֵר הִיָּתָה נֶגֶד הַדִּין וְהַשׁוֹרָה. מִשׁוֹם הַכִּי, לֹא נִתְקַיְּמָה בְּרִכְתָּם וְחֻשׁ הַקַּב"ה לְלַעֵז הַעֲמוּזֹת. וְהִיָּנּוּ לְפִי שְׁאֲמְרוּ אַחֲמַנּוּ אֶת הַיִּי לְאֵלֵפֵי רְבֵבָה, שְׁתִּלּוּ רַבּוּי הַגֵּרַע בָּהּ. וְאִשָּׁה אֵינָה מְצַוָּה עַל פְּרִיָּה וְרִבְיָה אֲלֵא הָאִישׁ. וְהַפְּנִים מִתְיַחֲסִים אַחֵר הָאָב וְלֹא אַחֵר הָאֵם. וְאִין הַכִּי נָמִי שְׂאֵם הָיוּ אוֹמְרִים לָהּ שְׂאֵלֵפֵי רְבֵבָה יְבוֹאוּ מִבְּעֻלָּה הִיָּתָה בְּרִכְתָּם מִתְקַיְּמָת? אָבֵל הֵם אֲמְרוּ אֶת הַיִּי, דְּמִשְׁמַע אֶת דְּוָקָא וְלֹא הוֹעִילוּ כְּלוּם.

In truth, the blessing that Laban [and his mother] gave to Rebecca, despite the fact that from one side it was a fitting blessing—as eventually she would give birth to Jacob and Esau, from whom came thousands and tens of thousands—regardless from another side it was against the law and the rule. Because of this, their blessing didn't come true and the Holy One, Blessed be He, feared the foreign nations would say that their prayer had been effective. It was against the law and the rule because they said, “Our sister! May you become thousands of myriads” (Gen. 24:60), as if the increase in offspring depended upon her. But the woman is not commanded to “be fruitful and prosper” (Gen. 1:28), but only the man is subject to that commandment.³³ Since Rebecca wasn't commanded to be fruitful and multiply, their blessing to her was “against the law and the rule,” which is one reason their blessing did not take effect. Another point is that **children relate their lineage after the father and not after the mother,³⁴ so the children would be ascribed by law and rule to Isaac and not to Rebecca, which is a second reason their blessing did not take effect. **But isn't it also the case that if they had said to her that thousands of myriads should come from her husband, that their blessing would have come true? But they said, “may you become,” the meaning being “specifically you,” Rebecca, and they accomplished nothing.****

³² Dan. 4:24–25: “Therefore, O king, may my advice be acceptable to you: Redeem your sins by beneficence, and your iniquities by generosity to the poor; then your serenity may be extended.’ All this befell King Nebuchadnezzar.” The Mevuar edition cites Ex. Rabbah 30:24 that it was the poor of Israel who benefited.

³³ Yevamot 65b presents a debate over whether women are obligated to have children, or only men. The halacha is that only men are obligated. Later rabbis have explained that a woman is not required to have children, as childbirth could endanger her life. Nevertheless, women generally have a strong desire to have children, and if they choose to have children despite it not being incumbent upon them, it is considered a mitzvah.

³⁴ For example, a Jewish child will be called Yaakov ben Yitzchak (Jacob the son of Isaac). Also, the tribal affiliation of the child, such as whether he is a Cohen, or a Levi, or a Yisroel, is determined by the father. Kiddushin 66b.

ועוד יש לומר דאין דגין אפשר מנשי אפשר. דבשלמא ברבקה אין קפידא אם תתעבב מלהתעבר בשנים הראשונות, שיעדין היתה בימי בתריותה, אבל בדוד ודגאל לא סגי בלאו הכי. ומשום הכי התם חניש ללעז. והכא לא חניש כלל, כהיה דתגן יאבד עולמו מפני השוטים?

It's also worth saying that “we don't judge what is possible from what is impossible.”³⁵ Granted that with regard to Rebecca, there is no urgency if she would delay getting pregnant the first years, when she was still in the days of her youth,³⁶ so it was possible to prevent Laban's prayer from being fulfilled, but with David and Daniel, any other way is insufficient, i.e., there was no good way to prevent their prayers from taking effect. Because of this, there [in Rebecca's case] there was fear of the foreigner saying that his prayer had been effective. But here [in David's and Daniel's cases] there was no fear at all, as it was taught in a Mishnah:

The gentiles asked the Jewish Sages who were in Rome: If it is not G-d's will that people should engage in idol worship, why does He not eliminate it? The Sages said to them: Were people worshipping only objects for which the world has no need, He would eliminate it. But they worship the sun and the moon and the stars and the constellations. **Should He destroy his world because of the fools?**

- Avodah Zarah 4:7 (54b)

In other words, ideally the prayers of Laban, Araunah, and Darius would have all appeared ineffective. But in Darius's case, the only way to have shown that his prayer had been ineffective would have been for Daniel to have died, which G-d would not allow to happen. Similarly, in Araunah's case, the only way to have shown that his prayer had been ineffective would have been for the plague to continue against Israel, which G-d also did not want to happen. Therefore, it can be said that it was “impossible” to frustrate the prayers of Darius and Araunah. In contrast, as noted above, Rebecca was young and could have children several years later; therefore, it was “possible” to frustrate the prayers of Laban and his mother. We don't raise any objections to the “possible” frustration of the prayers of Laban and his mother because of the “impossibility” of frustrating the prayers of Araunah and Darius. So G-d delayed Rebecca's giving birth, denying Laban of a conceit that his prayers were effective.

³⁵ This is a Talmudic concept that one shouldn't learn the parameters of a first halacha from an analogy to a second halacha in which a technical impossibility suggests a conflict. For example, Menachot 19a explains that one who brings a sacrifice needs to place his hands on the sacrifice. One might be tempted to say: “There's a second halacha that the sacrifice of the animal and sprinkling of its blood is what effects atonement, but since the owner isn't performing the sacrifice and sprinkling in this second halacha, then *a fortiori* he need not place his hands on the animal in the first halacha, as that's not what effects atonement.” However, we don't apply that *a fortiori*, because in the second halacha it is impossible for the owner to sacrifice the animal and sprinkle its blood, because that is the job of the Cohen.

³⁶ The rabbis agree that Rebecca was very young at the time of her marriage, though they disagree whether she was three years old (Rashi on Gen. 25:20, based on Seder Olam Rabbah), or 10 (Sefer haYashar, Chayei Sarah), or 14 (Ramban's comments on Yevamot 61b).

ועוד יש לומר בדקדוק הלשון שיאמרו תפלתנו עשתה פירות ולא אמרו תפלתנו נתקיימה. שהנה נודע שלכן בקש לעקור את הכל, והוא הנה מנחש ומכשף גדול ויודע ששני בנים עתידים לצאת מרבקה, יעקב ועשו, אחד צדיק וכולו בחלק הקדושה ואחד רשע כולו בחלק הקליפה. שלפי שיצחק הנה צדיק בן צדיק הוליד את יעקב ולפי שרבקה היתה בת רשע משום הכי הולידה עשו כמו שאמרו חז"ל.

It's also worth saying that the grammar of the language in Gen. Rabbah 60:13 is that there was a fear that [the nations of the world] would say, "our prayer created fruit," and not saying "our prayers were fulfilled." That here it is known that Laban sought to uproot the whole Jewish people,³⁷ for he was an interpreter of omens and a great sorcerer,³⁸ and he knew that two future sons would come from Rebecca—Jacob and Esau—one righteous and entirely apportioned with holiness, and one entirely wicked in the portion of the *klippah* (husk), i.e., impurity.³⁹ Because Isaac was a righteous man who was the son of a righteous man (i.e., Abraham), he begot Jacob, but as Rebecca was the daughter of a wicked man (i.e., Bethuel), because of this she gave birth to Esau, as the rabbis of blessed memory have said.⁴⁰

וכשאמר לרבקה אחתנו את ה' לאלפי רבבה פונתו היתה, שיתגבר חלק הקליפה דהיינו חלקו של עשו הבא מצד רבקה שהיתה בתו של בתואל יותר מחלקו של יעקב. ומשום הכי אמר את ה' דהיינו את דוקא, שמלת את היא מיותרת בפסוק. ובאמת שהאלופים והמלכים של עשו קדמו לשל יעקב מטעם שהקליפה קדמה לפרי, ואם לא הנה הקב"ה מבטל תפלתם היו אומרים האומות שתפלתם גרמה שיבואו האלופים והמלכים לעשו קודם יעקב. ולכן עשה שתהיה עקרה עד שתתפלל עליה יצחק, ובנה נתבטלה תפלתם ונקבזה תוחלתם, שמעשו לא באו הרבבות ואדרבא מייעקב יצאו הרבבות קודם האלפים, כדכתיב ויבנה ה' רבבות אלפי ישראל.

When [Laban] said to Rebecca, "Our sister! May you become thousands of myriads" (Gen. 24:60), his intent was that the portion of the *klippah* apportioned to Esau would grow stronger from the influence of the maternal side of Rebecca, who was the daughter of Bethuel, than Jacob's holy portion from the influence of the paternal side of Isaac. Because of this, he said "may you become," the meaning being "specifically you," that the word "you" is an extra word not strictly required by the Hebrew syntax in the Scripture. In truth, the generals and the kings of Esau preceded those of Jacob⁴¹ in the sense that the husk (*klippah*) precedes the fruit,⁴² and if the Holy One, Blessed be He, had not nullified their prayer, the nations would have said that their prayer caused the generals and the kings of Esau to come and rule

³⁷ Passover Haggadah: "Go out and learn what Laban the Aramean sought to do to Jacob, our father; since Pharaoh decreed [the death sentence] only on the males, but Laban sought to uproot the whole [Jewish people]."

³⁸ Rashi on Gen. 30:27.

³⁹ A *klipah*, a husk or shell, is the representation of an evil or impure spiritual force in Jewish mysticism.

⁴⁰ Rabbi Abraham Saba (1440–1508), was a student of Isaac de Leon. A victim of the expulsion from Spain and then Portugal, he settled in Morocco. The citation is found in his Torah commentary Tzror HaMor (Venice, 1523), at the beginning of Parshat Toldot.

⁴¹ The descendants of Esau are listed first, in Gen. chapter 36, with the descendants of Jacob being listed in chapter 37. Furthermore, Gen. 36:31 states, "These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the Israelites."

⁴² Zohar II.108b.

before the descendants of Jacob. Therefore, He arranged that [Rebecca] would be barren until Isaac would pray for her, and in this their prayer was nullified and their hopes were dashed,⁴³ that from Esau the myriads didn't come (but only the thousands), and to the contrary, from Jacob would emerge myriads before thousands, as it is written, "Return, O L-rd, to Israel's myriads of thousands!" (Num. 10:36). So it wasn't just that G-d wanted to prevent the nations of the world from saying that their prayers had been effective, but rather G-d wanted to prevent the supremacy of Esau (evil) over Jacob (good).

וְעוֹד יובן הפסוק מברכיך ברוך. דקשה שהיה לו לומר מברכיך ברוכים, ומהו ברוך בלשון יחיד אם מברכיך הוא לשון רבים? אמנם לפי מה שאמרנו שהברכות מברכות את בעליהן, אם כן פשטת מברך את חברו מתקיימת אותה ברכה. וכשמתקיימת מתפלת ומתפשטת לברכה אחרת נמי ונקרא שזה האיש נתברך בשמי ברכות. ואין הכי נמי שמברכיך אינו אלא איש אחד המברך ובשביל זה יקנה ברוך, אלא שגם הברכה עצמה מוספת לו מעצמה ברכה אחרת כי הברכות מברכות וכו'. ולכן אמר מברכיך בלשון רבים, וכיוצא בזה אורכיך אור.

Also understood will be the verse of Isaac's blessing to Jacob, "**they who bless you is blessed**" (Gen. 27:29). The difficulty is that he should have said "**they who bless you are blessed;**" and so why did he say "**is blessed**" in the singular form, if he said "**they who bless you**" in the plural form? In truth, in accordance with our saying that "blessings bless their masters," when one blesses his fellow, a blessing is created for the fellow. When [the blessing for the fellow] is created, it is doubled and extends as another blessing to the first party, and it's said that the man is blessed with two blessings, or rather, he is credited with having created two blessings: one active blessing given to his fellow, and a reflexive blessing for himself. So "**they who bless you**" is nothing more than one man who is doing the blessing and because of this he will be blessed, as the blessing to his fellow itself adds another blessing for him, as "blessings bless their masters." Therefore, [Isaac] said, "**they who bless you**" in the plural form, and for the same reason the verse also states "**they who curse you is cursed.**"

ומעמה שראינו שמי שרודף האמת ושונא השקר תהיה לו הברכה, קשה למה הוצרך הכתוב להבטיח את אברהם ואברהם. פשיטא שתהיה לו הברכה. ואפשר שמפח קושיא זו פירשו רז"ל על פסוק זה, לא שם אדם פרה מאברהם עד שנתברך. וכן באיוב מעשה ידיו ברכת. כל הנוטל פרוטה מאיוב מתברך.

Now that we have seen that he who pursues the truth and hates falsehood will have a blessing, it is difficult why Scripture is compelled to promise Abraham, "and I will bless you" (Gen. 12:2). It is simple to see that he will have a blessing, as he was a righteous man! Perhaps from the force of this question the rabbi of blessed memory explained on this verse: "R. Levi said: No man ever appraised a cow belonging to Abraham in order to buy it without becoming blessed, nor did a man ever price a cow to sell to him without his becoming blessed." (Gen. Rabbah 39:11). A similar thought can be seen in the Gemara:

⁴³ Cf. Job 41:1, "Their hopes must be disappointed . . ."

Rabbi Akiva said, “exert yourself to join together with a person upon whom the hour smiles (i.e., a successful person).” Rav Pappa interpreted “join together” to mean that one should neither buy nor sell from someone who is the beneficiary of good fortune, “because he will profit from any transaction and you will suffer from it.” Rather, he interpreted Rabbi Akiva’s statement as meaning that one should go into partnership with someone who is the beneficiary of good fortune. But Rav Shmuel bar Yitzchak disagreed with Rav Pappa. He said: “What is the meaning of that which is written in **Job (1:10), ‘You have blessed the work of his hands’?** This means that **anyone who took a *peruta* from Job would be blessed**, even if he received it via a business transaction. I.e., one can engage in business with a person who is blessed, even buying from him or selling from him, and he will share in the good fortune of the other.”

- Pesachim 112a

אֵלָא שְׁעֵדִיין צָרִיד טַעַם, לְמָהּ בְּפָסוּק וַיְבָרַךְ ה' אֶת־בֵּית עֹבֵד־עֲדֹם הַגִּיטִי. פִּירְשׁוּ בְּעֵנְיָן אַחַר שְׁבָרְכוּ בְּבָנִים. וַיֵּשׁ לֹאמֹר שֶׁהַמִּוֶּבֶן הִרְאִישׁוֹן וּפְשֻׁט הַבְּרָכָה רוֹצֵה לֹאמֹר בְּנִים כְּמוֹ שְׁפָתוֹב הִנֵּה נִחְלַת ה' בְּנִים. וְהִדָּר הִנֵּה כִּי־כֵן יִבְרָךְ גִּבְרָ וְכוּ'.

Rather, a reason is still required why the verse (I Chron. 13:14) reads: “The Ark of G-d remained in the house of Obed-Edom, in its own abode, three months, **and the L-rd blessed the house of Obed-Edom**” **the Gittite**. I.e., the very fact that the Ark of the Covenant was in the house was a blessing, so what does the Torah add by saying that G-d blessed the house? **Elsewhere**, in Berachot 63b, **it was explained** that the verse, II Sam. 6:12 (which parallels I Chron. 13:14), means **that he was blessed with children. It’s worth saying that the first understanding** of the blessing—and the simple meaning of the blessing—is that it **refers to children, as it was written**, “**Sons are the provision of the L-rd; the fruit of the womb, His reward**” (Ps. 127:3). A **repetition** of the idea: “Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine within your house; your sons, like olive saplings around your table. **So shall the man who fears the L-rd be blessed**” (Ps. 128:3-4).

וְהָכִי נִמְי דְרִישׁוֹ בְּפָרָק קִמָּא דְתַמּוּרָה, הִבְהִלִי בְרָכָה. אִם־בְּרָךְ תִּבְרַכְנִי, בְּפָרְיָהּ וְרִבְיָהּ.

It was also explained in the first chapter of Temurah (16a),⁴⁴ where the words of Caleb’s daughter, Achsah, “**give me a blessing**” (Judges 1:15), were cited. Also cited were Jabez’s words, “**if You would truly bless me**, enlarge my territory, stand by me, and make me not suffer pain from misfortune! (I Chron. 4:10)” Regarding Jabez’s words, Judah the Prince explained that requesting a blessing means “**by being fruitful and multiplying**; and that ‘enlarge my border,’ means with sons and daughters.”

⁴⁴ This citation actually appears in the second chapter of Temurah.

וכן מצינו שהברכה הראשונה הוצאה בתורה היתה בפרנה ורבנה, כדכתיב וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם . . . פְּרוּ ורבו וכו'. והכי נמי בנח אחר המבול וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם וכו'. והקללה הראשונה הוצאה בתורה היא קללת נחש דכתיב ביה ארור אתה מפלי-הבהמה וכו'. שענינה הוא מיעוט פרנה ורבנה, שהנחש אינו מוליד כי אם לשבע שנים. והטעם מבואר שהואיל שהברכה היא מחמת שהקב"ה אוהב אותו ותפצו ותשקו להטיב לזולתו, אם כן הוא רוצה שיברבו כמותו, ולתפוד למי ששונא מקללו שלא יתרבה, כמו הנחש.

Thus, we find that the first blessing that comes in the Torah is being fruitful and multiplying, as it says, “G-d blessed them and G-d said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply’ ” (Gen. 1:28). Also, with Noah after the flood, He blessed them, as it says, “G-d blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 9:1). The first curse that comes in the Torah is the curse given to the snake, as it is written regarding it, “You will be more cursed than all that cattle” (Gen. 3:14). This matter (i.e., the curse) is a diminution of being fruitful and multiplying, because the snake is pregnant for seven years (Bechorot 8a). The reason for the reward of the first blessing and the punishment of the first curse becomes clear. The blessing is because the Holy One, Blessed be He, loves [the one he is blessing], and desires him, and wants to benefit him. If so, he wants him to multiply, so there will others like him. The opposite is true for him that He hates: He curses that he will not multiply, as He cursed the snake.

אבל באברהם ואיוב אי אפשר לפרש כך, שהרי באברהם כתיב קודם ואעשה לגוי גדול דהיינו בניו. ובאיוב מעשה ידיו ברבת דמשמע דוקא מעשה ידיו.

But for Abraham, for whom it is written, “and I will bless you” (Gen. 12:2) **and for Job**, for whom it is written, “You have blessed the work of his hands” (Job 1:10), **it is impossible to interpret** the word ‘blessing’ **thus**, to mean an increase in progeny. **For with** regard to **Abraham**, immediately **before** saying “I will bless you,” **it is written, “I will make of you a great nation,”** and **that is** interpreted by Rashi from Gen. Rabbah 39:11 to mean having **children**. There is a principle that there are no wasted words in the Torah, but rather that something can be learned from any apparent redundancy.⁴⁵ So having already learned that “I will make of you a great nation” means that Abraham would be blessed with offspring, we cannot learn the same thing from the continuation, “I will bless you.” Similarly, **for Job**, the verse reads, “**You have blessed the work of his hands** so that his possessions spread out in the land,” which shows **that** the “blessing” **has a meaning of literally his handiwork**. Therefore, we need to find another meaning behind these mentions of “blessings,” and we accept R. Levi’s words from Gen. Rabbah 39:11, that these blessings extended to Abraham and Job mean that those conducting business with them would also flourish.

* * *

⁴⁵ Abraham ben Moses ben Maimon (1186–1237) (the son of the Rambam), in his commentary on Ex. 20:20, writes, “there is no duplication in Scripture.” Bahya ben Asher ibn Halawa (“Rabbeinu Behaye”) (1255–1340), in his commentary on Gen. 47:28, writes, “The Torah is all hints; it has no word or letter that is stated unnecessarily.”