

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

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Chapter XVIII: Mishpatim (Ex. 21:1–24:18)

Essay 9. Promises of offspring, long life, and sustenance

פְּסוּק "וַיְבָרֶךְ אֶת־לֶחֶמְךָ וְאֶת־מִימֶיךָ" וכו', "לא תהיה משפלה וְעַקְרָה בְּאַרְצְךָ אֶת־מִסְפַּר יְמֶיךָ אֲמַלֵּא". שְׁלֹשֶׁה הַבְּטָחוֹת הִלְלוּ הֵן מֵאֵי דְאָמַר רַבָּא בְּשִׁלְהֵי מוֹעֵד קִטּוֹן בְּנֵי חַיִּי וּמְזוּנֵי, לֹא בְּזִכּוּתָא תִּלְיָא מִלְתָּא, אֲלֵא בְּמִזְלָא תִּלְיָא מִלְתָּא. וּבְשִׁלְהֵי שְׁבֵת כְּתָבוּ הַתּוֹסְפוֹת דְּעַל יְדֵי זְכוּת גְּדוּל מִשְׁתַּנְּהַה הַמִּזְלָ. וְקִשְׁיָה דְּמַכְּאוֹן נִרְאָה דְּבִזְכוּתָא דְּנוֹקָא תִּלְיָא מִלְתָּא, מְדַאֲמַר הַקַּב"ה לְקַיָּים לְהֵם אֵלּוּ הַבְּטָחוֹת, וְאַף שְׁכַתוּב "וְעַבְדְתֶם אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם", לֹא מִשְׁמַע שְׂיִהְיֶה זֶה עַל יְדֵי זְכוּת גְּדוּל.

There are **verse[s]**: “You will serve the L-rd, your G-d, **Who will bless your bread and your water**; and I will remove sickness from your midst. **No woman shall miscarry or be barren in your Land; the full count of your days I will fulfill.**”¹

These can be grouped as **three promises that are what Rava discussed at the end of tractate Moed Katan (28a): “Children, lifespan, and income—these things do not depend on one’s merit, but rather these things depend upon fate.”**

But at the end of tractate Shabbat (156a), the Tosafists wrote that fate can change if [a person has] great merit.

A difficulty is that from here, i.e., from the cited verses, Ex. 23:25–26, it appears that the matter specifically depends upon merit, from the fact that the Holy One, Blessed be He, said He would fulfill these promises. Even the Scripture, “You will serve the L-rd, your G-d, Who will bless your bread and your water . . .” doesn’t mean that this will be because of a great merit.

וַיִּשַׁר לְזִמְרָא דְּאִין הָכִי נְמִי דְּבִלָּא זְכוּת גְּדוּל בְּמִזְלָא תִּלְיָא מִלְתָּא וְהַקַּב"ה מְבַטְיַחֵם שְׂאֵף בְּלֹא זְכוּת גְּדוּל וּבְלֹא הַשְׁתַּנּוּת הַמִּזְלָ יְהִיָּה לְהֵם טוֹבוֹת הִלְלוּ. וְהַיִּינוּ שְׂאֵם הַמִּזְלָ יְהִיָּה שְׂאֵחָד מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל יְהִיָּה לוֹ מְזוּנוֹת מְצוּמְצָמִים, הַקַּב"ה יְבָרֶךְ אוֹתוֹן הַמְּזוּנוֹת, שְׂיֵאֲכַל קִמְעָא וְיִהְיֶה הַפֶּת מִתְבָּרַךְ בְּמִיעֵיו. וּבְהָכִי לֹא יִהְיֶה הַמִּזְלָ וְהַעֲנִי יִתְעַדֵּן בְּרִינּוֹת כְּמוֹ הַעֲשִׂיר וַיִּשְׁבַּע וַיּוֹתִיר, וְזֶה שְׂאֵמַר הַכְּתוּב "וְעַבְדְתֶם אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְיְבָרֶךְ אֶת־לֶחֶמְךָ וְאֶת־מִימֶיךָ", דְּמִדְּכַתּוּב "לְחֶמְךָ" וְ"מִימֶיךָ" דְּנוֹקָא, שְׂמַע מִיַּנְה שְׂרָצָה לְזִמְרָא אוֹתוֹ הַלְחָם שְׂיִהְיֶה לְךָ לְפִי מִזְלָךְ וְלֹא יְהִיָּה לְךָ זְכוּת גְּדוּל לְשִׁנוֹת הַמִּזְלָ, זֶה הַמְעַט עִם הַבְּרָכָה וְיִתְבָּרַךְ וְיַעֲשֶׂה כְּמוֹ שְׂיִהְיֶה הַרְבֵּה.

It can be said that it’s indeed so that without a great merit, these things ordinarily depend upon fate, but the Holy One, Blessed be He, promises [Israel] that even without great merit and without changing their fate, they will have these good things. That is, if due to fate,

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¹ Ex. 23:25–26.

one Jew would have limited food, the Holy One, Blessed be He, will bless that food, and [the Jew] will eat a little and the food will be blessed in his bowels. Thus, the fate won't be overturned, but the poor person will be pampered in plenty like the wealthy person, and will eat and be satisfied. This is what Scripture said, "You will serve the L-rd, your G-d, Who will bless your bread and your water." The meaning is that as it's specifically written "your bread" and "your water," we hear from this that it means the same bread that you would have had because of your fate. You would not need to have great merit to change your fate; rather, this is a little food with the blessing that it will be blessed so that it will be as filling as a lot of food.

וכן נמי "את־מספר ימיך אמלא" רצה לומר שלא ישנה המזל להוסיף אכל לא יפחות מהם, דבפרק ד' דיבמות אמרינן זכה—מוסיפין לו, לא זכה—פוחתין לו. ו"זכה" רצה לומר זכות גדול, כמו שכתב שם מהר"ש"א לפי דברי התוספות הנ"ל, ועכשיו הבטיחן הכתוב שאף על פי שאין להם זכות גדול לא יפחתו אלא ישלימו.

Similarly, "the full count of your days I will fulfill" also means that [G-d] won't change the fate to add to his days, but at least they won't be shortened, as in the fourth chapter of tractate *Yevamot*:

If he is deserving, [G-d] completes his [allotted lifespan]. [If] he is undeserving [i.e., wicked], He reduces his [lifespan]; [this] is the statement of Rabbi Akiva [i.e., that one cannot outlive his preordained lifespan].

[In contrast,] the Rabbis say: [If] he is deserving, [G-d] adds to his [lifespan]. [If] he is undeserving, He reduces his [lifespan].

- Yevamot 50a

"Deserving" in this context of added years means "great merit," i.e., righteous, as the Maharsha² writes there according to the words of the Tosafists above. Now, the Scripture guarantees them that even if they don't have great merit, [their lot] won't be diminished, rather it will be completed.

ואם תאמר מה צורך להבטחה זו והלא אינן פוחתין אלא למי שלא זכה, ואיך תיסק אדעתין לומר שיפחתו למי שיזכה אף על פי שאין לו זכות גדול. והכי נמי קשה לסברת ר' עקיבא בפרק ד' דיבמות דקאמר זכה—משלימין לו, מה צורך שיזכה והלא אפילו אם יהיה בינוני לא יפחתו לו, שיהרי אין פוחתין אלא דוקא למי שלא זכה.

Maybe you'll say, what need is there for this guarantee, for there is only diminishment for one who is undeserving. How would it enter your mind to say that there would be diminishment for one who is deserving, even if he does not have great merit? I.e., "undeserving" means a wicked person, but "deserving" could perhaps refer to a righteous person or perhaps someone who is a *beinoni*, an average person. Thus, it's also difficult to understand the explanation of Rabbi Akiva in the fourth chapter of tractate *Yevamot*, as quoted above,

² Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer Eidels (1555–1631), Polish rabbi famous for his Talmud commentaries, *Chiddushei Halachot* and *Chiddushei Agadot*.

where he says, “[If] he is deserving, [G-d] completes his [allotted lifespan]; [if] he is undeserving, He reduces his [lifespan].”

What need was there that he should be deserving, i.e., a righteous person, for even if he would only be a *beinoni*, an average person, he wouldn’t have any diminishment, for there is only diminishment for one who is undeserving, i.e., a wicked person.

וַיֵּשׁ לֹאמֵר שְׁלֹפְעָמַיִם אֲדָם מִזִּיק בְּרִיאָתוֹ בְּשׂוּגָג, בְּמֵאֲכָל אוֹ בְּמִשְׁתֵּה אוֹ בְּאַיִתּוֹ עֲגֹן אַחַר כְּגֹן לַעֲבוֹר בְּמִקּוֹם סִפְנֵה שְׁלֹא יָדַע בָּהּ, וְהִיָּה אֶפְשֵׁר שְׁיָבֹא עָלָיו אֵינָה מִקְרָה וְיִסְתַּכֵּן בּוֹ בְּשׂוּגָג. וְלִכֵּן מִבְּטִיחוֹ הַכְּתוּב שִׁישְׁמְרֵהוּ מֵאֵלּוּ הַמִּקְרִים הַרְעִים כְּדִי לְהַשְׁלִים יָמָיו, אֲמִנָּם לְמִי שְׁלֹא זָכָה לֹא דִי שְׁלֹא יִצְיִלוּהוּ אֲלֵא אֲדַרְבָּא פּוֹחֲתִין לוֹ מִמָּשׁ אִף אִם הִיָּה זְרִיזוֹ לְהַנְצִל מֵהַמִּקְרִים. אֲמִנָּם בְּבָנִים כְּתִב "לֹא תִהְיֶה מִשְׁפָּלָה" וְכוּ' וּמִכָּאן נִרְאֶה שֶׁמִּשְׁנֵה הַמִּזְל, וְקוּשָׁה לְמָה דְּנִקְא בְּזֵה יִשְׁתַּנֵּה הַמִּזְל.

It can be said that sometimes a person harms his health by accident, by eating, or by drinking, or by some other matter, such as passing through a place of danger that he did not know about, and it is possible that some incident will befall him and he’ll endanger himself by accident. Therefore, Scripture promises him that he will be guarded from these bad incidents in order to fulfill his days.

However, for one who is undeserving, it’s not enough that he won’t be saved; rather, he will have a diminishment, even if he was alert to save himself from these incidents.

However, regarding children, it’s written, “no woman shall miscarry or be barren in your Land,” and from here it appears that there is a change in fate, and it is difficult why especially in this regard the fate will be changed.

וַיֵּשׁ לֹאמֵר דְּאֵימָא בְּפָרְק קַמָּא דְּרֵאשׁ הַשְּׁנָה שְׁלִישֵׁה דְּבָרִים מְקַרְעִין גְּזֹר דִּינוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם, וַיֵּשׁ אוֹמְרִים אִף שִׁינּוּי מְקוֹם כְּדֹאשְׁכֻּסְן בְּאַבְרָהָם, וְאֵינְדָּה הֵהוּא זְכוּתָא דְּאַרְצֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הוּא דְּאַהֲנִיָּא לֵיהּ. וְאָמַר הַכְּתוּב "לֹא תִהְיֶה מִשְׁפָּלָה וְעַקְרָה בְּאַרְצֵךְ" דְּנִקְא וְהִינּוּ מִשׁוּם זְכוּת אֲרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל.

It can be said that it’s brought in the first chapter of tractate Rosh Hashanah:

And Rabbi Yitzchak said: **Three matters evoke a person’s sins.** They are: [Endangering oneself by sitting next to] a leaning wall; expecting prayer [to be accepted, as that leads to G-d judging the person]; and passing a case against another [to Heaven], for Rabbi Avin said: Anyone who passes a case against another [to G-d] is punished first [as that leads to G-d judging both parties]. . .

And Rabbi Yitzchak said: A person’s sentence is torn up on [account of] four [types of] actions. These are: [Giving] charity, crying out [in prayer], a change of [one’s] name, and a change of [one’s] deeds. . .

And some say: Also, a change of [one’s] place [of residence cancels an evil judgment], as we find with Abraham. . . And the other [one, i.e., Rabbi Yitzchak, who does not include a change of residence in his list, holds that in the

case of Abram], **it was the merit [and sanctity] of the Land of Israel that helped him [become the father of a great nation].**

- Rosh Hashanah 16b

אלא דעדיין קשה אם זכות ישיבת ארץ ישראל נקרא זכות גדול לשנות המזל של הבנים, הנה לו להקרא זכות גדול אף לחיי ומזוני, ואם אינו נקרא זכות גדול לחיי ומזוני מאי שנא בני דלדבר זה משתנה המזל. ויש לומר שלעולם הקב"ה מודד מדה כנגד מדה דבפרק י"ג דכתובות אמרינו כל הדר בארץ ישראל דומה כמי שיש לו אלוה, וכל הדר בחוצה לארץ דומה כמי שאין לו אלוה, שנאמר "למת לכם את־ארץ פנעו להיות לכם לאלהים". ובפרק ו' דיבמות אמרינו כל מי שאינו עוסק בפריה ורביה גורם לשכינה שתס[ת]לק מישראל, שנאמר "להיות לה לאלהים ולזרעה אחריה", בזמן שזרעה אחריה—שכינה שורה, "אין זרעה אחריה"—שכינה על מי שורה? על העצים ועל האבנים? ע"כ.

But it is still difficult to understand: If the merit of dwelling in the Land of Israel is called a great merit, to change the fate of the children, it should be called a great merit even for lifespan and income. To the contrary, if it is not called a great merit for lifespan and income, what is different regarding children to say that this dwelling in the Land of Israel changes the fate? It can be said that the Holy One, Blessed be He, always weighs measure-for-measure, as in the 13th chapter of tractate Ketubot (110b), it is said, "That anyone who resides in the Land of Israel is considered as one who has a G-d, and anyone who resides outside the Land of Israel is considered as one who does not have a G-d. As it is stated: 'To give to you the land of Canaan, to be your G-d.'"³

Also, in the sixth chapter of tractate Yevamot (64a), it is said: "Everyone who does not engage in [the commandment to be] fruitful and multiply causes the Shechinah to depart from Israel, as it is said, 'to be G-d to you and to your offspring to come'⁴. . . When your seed is after you [i.e., when you have children], the Shechinah rests [upon the Jewish people, but if] your seed is not after you, upon whom does the Shechinah rest? Is it upon wood and stones?"

ומעתה זה שדר בארץ ישראל הוא דר שם כדי הנה לו השראת שכינה, והשראת שכינה באה על ידי הבנים, ואם בן על פרסה צריך לשנות מזלו, דלענין הבנים מקרי ישיבת ארץ ישראל זכות גדול אבל לשאר מילי לא, ומשום הכי אחר שפתיב "לא תהיה משפלה" וכו' דהיינו שישתנה המזל, כתב "את־מספר ימיה אמלא" בלי שינוי מזל, כדי שלא נאמר כשם שמשפנה המזל לבנים כך ישתנה בחיים, והכתוב סדרן לפי הצורה, שמתחלה אדם צריך למזונות ואחר כך לבנים ואחר כך לחיים ארוכים.

Now, one who dwells in the Land of Israel dwells there in order that he will have the inspiration of the Shechinah, and inspiration of the Shechinah comes from having children. Thus, if it's so [that he doesn't have children], [G-d] must necessarily change his fate so that he will have children. That is, regarding children, dwelling in the Land of Israel is called "a great merit," but for the rest of the three things it is not. Because of this, after it is written, "No woman shall miscarry," which is that the fate will be changed, it is written, "the full

³ Lev. 25:38.

⁴ Gen. 7:17.

count of your days I will fulfill”—as we have said **without changing fate**. This is **in order that it won't be said, “Just as his fate changed with children, so too his fate will change in life.”** The Scripture is arranged according to the need, that initially a person needs food, then children, and then a long life.

וזהו "ויברך את לחמך" . . . "לא תהיה משפלה . . . את מספר ימיך אמלא", ואצל המזונות כתיב "ונהסרתי מחלה מקרבך" לפי שהוא ענין תלוי במזונות, כמו שאמרו ז"ל מחלה זו מרה שפ"ג תלאים תלויים בהם וכלן פת שחרית מבטלתן, ועוד דברך ד' דכתובות אמרינן דרפואה היא כמזונות.

This is the meaning of **“Who will bless your bread . . . the full count of your days I will fulfill,”** and for bread it is written, **“I will remove sickness [מחלה] [*machala*] from your midst.”** It is written thus because this is a matter depending upon food, as [the rabbis] of blessed memory have said, **“It is taught in a Baraita: ‘Sickness’—this [refers to] bile, that there are 83 illnesses in them,⁵ and all are negated by bread dipped in salt [eaten in] the morning.”⁶**

Also, in the fourth chapter of tractate *Ketubot*, it is said, **“medical treatment is like sustenance.”⁷**

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⁵ The Gematria of מחלה is 83.

⁶ Bava Kamma 102b.

⁷ *Ketubot* 52b: “The Sages taught [in a *Baraita*]: [Regarding] a widow who is sustained from the property of the orphans and who requires medical treatment, [her medical needs] are like her sustenance [and the orphans must bear the costs].”