Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XXXIII: Bechukotai (Lev. 26:3-27:34)

Essay 2. Blessings and curses

The Torah has two sections of Tochachot, "admonitions" [which also include blessings]. One Tochacha is in this week's parasha, while the other is in parashat Ki Tavo, in Deuteronomy.

עוֹד שָׁם, ר' אַבָּא בְּשֵׁם ר' יוֹחָנָן אָמַר חָשַׁבְתִּי בְּרָכוֹת חָשֵׁבְתִּי קְלָלוֹת, בְּרָכוֹת מֵאָלֶ"ף וְעַד תִי"ו, וּקְלָלוֹת מִן וָא"ו עַד הַ"א, וְלֹא עוֹד אֶלָּא שֶׁהֵן הָפּוּכוֹת. אָמַר ר' אָבִין אִם זְכִיתָם הָרֵנִי הוֹפֵךְ לָכֶם הַקְּלָלוֹת לְבָרָכוֹת אֵימָתִי כְּשֶׁהְשַׁמְּרוּ אֶת תּוֹרָתִי הַדָּא הוּא דָכָתִיב "אָם־בָּחָקֹתַי תַּלָכוּ" עכ"ל.

Also there in the Midrash, we read:

Rabbi Abba, son of Rabbi Chiya, said in the name of Rabbi Yonatan: I considered blessings, I considered curses; the blessings are from alef through tav [representing the entire alphabet], the curses are from vav through heh [only one letter apart]. Moreover, they are reversed [i.e., from vav to heh is in reverse alphabetical order].

Rabbi Avin said: "[G-d says:] If you merit, I will reverse [i.e., transform] the curses into blessings for you. When will this be? When you observe My Torah." That is [the meaning of] what is written: "If you follow My statutes."

- Lev. Rabbah 35:1

In making sense of this Midrash, commentaries first try to understand which verses are implicated. The Midrash is placed in Leviticus Rabbah, and it cites Lev. 26:3 from this parashah. Thus, it appears obvious that in discussing the blessings, it is speaking of the blessings of this parashah of the Book of Leviticus (also referred to as *Torat Kohanim*). The first blessing, in Lev. 26:3, begins with *alef*, "אַבְּקָּמִי מֵּלְכוֹי "If you follow My statutes"], and the last blessing, in Lev. 26:13, ends with a *tav*, "וְאוֹלְךְּ אֶתְכֶם קוֹמְמִיּוֹת" ["And made you walk erect"].

However, in speaking of the curses, it is harder to understand the Midrash. The first curse, in Lev. 26:14, begins with vav, "יְּאָם לֹא חַשְּׁמְעוּ לִי" ["But if you do not listen to Me"]. But the last curse, in Lev. 26:43, does not end with a heh. Thus, the Yefeh To'ar, discussed below, assumes that the Midrash's discussion of the curses instead refers to those of parashat Ki Tavo of the Book of Deuteronomy (also referred to as Mishneh Torah). The Yefeh To'ar questions why the Midrash isn't contrasting the blessings and curses of Torat Kohanim to each other, or for that matter, contrasting the blessings and curses of Mishneh Torah to each other.

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¹ Lev. 26:3.

ְוָהָקְשָׁה הַיְפֵה תֹּאַר דְּאַמַּאי חָשֵׁיב בְּרָכוֹת דְּתּוֹרַת כֹּהָנִים שֶׁהֵן מֵאָלֶ"ף עַד תָי"ו, וּקְלָלוֹת דְּמִשְׁנָה תּוֹרָה שֶׁהֵן מִן נָא"ו עַד הֵ"א. וְאַמַּאי לֹא חָשֵׁיב קֶלָלוֹת דְּתּוֹרַת כֹּהָנִים דְּהָווֹ מִן נָא"ו עַד מֵ"ם, כִּדְאָמְרִינַן בְּפֶרֶק הַסְפִינָה מִ"וְאָם־בְּחֻּלְּתֵי תִּמְאָסוּ" עַד "וְאֶת־ חָקֹתֵי גָּעֲלָה נַפְשָׁם". אִי נָמֵי בְּרָכוֹת הַמִּשְׁנָה תּוֹרָה דְּלֹא הָווֹ אֶלֶּא מֵ[נ]א"ו עַד מֵ"ם עכ"ל.

The Yefeh To'ar raised a difficulty:

Why did [the author of the Midrash] consider the blessings of *Torat Kohanim* [i.e., the Book of Leviticus], which are from *alef* to *tav*, but consider the curses of *Mishneh Torah* [i.e., the Book of Deuteronomy], which are from *vav* to *heh*? [The first curse, in Deut. 28:16, begins with *vav*, "אָרֶלְּא תַשְׁלֵּע " {"If you do not listen"}, and the last curse, in Deut. 28:68, ends with a *heh*, "וְאֵין לְנָה" {"but none will buy"}.]

[Since he was considering the blessings of *Torah Kohanim*,] why didn't he consider the curses of *Torat Kohanim*, which are from vav to mem, as we say in the 5th chapter of Bava Batra, entitled *HaSefinah*, "And He cursed them with eight [letters], from [the letter vav that begins the verse]: 'And if you shall reject My statutes' ["וְאָמִרֹּחָלְּתִי תִּלְאָסוֹן"], until: 'And My statutes were abhorred by their soul' ["וְאָתֹּחַלְּתִי נִּעְלָה נַפְשָׁם"] [which ends with the letter mem]. [From vav through mem are eight letters.]"

Alternatively, [if he was going to consider the curses of *Mishneh Torah*, why not consider] **the blessings of** *Mishneh Torah***, which are only from vav to mem.** [The first blessing, in Deut. 28:1, begins with vav, "יְהָיָה אַם־שָׁמוֹעֵ" {"If you listen"}, and the last blessing, in Deut. 28:14, ends with a mem, "לְּבְּרָם" {"to worship them"}.] [I.e., why contrast the blessings of one section with the curses of the other?]

- Yefeh To'ar on Lev. Rabbah 35:1

אָבָל מִתְּחָלָּה צָרִידְּ לְהָבִין הַטַּעַם שֶׁל שִׁינּוּי הַכְּתוּבִים שֶׁבְּתוֹרַת כֹּהַנִים הַבְּרָכוֹת הֵן מֵאָלֶ"ף וְעַד תִי"ו וְהַקְּלָלוֹת מֵנָא"ו עַד מֵ"ם, וּבִמִשְׁנָה תּוֹרַה הֶם לֹהָפֶךְ וָהַקּלָלוֹת מֵנָא"ו עַד הָ"א, וּמַה עָנָין הָהָ"א וָהַמֶ"ם לֹהִיוֹת סוֹפַן שֵׁל הַקּלַלוֹת אוֹ הַבְּרַכוֹת.

But first, one must understand the reason for the change in the Scripture, that in *Torat Kohanim*, the blessings are from *alef* to *tav*, and the curses from *vav* to *mem*, i.e., both in alphabetical order, while in *Mishneh Torah* it is the opposite, the curses are from *vav* to *heh*, in reverse alphabetical order.

Question 1: Why compare the blessings of Leviticus to the curses of Deuteronomy?

Question 2: Why are the curses of Deuteronomy reversed [i.e., the beginning and ending letters are in reverse alphabetical order]?

Question 3: What is the significance of the *heh* or the *mem* being the ends of the curses or blessings?

³ Lev. 26:43.

² Lev. 26:15.

⁴ Bava Batra 88b.

ּוּמָצָאנוּ בִּישַׁעָיָה מֵ"ם שֶׁל "(לם רבה) [לְמַרְבֵּה] הַמִּשְׂרָה" סְתוּמָה בְּאֶמְצַע תִּיכָה, וּבִנְחָמְיָה "בְּחוֹמֹת יְרוּשָׁלַחַ אֲשֶׁר־ (המפרוצים) [הַם פְּרוּצִים]", מֵ"ם פְּתוּחָה בַּסּוֹף תֵּיכָה. וְיֵשׁ בּוֹ דָּרַשׁ שֶׁכַּאֲשֶׁר יִסְתְּמוּ חוֹמוֹת יְרוּשָׁלִים, אֲשֶׁר הֵם פְּרוּצִים כָּל (המפרוצים) [הַם פְּרוּצִים]", מֵ"ם פְּתוּחָה בַּסּוֹף תֵּיבֶה וְשָׁהָתְ"ם שֶׁהָמֵ"ם זְמַן הַגָּלוּת, וְלָצֵת הַיְּשׁוּעָה יִסְתְּמוּ הַפְּרוּצִים, וְאָז תִּפְּתַח הַמְּשְׂרָה שֶׁהִיא סְתוּמָה עַד מֶלֶךְ הַמְּשִׁיחַ עכ"ל. נִמְצִינוּ לְמֵדִים שֶׁהַמֵּ"ם הוֹא סִימֵן לַגָּאוּלָה.

We find in Isaiah 9:6 that the *mem* of the word "lemarbeh" [לם רבה) in the phrase, "in token of abundant authority," is closed in the middle of the word.⁵

Also, in Nehemiah 2:13, for the phrase, "the walls of Jerusalem that were breached," there is an open *mem* at the end of the word $\Box \Box$.

There is a homiletic interpretation of these verses, that when the walls of Jerusalem will be sealed—i.e., those which have been broken open throughout the exile—at the time of salvation these breaches will be sealed, then, the authority will be opened up, that which has been closed until the coming of the King Messiah. We learn from this that the mem is a sign of redemption.

וְהַהָּ"א הוּא סִימָן לְתְשׁוּבָה דָּאִיתָא בְּפֶּרֶק ג' דִּמְנָחוֹת וּמִפְּנֵי מָה נִבְרָא הָעוֹלָם בְּהַ"א מִפְּנֵי שֶׁדּוֹמֶה לְאַכְסַדְרָה שֶׁכֶּל הָרוֹצֶה לָצֵאת יַצֵא, וּמֵאי טַעֵּמֵא תָּלִי כַּרְעֵיה דָּהָ"א דָּאִי הַדָּר בָּתְשׁוּבַה מָעַיִילֵי לֵיה ע"כ.

The *heh* is a sign of repentance, as it is stated in chapter 3 of *Menachot*:

And for what was this world created with [the letter] heh? Because it is similar to a porch [which is open on one side], where anyone who wishes to leave may leave [i.e., one has free will to sin. And what is the reason [that the left] leg of the heh is suspended [i.e., is not joined to the roof of the letter]? Because if one repents, he is brought in [through the top opening].

- Menachot 29b

וְאִיתָא בְּזוֹהֵר פָּרָשַׁת כִּי תִּשָּׂא (דַּף קפ"ח ע"ב) אִי בָּעוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאִיתְעֲרָא הַשְׁמָּא בִּתְשׁוּבָה כֵּלְהוּ כַּחַדָּא, לָא יַכְלין. מַאי טַעְמָא לָא יַכְלין, בְּגִין דְּכְתִּיב, "וְהָיָה כִי־יָבֹאוּ עָלֶידּ כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְּלָלָה" וְכוּ', וְעַד דְּכָל אִינּוּן דְּבָרִים יִתְקּיְימוּן לָא יַכְלִין לְאַתְעֲרָא בִּתְשׁוּבָה וְכוּ'. אָמַר ר' חִיָּיִא כַּמָה סָתָמְתּ כָּל אָרְחִין וּשְׁבִילִין מִכָּל בְּנֵי עַלְמָא וְלָא שׁבְקת לוֹן פִּתְחוֹן כֶּה עכ"ל.

And it is stated in the Zohar, Parashat Ki Tisa (188b):

If Israel were to wish to now be aroused in repentance, all of them together, they would not be able. Why can they not? Because it is written, "When all these things befall you, the blessing and the curse that I have set before you, and you take them to heart amidst the various nations to which the L-rd, your G-d, has banished you, and you return to the L-rd, your G-d... then the L-rd, your G-d, will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather you from all the peoples where the L-rd, your G-d, has scattered you. If

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⁵ I.e., according to the Masoretic tradition, it is read and interpreted as one word, לְמַרְבַּה, but it is written as though it is two words, לם רבה, with a *mem sofit*.

⁶ I.e., according to the Masoretic tradition, it is read and interpreted as two words, הַם פְּרוּצִים, but it is written as though it is one word, המפרוצים, with a regular *mem*.

⁷ Rabbeinu Bachya, Parashat Vayechi 47:28.

any of yours that are dispersed be in the uttermost parts of Heaven, from there will the L-rd, your G-d, gather you." Until all those things are fulfilled, they are not able to be aroused in repentance.

Said R. Chiya: "How many paths and ways you have closed off from all the people of the world, and you have not left them any opening to say [anything]."

- Zohar II:188b (parashat Ki Tisa 6:22–23)⁹

ּוּלְפִי זֶה יֵשׁ לוֹמַר שֶׁהֶקְלָלוֹת שֶׁל תּוֹרַת כֹּהָנִים הֶם מִנָא"ו עַד מֵ"ם דְּמַשְׁמָע שֶׁאֵין שׁוּם תִּיקוּן אֶלָא עַד שֶׁיְתוּקּן הַמֵּ"ם דְּהַיְינוּ עַד שֶׁיָבֹא מָשִׁים, וּמֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ עָלָיו השְׁלָוּם שֶׁהָיָה דּוֹרֵשׁ לִזְכוּתָן שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל הִפְסִיק הַקְּלָלוֹת בְּהַ"א שֶׁהִיא סִימָן הַתְּשׁוּבָה לוֹמַר שֶׁבְּשֶׁיַּעֲשׁוּ תְשׁוּבָה גְּמוּרָה יִהְיוּ נִגְאָלִים אַף שֶׁלֹּא יִתְקִיִּימוּ כָּל הַתּוֹכָחוֹת.

According to this, one can say that the curses of *Torat Kohanim* are from *vav* to *mem*, implying that there is no rectification until the *mem* is rectified, that is, until the Messiah comes.

But our teacher Moses, peace be upon him, who in *Mishneh Torah* was advocating for the merit of Israel, ended the curses with a *heh*, which is a sign of repentance, to indicate that when they engage in complete repentance, they will be redeemed, even if all the rebukes have not yet been fulfilled.

Thus, to answer Question 3, as to what difference it makes whether the curses end with *mem* or *heh*, we see that *mem* is indicative of a strict judgment, while *heh* is indicative of a more lenient judgment, where redemption can come through repentance, even before the coming of the Messiah.

This also answers Question 1, as to why the Midrash compares the blessings of Leviticus to the curses of Deuteronomy. By ending with *heh*, the curses of Deuteronomy are indicative of a milder judgment compared to those of Leviticus, which end with *mem*.

ּוְהַבְּרָכוֹת שֶׁל תּוֹרַת כַּהְנִים הֵם מֵאָלֶ"ף וְעַד תִּי"ו שֶׁכֵּן הָאֱמֶת שֶׁהַבְּרָכוֹת אֵין לָהֶם קֵץ וְכוֹלְלוֹת כֹּל כ"ב אוֹתִּיוֹת הַתּוֹרָה דְּהַיִינוּ כֹּוֹלְלוֹת כָּל הָעוֹלָמוֹת שֶׁנִּבְרָאוּ בְּכ"ב אוֹתִיּוֹת הַתּוֹרָה, שֶׁהַתּוֹרָה הָיְתָה כְּלִי אוּמָנוּתוֹ שֶׁל הקב"ה "וָאֶהְיָה אֶצְלוֹ אָמוֹן".

Question 4: Having explained why the curses of Deuteronomy are to be used, why compare them to the blessings of Leviticus, which begin with *alef* and end with *tav*, instead of the blessings of Deuteronomy, which begin with *vav* and end with *mem*?

The answer is that the blessings of *Torat Kohanim* are from *alef* to *tav*, for in truth the blessings have no end and include all 22 letters of the Torah, that is, they encompass all the worlds that were created with the 22 letters of the Torah, for the Torah was the tool of the Holy One, Blessed be He, ¹⁰ as it is written, "Then I was by Him, as a craftsman." ¹¹

⁸ Deut. 30:1–4.

⁹ In our text of the Zohar, it is the first paragraph that is said by Rabbi Chiya, and the second paragraph is said by Rabbi Yosei.

¹⁰ Gen. Rabbah 1:1.

¹¹ Prov. 8:30.

ּוּלְפִיכָךְ אֵלּוּ הַבְּרָכוֹת אִי אֶפְשָׁר לְהִתְקַיֵּים כֵּלֶּם בָּעוֹלָם הַזָּה, שֶׁהְרֵי כְּתוֹב "וְהִתְהַלַּכְתִּי בְּתוֹכְכֶם" וּפֵרָשׁ רַשִּ"י אֲטַיֵּיל עִמֶּכֶם בְּגַן עֵדָן וְכוּ', וְכֵן פֵּירַשׁ עַל "וַהַקִּמֹתִי אֶת־בִּרִיתִי אִתְּכֶם", בְּרִית חֲדָשָׁה שֶׁלֹא תּוּפַר שֻׁנָּאֱמַר "וְכָרִתִּי אֶרְבִּי שָׁלְיוֹט "וְנָתְנָה הָאָרֶץ יְבוּלָה" לֹא כְּבָרִית" וְכוּ'. וְכֵן בְּמִדְרָשׁ יַלְקוּט "וְנָתְנָה הָאָרֶץ יְבוּלָה" לֹא כְּדָרֶךְ שֶׁעוֹשֶׂה עַרְשִׁיוֹ אֶלָא בְּרָבְי עֹשְׁעוֹשֶׂה עַרְשִׁיוֹ אֶלָא בְּרָבְי שְׁעוֹשֶׂה עַרְשִׁיוֹ אֶלָא בְּרָבוֹ עִלְשִׁיוֹ אֶלָא הַבְּיבִי אָדָם הָרִאשׁוֹן שֶׁהָיָה נוֹטֵעַ אִילָן וְעוֹשֶׂה פֵּירוֹת בּוֹ בְּיוֹם וְכוּ'. וְאַךְ אִילְנֵי סְרַק עֲתִידִים לַעֲשׁוֹת פֵּירוֹת כְּמֹּ שָׁתְשָׁה בִּימִי אָדַם הָרִאשׁוֹן שֶּהָיָה נוֹטֵעַ אִילָן וְעוֹשֶׂה פֵּירוֹת בּוֹ בְּיוֹם וְכוּ'. וְאַף אִילְנֵי סְרַק עֲתִידִים לַעֲשׁוֹת פֵּירוֹת כִּל.

שָׁהָיָה בִּימִי אָדַם הָרִאשׁוֹן דְּכָתִיב "וְעֵץ הַשָּׁדָה יִמֵּן בְּרִיוֹ" עכ"ל.

Therefore, the implication of this is that these blessings cannot all be fulfilled in this world, as it is written, "And I will walk among you," and Rashi explains: "I will stroll with you in the Garden of Eden as though I were one of yourselves and you will not be frightened of Me." Likewise, he interprets, "And I will maintain My covenant with you" as "a new covenant that will not be broken, as it is said, 'And I will make a covenant with the house of Israel and the House of Judah, a new covenant; not like the covenant I made with their ancestors." 14

Also, in the Midrash Yalkut Shimoni:

"And the earth shall yield its produce" 15—not in the manner it does now, but as it did in the days of Adam the first man, when the field would be sown and bear fruit on the same day. "And the tree of the field shall yield its fruit"—not as it does now, but as it did in the days of Adam the first man, when one would plant a tree and it would bear fruit that very day, etc. Even barren trees will in the future bear fruit, as it was in the days of Adam the first man, as it is written, "And the tree of the field shall yield its fruit."

- Yalkut Shimoni, Behuchotai, remez 672

וְלָכֵן הֵן מֵאָלֶ"ף וְעַד תִי"ו לְרְמוֹז הַבְּּרָכוֹת שֶׁהָיוּ בְּּיָמִים הָרְאשׁוֹנִים שֶׁל בְּרִיאַת הָעוֹלָם שֶׁאָז הָיָה הַכּּל מְתוּקֵן וַאֲפִילּוּ אִילְנֵי סְרָק הָיוּ עוֹשִׁים פֵּירוֹת כְּמוֹ שֶׁיִּהְיוּ לֶעָתִיד, זַהוּ רֶמֶז הָאָלֶ"ף שֶׁהִיא רְאשׁוֹנָה לְאוֹתִיּוֹת עַד סוֹף הָעוֹלָם לְאַהַר יְמוֹת הַמְּשִׁים כְּמוֹ הָבְּרָכוֹת הַן מֵאָלֶ"ף וְעַד תָי"ו יֵשׁ במִשְׁמָע שֶׁלֹא יִתְקַיְימוּ אֶלָּא כְּשֶׁהָעוֹלָם מְתוּקֵן הָהוֹא שֶׁיִּהְיָה בְּסוֹף. לְגַמְרֵי, דְּמֵה שֶׁהָיָה מִתְּחַלָּה הוּא שֶׁיִּהְיָה בְּסוֹף.

Therefore, they are from *alef* to *tav*, to hint at the blessings that existed in the early days of the creation of the world, when everything was perfected; even barren trees bore fruit, as they will in the future. This is the hint in the *alef*, which is the first of the letters, to the end of the world after the days of the Messiah, like the *tav*, which is the last of the letters.

Since these blessings from G-d in Leviticus are from *alef* to *tav*, we hear that they will only be fulfilled when the world is completely rectified, for that which was in the beginning is what shall be at the end.

¹² Lev. 26:12.

¹³ Lev. 26:9.

¹⁴ Jer. 31:31–32.

¹⁵ Lev. 26:4.

ּוּלְפִיכָּךְ בָּא מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּינוּ עָלָיו הַשָּׁלוֹם וְהָתְחִיל הַבְּרָכוֹת בְּנָא"ו עַד מֵ"ם לֹרְמוֹז שָׁאַף כְּשֶׁהָעוֹלָם אֵינוֹ מְתוּקֵן יִהְיוּ בְּרָכוֹת בָּעוֹלָם הַנָּה אִם הְעַיֵּין בָּהָם. וְהַטַּעֵם שֶׁהָא"ו מוֹרֶה עַל הַזְּמֵן שֶׁהָעוֹלָם אֵינוֹ מְהַבְּרָכוֹת שֶׁאָמַר מֹשֶׁה יְכוֹלוֹת לְהָתְקֵיֵים בְּעוֹלְם הַנָּה אִם הְעַיֵּין בָּהָם. וְהַשָּׁבֶי שֶׁה אִינוֹ בָּרְכוֹת שֶׁנָאֶקרוּ מְתוּקְן, דְּאָמְרִינֵן בָּרְבִאשִׁית רַבָּה עַל פָּסוּק "אֵלֶּה תוֹלְדוֹת הַשְּׁמִים וְהָאָרֶץ", אָמַר ר' שְׁמוּאֵל בַּר נַחְמָן כֹּל תוֹלְדוֹת שֶׁנָּאֶקרוּ בְּמְקרָא חֲסַרִין בַּר מִן תְּרֵין, "וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת פָּרֶץ" וְהַדֵּין. וּמְפְּנִי מָה אִינוּן חֲסַרִין, ר' יוּדָן אָמֵר כְּנָגֶד שִׁשָּׁה דְּבָרִים שֶׁנִּיטְלוּ בָּמְקרָא חַסְרִין בַּר מִן תְּרֵין, "וְאֵלֶה תּוֹלְדוֹת פָּרֶץ", וּפֵירוֹת הָאִילָן, וּמֵאוֹרוֹת. וְשׁוֹב אֵינָם חוֹזְרִים לְתִיקּוּנָם עַד שֶׁיָּבֹא מָשִׁים בָּן בָּנְא"ו חֲסַרָה בָּעוֹלָם וְהַבְּרָכוֹת יִהִיוּ מֵנָא"ו דְּהַיִינוּ מַחְפָּרוֹן הַנָּא"ו עַד הַמֵּ"ם דְּהַיִּינוּ עַד שֶׁיָּבֹא מָשִׁים לְּנִבְיל עכ"ל. וְאִם כֵּן הַנָּא"ו חֲסַרָה בָּעוֹלָם וְהַבְּרָכוֹת יִהִיוּ מֵנָא"ו דְּהַיִינוּ מַחְפָּרוֹן הַנָּא"ו עַד הַמֵּ"ם לְּבָּרִינוּ עִד שֶּיָבֹא מְשִׁיםר לְעֵיל.

Question 5: If the blessings of Leviticus, which begin with *alef* and end with *tav*, are superior, being all encompassing, why did Moses present the blessings in Deuteronomy in a more limited manner, beginning with *vav* and end with *mem*?

The answer is that because of this implication that the blessings of Leviticus could only come about during the time of the Messiah, our teacher Moses, peace be upon him, began the blessings in Deuteronomy from vav to mem, to hint that even when the world is not yet rectified, there will still be blessings in the world. Therefore, all the blessings that Moses spoke in Deuteronomy can be fulfilled in this world, if you examine them closely.

The reason the *vav* teaches about the time when the world is not yet rectified, as it says in *Gen. Rabbah* on the verse, "These are the generations [תוֹלְדוֹת] [toledot] of the heavens and the earth"¹⁶:

Rabbi Shmuel, son of Rabbi Nachman said: All [instances of the word] toledot that are said in Scripture are [written] deficient [i.e., missing one or both of the vavs], except for two: "These are the generations of Peretz" and this one, Gen. 2:4. Why are the others deficient? Rabbi Yudan said: Corresponding to six things that were taken from the first Adam: his radiance, his life, his stature, the fruit of the earth, the fruit of the trees, and the luminaries. They will not return to their original state until the son of Peretz [i.e., the Messiah] comes.

- Gen. Rabbah 12:6

Therefore, the vav is lacking in the world, and the blessings begin from vav, that is, from the deficiency of the vav. Furthermore, they go until the mem, that is, until the Messiah comes, as mentioned above for the curses, where we explained that mem referred to the redemption of the coming of the Messiah.

Thus, the blessings of Deuteronomy are achievable now, even during this period of deficiency until the coming of the Messiah.

¹⁶ Gen. 2:4.

¹⁷ Ruth 4:18.

וּמֵעַתַּה נַבֹּא לָבֵיאוּר הַמְּדָרָשׁ, חַשַׁבָתִּי בָּרַכוֹת חַשַּׁבָתִּי קַלַלוֹת וָרָאִיתִי בְּשָׁנֵיהֶם שָׁנוּי וָהַפָּרֵשׁ מֵאוֹתַן הַכְּתוּבוֹת בָּתוֹרַת כֹּהַנִים לְאוֹתָן הַכְּתוּבוֹת בְּמִשְׁנֶה תּוֹרָה, וְהַבְּרָכוֹת הַיּוֹתֵר מֵעוֹלוֹת וְטוֹבוֹת לָנוּ הֵן אוֹתַן שֵׁהֶן מֵאַלֵ"ף וְעַד תַי"ו שֵׁמוֹרוֹת שֵׁהקב"ה מַבְטִיחַנוּ לֹזְכוּתֵנוּ בָּתִיקּוּן הָעוֹלָם כָּמוֹ שֶׁהָיָה בִּתְחַלַּת הַבְּרִיאָה. וְהַקּלֶלוֹת שֶׁהֵן יוֹתֵר קַלּוֹת לָנוּ הֵן אוֹתָן שֶׁמֵנָא"ו עַד הַ"א שמורות שַיֵשׁ בִּידֵינוּ כֹּחַ לַעֲשׁוֹת תַשׁוּבה וּלְתַקּן העוֹלם.

Now we will come to a full understanding of the Midrash. He is saying: I considered the blessings, I considered the curses, and I saw in both a change and a difference between those written in Torat Kohanim and those written in Mishneh Torah. The most elevated and beneficial blessings for us are those that are from alef to tav, which indicate that the Holy One, Blessed be He, promises us the merit of the rectification of the world, as it was at the beginning of creation. The curses that are easier for us are those from vav to heh, which teach that we have the power to repent and repair the world.

וְלֹא דֵּי שֶׁכָּדְ מַבְטִיחֵנוּ מֹשֶׁה בַּתּוֹרָה, אֶלָּא שֶׁעַל כָּרְחָךְ צָרִיךְ לוֹמַר כֵן לְפִי שֶׁהֵן הַפוּכוֹת, שֶׁהקב"ה הוּא בַּעַל הָרַחֲמִים כַּלְּם ָוְאִי אֶפִשַׁר שֶׁהָאָדָם יִהָיֶה רַחָמָן יוֹתֵר מִמְנוּ, וְכִדְאָמְרִינַן פֶרֵק ג' דָּמוֹעֵד קַטַן אָמַר הקב"ה אֵין אַתַּם מְרַחֲמִין עַלָּיו יוֹתֵר מְמֵנִּי, וּבְוַדַּאי צָרִידְ לוֹמַר שֶׁאַף הקב"ה מַסְכִּים בְּכָדְ, וְאַדְרַבָּא סְיֵים הַקּלָלוֹת שֶׁבְּתוֹרַת כֹּהָנִים בָמֵ"ם שֶׁהִיא סִימָן הַגָּאוּלָּה לוֹמַר ָשָאַף עַל פִּי שֶׁלֹא יַעֲשׂוּ תְּשׁוּבָה יִהְיוּ נִגְאָלִים כְּדְכְתִיב "בְּעַתָּה אֲחִישֶׁנָּה" זָכוּ, אֲחִישֶׁנָה, לֹא זָכוּ, בְּעַתָּה.

This brings us to another point, a challenge to the Zohar's teaching that we are limited in our power of repentance, and have to wait for the Messiah to come.

Not only does Moses promise us in the Torah [that we have the power to repent and repair the world], rather you must necessarily say so, since [the curses] are inverted.

But how can that be, for the Holy One, Blessed be He, is the Master of all mercy, and it is impossible that a human should be more merciful than He. As it is said in the third chapter of Moed Katan (27b): the Holy One, Blessed be He, said, "Do not be more merciful with [someone] than I am."

Surely one must say that even the Holy One, Blessed be He, agrees to this? On the contrary, the curses in Torat Kohanim conclude with the letter mem, which is a sign of redemption, to say that even if they do not repent, they will be redeemed, as it is written, "In its time I will hasten it," "if they are worthy, I will hasten it; if they are not worthy, it will come in its time."19

וּמֹשֶה רַבֵּינוּ עַלַיו הַשָּׁלוֹם שֶׁסָיֵים הַקּלַלוֹת בָּהָ"א שֶׁהִיא סִימַן הַתִּשׁוּבַה לֹא נִתְכַּוַון לְרַחֵם עַלֵינוּ יוֹתֵר מֵהקב"ה אֵלַא בַּא לְפַרֵשׁ לָנוּ דָבָרֵיו שֶׁל מְקוֹם, שַאַף עַל פִּי שֶׁסָיֵים בָּמֵ"ם אֵינוֹ כָּפִי סְבַרָת הַזֹּהֵר דָּאִי בַעוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאִיתְעַרָא בִּתְשׁוּבָה לָא יַכִלִין, אֶלַא שָׁלְעוֹלָם יֵשׁ יִכוֹלֶת בְּיַדָם לְעוֹרֵר הַתְּשׁוּבָה וּמִיָּד הַיָה בָּא תִּיקוּן הַעוֹלַם.

Our teacher Moses, peace be upon him, who concluded the curses with the letter heh, which is a sign of repentance, did not intend to be more merciful to us than the Holy One. Rather, he came to explain to us the words of the Omnipresent, that even though He concluded with a mem, it is not as the Zohar holds, that if Israel wanted to awaken to repentance, they would not be able. Rather, there is always the ability in their hands to awaken repentance, and immediately the rectification of the world would come.

¹⁸ Isaiah 60:22.

¹⁹ Sanhedrin 38a.

ְוָזֶהוּ שֶׁאָמֵר "חִשַּׁבְתִּי דְרָכָי" דְּהַיִּינוּ בְּרָכוֹת וּקְלָלוֹת כְּנָאֱמֶר לְצֵיל וְחָזַרְתִּי מֵהּסְבַרָה הָראשׁוֹנָה שֶׁיּהְיֶה הַכּּל תַּלוּי בְּבִיאַת מְשִׁיחַ, שָׁאִם הָיָה כָּך הָיָה צָרִיךּ לְהַמְתִּין עַד דְּמָטוּ רַגְּלִין בְּרַגְלִין כִּדְאִיתָא בְּזוֹהֵר פָּרָשַׁת פִּקוּדֵי (דַּף רנ"ח ע"א) וְעַד שְׁיִּתְּיָּה הַכְּתוּב "וְעָמְדוּ רַגְלָיו בִּיּוֹם־הַהוּא" וְעִיי"ש. אֶלָּא הָאֱמֶת הוּא שֶׁהַכּּל תָּלוּי בִּתְשׁוּבָה וּמַצְשִׁים טוֹבִים, וְלָכֵן "וָאָשִׁיבָה רַגְּלִי"-רַגְּלִי דַּוְקָא-"אֶל־עֵדֹתִיךּ" כְּדֵי לִמָּהָר תִּיקּוּן הָעוֹלָם.

This is what is meant when it said, "I have considered my ways, and I have turned back my feet to Your decrees." That is, "I have considered blessings and curses," as mentioned above, "and I turned away from the initial reasoning that everything depends on the coming of the Messiah." For if that were so, one would have to wait "until feet will meet feet," a Kabbalistic concept of spiritual rectification, as it says in the Zohar, Parashat Pekudei (page 258a), and until the verse is fulfilled, "and His feet shall stand on that day on the Mount of Olives," and see there, where Zechariah prophesies about the end of days, when "the L-rd will be sovereign over the entire world."

Rather, the truth is that everything depends on repentance and good deeds. Therefore, "I have turned back my feet"—specifically "my feet"—"to Your testimonies," in order to hasten the rectification of the world.

וְאַחַר כָּךְ בָּא ר' אָבִין וְהוֹסִיף אָם זְכִיתֶם הֲרֵינִי הוֹפֵךְ לָכֶם הַקְּלָלוֹת לִבְרָכוֹת. וְקֵשֶׁה טוּבָא מַה צוֹרֵךְ לַהִיפּוּךְ דְּתִיפּוֹק לִי דְּבְהֶדְיָא כְּתִיבוּ בָּרָכוֹת לִשְׁמוֹעַ בְּקוֹל ה', וְכֵן הִקְשֶׁה שֶׁם הַיָּפֶה תֹּאֵר וְעיי''ש.

Afterward, Rabbi Avin came and added: "If you merit, I will transform the curses into blessings for you."

Question 6: This is very difficult to understand, for what is the need for this transformation? After all, it is explicitly written that blessings are given to those who listen to the voice of G-d. The *Yefeh To'ar* also raised this difficulty there; see there.

ּוְיֵשׁ לוֹמֵר דְּיֵשׁ קְלָלוֹת שֶׁצְּרִיכִים הַפִּיכָה כְּגוֹן "אֵיכָה יִרְדּף אֶחָד אֶלֶף" וְהָיִינוּ שָׁאֶחָד מִן הַנָּכְרִים יִרְדּוֹף אֶלֶף מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל, וּבְבַּרְכוֹת לֹא מִצִינוּ אֶלָּא "וְרָדְפוּ מָבֶּם חֲמִשָּׁה מֵאָה". וּמִשׁוּם הָכִי קַאָמר שָׁאִם יִזְכּוּ יַהָּפּוֹךְ לָהֶם הַקְּלָלוֹת לְבְרָכָה, וְכֵן מָצִינוּ שָׁבָּרְכוֹת לֹא מִצִינוּ אֶלָּא "וְרָדְפוּ מָבֶּם חֲמִשָּׁה מֵאוֹת לְבֵּד בִּשְׁבִיל הַחֵּטְא שֶׁל אוּרִיָּה הַחִתִּי, וְעַיֵּין בֶּרָק ג' דְּמוֹעֵד שָׁנִה בִּיִם בִּימִי דְּוִד שָׁהָיוֹ הוֹרְגִים אֶלֶף וְדָוִד הָיָה הוֹרֵג שְׁמוֹנֶה מֵאוֹת לְבֵּד בִּשְׁבִיל הַחֵּטְא שֶׁל אוּרִיָּה הַחִתִּי, וְעַיֵּין בֶּרֶק ג' דְּמוֹעֵד קְטַן בַּמֵּהָרְשַׁ"א שֶׁם.

It can be said that there are curses which require transformation, such as "How could one chase a thousand, or two put ten thousand to flight, unless their Rock had sold them, the L-rd had given them up?"²³ which is speaking of one from the nations chasing a thousand of Israel. Whereas in the blessings we only find, "And five of you will chase a hundred."²⁴

For this reason, it says that if they merit, He will transform the curses into blessings. Similarly, we find that this was fulfilled in the days of David, when [each of David's soldiers] kill a thousand, but David would kill eight hundred by himself, because of the sin of Uriah

²⁰ Ps. 119:59.

²¹ Zohar II:258a (Pekudei 51:740).

²² Zech. 14:4.

²³ Deut. 32:30.

²⁴ Lev. 26:8.

the Hittite.²⁵ I.e., II Sam. 23:8 says that David's chief officer was Adino the Eznite, and that he killed eight hundred enemies on one occasion. Moed Katan 16b says that Adino was David himself, and that he had expected the threat that "how could one chase one thousand" would be transformed into a blessing, and he was therefore upset that he could only kill eight hundred, the deficiency of two hundred being due to his sin with Uriah.

See chapter 3 of *Moed Katan* in the *Maharsha* there.

ְּעוֹד יֵשׁ לוֹמֵר דְּאִיתָא בְּתוֹרַת כַּהָנִים עַל פָּסוּק "אַף־אָנִי אֶעֱשֶׂה־זֹאת לָכֶם", אֲנִי אֲשֶׁר בָּנִיתִי, אֲנִי אֶהֶרוֹס, אֲנִי אֲשֶׁר נָטַעְּתִּי, אֲנִי אֲשֶׁר בָּנִיתִי, אֲנִי אֲשֶׁר בָּטַעְתִּי אֲנִי אָתּוֹשׁ. וְכֵן הַכָּתוּב אוֹמֵר "הָנֵה אֲשֶׁר־בָּנִיתִי אֲנִי הֹרֵס וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר־נָטַעְתִּי אֲנִי בֹתַשׁ", אֶעֱשֶׂה זֹאת, זוֹ קָשֶׁה לָכָם "חֹבָר אֲמָר "מָפִּי עֶלְיוֹן שֶׁשְׁמִי הַגָּדוֹל הָנֵי עֲלִיכֶם כָּבְעַל חוֹב, לָכֶם "מִיֶּדְכֶם הָיְתָה זֹאת" אֵין הָרָעָה יוֹצֵאת מִלְפָנֵי לְעוֹלָם. וְכֵן הַכָּתוּב אוֹמֵר "מִפִּי עֶלְיוֹן לֹא תַצֵא הָרָעוֹת וְהַטּוֹב" עכ"ל. וְהוּבָא בְּיַלְקוּט וְעִיי"ש.

Furthermore, it can be said, as it is taught in *Sefer Torat Kohanim*, i.e., the Midrash on Leviticus also known as the *Sifra*, on the verse that introduces the curses, that if we reject G-d's laws, "Even [78] [af] I in turn will do this to you"²⁶:

It is 'I' who built; 'I' will destroy. 'I' who planted; 'I' will uproot. Thus the Scripture says, "What I have built, I am going to destroy, and what I have planted, I will uproot." I will do this. This is harder for you than anything, that My great Name becomes to you like a creditor. "This is from your hand;" evil never goes forth from before Me. Similarly, the verse says "From the mouth of the Most High does not come evil and good." 29

- Sifra, Bechukotai, chapter 4

It is also brought in the Yalkut Shimoni (Bechukotai, remez 673), and see there.

ְהַמּדְרָשׁ הַזֶּה תָּמוּהַ, וְעוֹד דְּלֹכָאוֹרָה לֹא רֵישֵׁיה סֵיפֵיה וְלֹא סֵיפֵיה רֵישֵׁיה, דְּמֵעְקָרָא קַאָמַר שֶׁרוֹצֶה הוּא הַבּוֹנֶה לְהִיוֹת הוּא בְּעַצְמוֹ הַסּוֹתֵר וְהַנּוֹטֵשׁ, וְאַחַר כָּדְ מְסַיֵּים שֶׁאֵין הָרָעָה יוֹצֵאת מִלְּפָנָיו לְעוֹלָם. וּמַה שֶׁתֵּירֵץ הַקּרְבָּן אַהָרֹן מִלְּכַד שֶׁהוּא דּוֹחֵק עֲדִיִין הַקּוּשְׁיָא בִּמְקוֹמָה עוֹמֶדֶת לֹמְדַקְדִּק שָׁם.

This midrash of the *Sifra* is perplexing, and furthermore, it seems that the beginning has no ending, and the ending has no beginning: for initially it says that the builder Himself wishes to be the One who demolishes and abandons, and then it concludes that evil never issues from Him at all.

The Korban Aharon, a commentary on the Sifra, stated that the word af ["even"] [א seems to be unnecessary, and led the author of the Sifra to conclude that it implies severity or anger, and emphasizes that one should not view the curses that occur as coming from nature, but from G-d's decree of purposeful judgment. "I, the One Who blessed you, will also be the One to bring misfortune." What the Korban Aharon answered is not only a forced explanation, but the question still remains for anyone who examines the matter closely.

²⁵ Moed Katan 16b.

²⁶ Lev. 26:16.

²⁷ Jer. 45:4.

²⁸ Malachi 1:9.

²⁹ Lam. 3:38

³⁰ Aharon Ibn Hayyim (1545–1632), Korban Aharon (Venice, 1609–11) is a commentary on the Sifra.

ְיִּוּבֵן שַׁפִּיר בְּמָה שֶׁנּוֹדָע שֶׁלְפִי הַמַּעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים שֶׁל בְּנֵי אָדָם נַעֲשִׁים תִּיקוּנִים גְּדוֹלִים וְנִמְשָׁכִים הָאָרוֹת בָּעוֹלָמוֹת הָעֶלְיוֹנִים, וְלֹם הַקְּדוֹשָׁה הוֹלֵדְ וּמְתְרַבֶּה וְנִתְרַבֶּה הַשֶּׁפַע וְהַבְּרָבָה אַף בַּעוֹלָם הַזָּה. וּכְשֶׁהֵם חֵס וְשָׁלוֹם חוֹטְאִים הוּא לְהָפֵּךְ, וּמִי שֻׁתְּחָלְתוֹ הָיָה טוֹב וְאַחַר כְּדְ סָרַח יוֹתֵר קְשֵׁה עָנְשׁוֹ לְפִי שֶׁגוֹרֵם חִילּוּל לְכָל הַקְּדוּשָׁה שֶׁנְתְרַבְּתָה בִּשְׁבִילוֹ, שֶׁכָּל אוֹתוֹ תּוֹסֶפֶת קְדוּשָׁה נְתְחַלֵּל וְנוֹתֵן יוֹתֵר כֹּחַ לַחִיצוֹנִים חֵס וְשָׁלוֹם. וְאַף הַבְּרָכָה שֶׁנִּשְׁתַּלְחָה לְעוֹלָם מִסְתַּלֶּקֶת, מַה שָׁצִין כֵּן מִי שֶׁלֹא זָכָה מִהְחִלָּתוֹ שָׁצִינוֹ עוֹשֵׂה כֹּל כַּךְ פָּגַם.

It is well understood from what is known to Kabbalists, that according to the good deeds of people, great rectifications are made and enlightenment spreads in the upper worlds, and the power of holiness increases and the abundance and blessing are also increased in this world. But when they sin, G-d forbid, the opposite occurs. One whose beginning was good but later strayed, his punishment is more severe. That is because he causes a desecration of all the holiness that was increased on his behalf, as all that added holiness becomes desecrated and, G-d forbid, gives more strength to the external forces. Even the blessing that was sent into the world is withdrawn, which is not the case for one who did not merit from the beginning, for he does not cause as much damage.

וְזוֹ הִיא כּנָונַת הַמִּדְרָשׁ, אֲשֶׁר נָטְעְתִּי אֲנִי הוֹרֵס, כְּלוֹמֵר כָּל הַשֶּׁכַע וְהַבְּרָכָה שֻׁשְּׁלַחְתִּי לְעוֹלָם בִּשְׁבִיל מַעֲשֵׂיכֶם, אֲנִי אָתוֹשׁ נְאָנִי הוֹרֵס. וּכְבָר זָכָה הָעוֹלָם בּוֹ מִשְׁעָה שֶׁקְבְּלוּ, וּמֵעַתָּה שֻׁאַתָּם גּוֹרְמִים לִי לְסָלְקוֹ וּלְאַבְּדוֹ, הָעוֹנֶשׁ כָּפּוֹל עֲלִיכֶם מִחְםַת מַעֲשֵׁיכֶם הָרִאשׁוֹנִים, כְּמוֹ שֻׁאָמְרוּ שָׁנָה וּפָרָשׁ קְשָׁה מִכַּלְם. וְזוֹ קְשֶׁה לָכֶם מִן הַכֹּל שֶׁמְלְבֵד הַפְּגָם שֶׁפְּגַמְה שָּבְנָשׁה הָשֶׁפַע בָּעוֹנֹתִיכֶם עוֹד אָהֶבי שֶׁקּלְקְלְהֶם בְּמֵה שֶׁבְּרָר תִּקּנְהֶם, וְעַל כֵן שְׁמִי הַגְּדוֹל נַשְׁמֵּה לָכֶם כִּרְעַל חוֹב, שָׁהָרֵי כְּשְׁמִּתְרַבֶּה הַשְּׁפַע בָּעוֹל חוֹב, שָׁהָרֵי כְּשְׁמִּתְרַבֶּה הַשְּפַע בְּעוֹל חוֹב, שָׁהָרִי לְמַעְלָה בָּאוֹתִיּוֹת הַשֵּׁם, וּבְשֶׁמְתַעֵּט כִּבְיָכוֹל יֵשׁ פֵּירוּד חֵס וְשָׁלוֹם. לָכֵן שְׁמוֹ הַגָּדוֹל דַּוְקָא הוּא כִּבְעַל חוֹב.

This is the intent of the Midrash of the Sifra: "That which I have planted, I will uproot," as if to say: "All the abundance and blessing that I sent into the world because of your deeds, I will uproot and destroy. The world had already merited it from the moment it received it; but now that you are causing Me to withdraw and destroy it, the punishment upon you is doubled because of your earlier deeds, just as it says, 'One who studied and then turned away is worse than all others.' 31 "

"This is harder for you than anything," as if to say that "besides the damage you caused through your sins, you are also liable for having corrupted what you had already rectified. Therefore, My great Name becomes to you like a creditor, for when abundance increases in the world, it is a sign that there is a unification above in the letters of the Name; and when it diminishes, so to speak, there is separation," G-d forbid.

Thus, His great Name specifically becomes like a creditor.

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³¹ Pesachim 49b.

וָאַחַר כַּךְ חַזַר לוֹמַר לַכָם "מְיֵדְכֶם הַיִּתָה זֹּאֹת" שֶׁאֵין הַרַעַה יוֹצֵאת מִלְפַנַי לְעוֹלַם, לְפִי שֶׁעַד עַתַּה דְּבֶּר בִּהַקְּלְקוּל שֶׁגַּרַם בְּמַה שַּבָּבַר תִּיקֵן, וָאִין הַכִי נַמֵי שֵׁלָאַחֵר שֵׁחַזַר הקב"ה לִיקָח מֵהַעוֹלָם הַשֵּׁפַע שֵׁהִשִּׁפִּיעַ בִּשְׁבִילוֹ אֵינוֹ מוֹסִיף לוֹ בִּעַצְמוֹ שוּם רַעַה אֶלָּא נִשְׁאַר לַמִּקְרִים הַמִּתְהַוִּים בַּעוֹלָם, שֶׁמְמֵילָא הַקּלָלָה וְהָרַעָה בָּאָה עַל עוֹשֵׁי הָרֶעָה, וְהַטוֹבָה בָּאָה עַל עוֹשֶׂה הָטוֹבָה, ּכָּדַאָמָרינַן בָּמִדַרַשׁ פַּרַשַׁת "רָאָה אַנֹכִי" וִכוּ', וְעוֹד עַל "לֹא־יִהֹיֵה לֹךְ בָּכִיסְךְּ אֶבֶן וַאָבֶן" וִכוּ', הַבְּרַכוֹת אָת בַּעַלֵיהֶן וָהַקּלַלוֹת מָקַלְלוֹת אֵת בַּעַלֵיהָן.

Afterward, He again said: "This is from your hand; for evil never goes forth from before Me." For until now, He had spoken about the damage caused by one who corrupted what had already been rectified. It is indeed so, after the Holy One, Blessed be He, returns to take from the world the abundance that He had bestowed because of that person, He does not bring any further harm Himself; rather, the person is left to the natural occurrences in the world.

Thus, the Zera Shimshon disagrees with the analysis of the Korban Aharon cited above, who said that one should not view the curses that occur as coming from nature, but from G-d's decree of purposeful judgment. Consequently, the curse and "misfortune come naturally upon those who do evil, and goodness comes to those who do good," as it is stated in the Midrash on parashat Re'eh.32

Also on the verse, "You shall not have in your pouch alternate weights, larger and smaller,"33 we learn that "the blessings bless their owners, and the curses curse their owners."34

וּבָזָה נָבֹא לְתַרֵץ קוּשִׁייַת הָעוֹלָם עַל פַּסוּק "אֵיכָה יִרדֹּף אֶחָד אֶלֶף", לָמַה בְּבִרְכַתָם שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא אַמַר אֶלָּא "וְרָדְפוּ מִכֵּם קמשה מאה" והיה לו לומר ש"אחד ירדף אלף".

With this, we can come to answer the world's question on the verse describing a curse upon Israel, "How could one chase a thousand." Why, in the blessing of Israel, does it say only, "And five of you will chase a hundred"? It should have said, "One shall chase a thousand," as it says in the context of punishment.

וּמַה שֶׁתִּירָצוּ עִם דָּבָרֵי רַשָּׁ"י עַלַיו הַשַּׁלוֹם שֶׁפֵּירֵשׁ עַל "וְרַדְפוּ מְכֶם" מְן הַחַלַּשִׁים שֶׁבַּכֶם אֲבַל הַגִּיבּוֹרִים אִין הַכִּי נַמֵי שֵׁאָחָד יִרְדּוֹף אֶלֶף, הוּא דּוֹחֵק. חֲדָא שֶׁכְּשֶׁיִשְׂרָאֵל עוֹשִׁים רְצוֹנוֹ שֶׁל מָקוֹם יִהִיוּ כַּלַם טוֹבִים וּבָרִיאִים, כִּדְכִתִיב "אָם־שַׁמוֹעַ תִּשִׁמַע" וָכוּ' "כָּל־הַמַּחַלָּה אֲשֶׁר־שַׂמְתִּי בָמִצְרַיִם" וְכוּ'. וְעוֹד שֶׁהוֹאִיל שֵׁאֵלוּ הַבְּרָכוֹת הֵן כַּלַן חוּץ מַהַטֶּבַע וְרַק עַל יְדֵי גַס וּמְשֶׁפַע הקב"ה שֶׁנָתְרַבֶּה בְּעוֹלָם, אֵין שַׁיָּיךְ לְהַפְּרִישׁ בֵּין הַגִּיבּוֹרִים אוֹ הַחַלָּשִׁים בִּטִבְעַם, אִם הַכַּתוּב אוֹמֵר "וְקוֹיֵ ה' יַחַלִּיפוּ כֹחַ", ָועוֹד דָעַדַיִין קשָׁה לָמַה כַּתַב שָׂכַר הַחַלַּשִׁים וַלֹא כַּתַב שָׁכַר הַגִּיבּוֹרִים.

As far as the solution with the words of Rashi, may he rest in peace, who explained on the verse, "And five of you will chase a hundred" that this is "of the weakest among you, but the mighty ones, it is indeed so that one will chase a thousand"—this is a forced explanation.

Firstly, because when Israel does the will of the Omnipresent, they should all be good and healthy, as it is written: "If you will listen diligently to the voice of the L-rd, your G-d, doing what is upright in His eyes, and listening to His commandments and keeping all His statutes,

³² Deut. Rabbah 4:3.

³³ Deut. 25:13.

³⁴ Lev. Rabbah 15:7.

then I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians, for I the L-rd am your healer."³⁵

Furthermore, since these blessings are entirely beyond nature and occur only through miracles and the divine abundance increased in the world by the Holy One, Blessed be He, it is not relevant to distinguish between the mighty and the weak by their natural strength, if the verse states, "But those who hope in the L-rd shall renew their strength." ³⁶

Also, there is still the question: Why does the Torah write the reward of the weak, but not that of the mighty?

ּוּלְפִי דַּרְכֵּנוּ אָתֵי שַׁפִּיר, דְּאִין הָכִי נָמֵי דְּמִפִּי עֶלְיוֹן לֹא הַּצֵא הָרָעוֹת וְהַטוֹב אֶלָּא שֶׁמְמֵילָא הַטוֹבָה בָּאָה עַל עוֹשֵׁי הַטוֹבָה וְהָבִּרְכוֹת אֶת בַּעֲלִיהֶן. וְהַבְּרָכוֹת שֶׁל פָּרְשָׁה זוֹ הֵן בָּאוֹת בְּעַצְמָן עַל דּוֹר הַזּוֹכֶה, שָׁאַף עַל פִּי שֶׁהֵן קְצָת רְחוֹקוֹת מָן הַבְּרְכוֹת אֶת בַּעֲלִיהֶן, וְהָבְּרָכוֹת שֶׁל פָּנְאֲמָר לְעֵיל, עָם כֹּל זֶה הֵן קְרוֹבוֹת אֶל הַטֶּבַע שֶׁהִטְבִּיעַ הקב"ה בְּבְרְכוֹת שָׁת בַּעֲלִיהָן, וּלְזֶה לֹא אָמַר אֶלָא "וְרָדְפוּ מָכֶם חֲמִשָּׁה מֵאָה".

According to our approach, this is fine: indeed, no evil or good comes directly from the Most High; rather, goodness naturally comes to those who do good, and blessings bless their owners. The blessings in this parasha come on their own to generation that merits them, even though they are somewhat beyond nature and occur through miracles, and will not be fully realized until the end of days, as stated above. Nevertheless, they are still close to the natural order established by the Holy One, Blessed be He: with blessings that will bless their owners. Therefore, it only says, "And five of you will chase a hundred," and not "one shall chase a thousand."

אָמָנֶם בְּשִׁירַת הַאָּזִינוּ מַיְירֵי שֶׁחָטְאוּ לְאַחֵּר שֶׁזָּכוּ כְּמוֹ שֶׁהַתְחִיל "הָלוֹא־הוּא אָבִיךּ קֶנֶּדְ הוּא עֲשִׂדּ וַיְכֹנְנֶדְּ" שֶׁקְנָּגְדּ, שֶׁקְנָּגְדּ וְכוּי, וְעַיֵּין בַּמִּדְרָשִׁים, וְכֵן כֵּרִשׁ רַשִׁ"י "הַלְה' הִּגְמְלוּ־זֹאת", לָשוֹן תֵּימָא וְכִי לְפָנִיו אַתֶּם מַעְצִיכִים שֶׁיֵשׁ בְּיָדוֹ לִפְּרַע מִכֶּם וְעָרֵין בַּמָּדְרָשִׁים, וְכֵן כַּרָא נִּיְבָין "אַת אֲשֶׁר־נָטַעְתִּי אֲנִי נֹתַשׁ" שֶׁלְאחֵר שֶׁקְנָאָם וְקְנְ[יָ]נָם חוֹזֵר וּמוֹכֵר וְשְׁהָטִיב לָכֶם בְּכָל הַטוֹבוֹת עב"ל. וּכְשֶׁחָטְאוּ בָּאוּ לִכְלָל "אֵת אֲשֶׁר־נָטַעְתִּי אֲנִי נֹתַשׁ" שֶׁלְּאחֵר שֶׁקְנָאָם וְקְנְ[יָ]נָם חוֹזֵר וּמוֹכֵר אוֹתָם, כְּמוֹ שֶׁסְיֵּים "אִם־לֹא כִּי־צוּרָם מְכָרָם וַהּ' הָסְּיִּרָם".

Indeed, in the Song of Moses in parashat *Ha'azinu*, it speaks of those who sinned after having merited, as it begins, "Is this how you repay the L-rd, O foolish and senseless people? Is not this the Father who created you, fashioned you and made you endure!"³⁷ "[Meaning,] He has acquired you, or He has placed you in a nest of rocks and in strong ground, or He has provided you with everything that will benefit you."³⁸ See the midrashim, and so Rashi explained the words, "Is this how you repay the L-rd" as "an expression of astonishment: Do you mean to grieve Him Who has the power to punish you, and Who has bestowed all these favors upon you?"³⁹ When they sinned, it came to the principal of the *Sifra*, "what I have planted, I will uproot," that after He acquired and established them, He goes back and sells them, as [the verse] concludes, "How could one chase a thousand, or two put ten thousand to flight, unless their Rock had sold them, the L rd had given them up?"

³⁵ Ex. 15:26.

³⁶ Isaiah 40:31.

³⁷ Deut. 32:6.

³⁸ Rashi on Deut. 32:6.

³⁹ Ibid.

ְּהַכָּתוּב הוּא כְּמַתְמִיַהּ וְכִי אָפְשָׁר שֶׁיִּרְדּוֹף אֶחָד אֶלֶף, וַהְּלֹא "מִדָּה טוֹבָה מְהֵבָּה מְמָדָת פֻּרְעָנוּת" וּבְמִדָּה טוֹבָה כְּתִיב "וְרָדְפוּ מָכֶּם חֲמִשָּׁה מֵאָה" וְתוּ לָא, וּכְמוֹ שֶׁהְקְשׁוּ הַתּוֹסְפוֹת בְּסוֹטָה (דַּף י"א ע"א ד"ה וּלְעוֹלֶם מִדָּה טוֹבָה מְרוּבָּה), וְתֵּירֵץ שָׁאֵינָם בְּכְלֶל שְׁאֵר הַתּוֹכְחוֹת אֶלָּא בִּכְלָל "אֵת אֲשֶׁר־נָטַעְתִּי אֲנִי נֹתֵשׁ", וְזֶהוּ "אִם־לֹא כִּי־צוּרָם מְכָרָם וַה' הָסְגִּירָם", שֶׁיֵשׁ לְהֶם עוֹנֶשׁ בְּכְלָל שְׁאֵר הַמְלֹל "אֵת אֲשֶׁר־נָטַעְתִּי אֲנִי נֹתֵשׁ", וְזֶהוּ "אִם־לֹא כִּי־צוּרָם מְכֶרָם וַה' הָסְגִירָם", שֶׁיֵּשׁ לְהֶם עוֹנֶשׁ כְּפוּל הוֹאיל שֶׁקּלְקוֹוּ בְּמַה שֶׁבְּבֶר זָכוּ, וְהָרָעָה זוֹ בָּאָה מִיָּד הקב"ה שֶׁחוֹוֵר וְנוֹטֵל אֶת שֶׁלוֹ שֶׁבְּר נָתַן לְנִוּ. אָמְנָם לְאָחֵר שָׁיִגְּלֵם וְיִהְיֶה כָּל הָעוֹלָם מְתוּקּן שֶׁבָּלַע הַמֶּנֶת לְנָצֵח וּ"בֵּיוֹם הַהוּא יִהְיֶה הּ' אָחָד וּשְׁמוֹ אָחָד", אָז יַהְפוֹּך לָהֶם הַקּלָלָה לְבְרָכָה שָׁיִחְזֹוֹר וְיִקְנֵם וְהוּא עַצְמוֹ יִהְיֶה הָרוֹעֶה שֶׁלְּהָתִיב "אֲנִי אֶרְעָה צֹאנִי וְבָוּיִן וְכוּי.

The verse expresses astonishment: Is it possible that one would chase a thousand? After all, isn't "the measure of good is always greater than the measure of punishment," and yet for the measure of good, it is written, "Five of you will chase a hundred," and not more.

This is as Tosafot asked in Sotah, page 11a, on "the measure of good is always greater than the measure of punishment," and they answered that this curse of "how could one chase a thousand" is not in the same category in the rest of the rebukes, but rather in the category of "that which I have planted, I will uproot," which is the meaning of, "their Rock had sold them, the L-rd had given them up." They receive a double punishment because they corrupted what they had already merited, and this evil comes directly from the Holy One, Blessed be He, Who takes back what He had already given to us.

However, after He redeems them and the entire world is rectified, when death will be swallowed up forever and "On that day the L-rd will be One and His Name One," then He will transform the curse into a blessing. Then He will once again acquire them, and He Himself will be their shepherd, as it is written, "I Myself will graze My flock, and I Myself will let them lie down." 42

וְזֶהוּ בֵּיאוּר מִדְרָשֵׁנוּ אָם זְכִיתֶם הָרֵינִי הוֹפֵךְ לָכֶם הַקְּלָלוֹת לְבְרָכוֹת, דְּהַיִינוּ אַף הַקְּלָלוֹת שֶׁבְּאוֹת עֵל הַחוֹטְאִים מִיָּדוֹ שֶׁל הקב"ה מַמָּשׁ כְּדְכָתִיב "אֲשֶׁר־נָטַעְתִּי אֲנִי נֹתַשׁ" וְכוּ' יִתְהַפְּכוּ לְבָרָכוֹת כְּדְכִתִיב "אֲנִי אֶרְשָה צֹאנִי" וְכוּ'.

To summarize the answer to Question 6, this is the explanation of our Midrash: "If you are worthy, I will transform the curses into blessings for you." That is, even the curses that come upon the sinners directly from the hand of the Holy One, Blessed be He—as it is written, "That which I have planted, I will uproot," etc.—will be transformed into blessings, as it is written, "I Myself will graze My flock," etc.

⁴⁰ Sotah 11a.

⁴¹ Zech. 14:9.

⁴² Ezek. 34:15.

וְאַחַר כָּךְ שָׁאַל אֵימָתִי וְתֵּירֵץ כְּשֶׁתְּשַׁמְּרוּ אֶת תּוֹרָתִי, וְגַם זָה תֵּימָא דְמַלְיָתָא דְּפְשִׁיטָא הִיא וְאֵין צוֹרֵךְ לֹא לַקוּשְׁיָא וְלֹא לַתֵּירוּץ. אֶלָּא הַכַּנָנָה הִיא שָׁזָּה הָיָה דִּוְקָא לֶעָתִיד שֻׁיְּשַׁמְרוּ תּוֹרָתוֹ בְּלִי שׁוּם דּוֹפִי. וְנִיחָא שַׁפִּיר שָׁנִּתְקַיֵּים קְצָת אַף בָּעוֹלְם הַגָּה בְּדוֹרוֹ שָׁל דָּוִד שֶׁהַגָּבּוֹרִים שֶׁלוֹ הָיוּ רוֹדְפִים אֶלֶף לְפִי שֶׁדָּוִד עַצְמוֹ יִהְיֶה מְלַכְנוּ לֶעָתִיד לְבוֹא "וְעַבְדִּי דָוִד מֶלֶךְ עְלֵיהֶם", וּמְשׁוּם הָכִי הָטִעִימוֹ מֵעֵין הַעוֹלַם הַבַּא.

Afterward, [Rabbi Avin] asked, "When will this be?" and answered, "When you keep My Torah." This too seems puzzling, for it is obvious and requires neither question nor answer. Rather, the intent is that this will be specifically in the future, when they will keep His Torah without any flaw. It is fine that this was fulfilled to some extent even in this world, in the generation of David, whose mighty men would pursue a thousand—because David himself will be our king in the future, as it is written: "And My servant David shall be king over them." For this reason, they were granted a taste of the World-to-Come.

וְאִין הָכִי נָמֵי שֶׁגַּם לִשְׁאָר צַדִּיקִים שֶׁיִּזְכּוּ שֶׁיַּטְעִימֵם מֵעֵין הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא כְּמוֹ הָאָבוֹת, יִתְקַיֵּים אַף בָּרָכָה זוֹ. וְנִמְצָא שֶׁהַפֶּּסוּק שָׁל "וְרָדְפוּ מִבֶּם חֲמִשָּׁה מֵאָה" אֵינָה סוֹף עִנָין הַבְּרָכָה אָלָּא הִיא בְּרָכָה הַנְּגְרֶרֶת מֵעַצְמָה עַל דּוֹר הַזּוֹכָה. אֲכָל עִקָּר הַבְּרָכָה הִיא שֶׁ"יִרְדֹּף אֶחָד אֶלֶף" וְזוֹ הִיא כְּשִׁיְסַיֵּיעַ הקב"ה בְּעַצְמוֹ. וּמִשׁוּם הָכִי כָּתְבָה בַּקְלָלוֹת לְפִי שֶׁכּוָונְתוֹ הִיא לְהַפּוֹךְ הַקְּלְלוֹת לָבָרַכוֹת.

Indeed, it is also true that for other righteous individuals who merit that they have a taste of the World-to-Come, such as the Patriarchs, He will fulfill this blessing even for them. We find that the verse, "And five of you will chase a hundred," is not the end of the matter of blessing, but rather it is a blessing that by itself accompanies the generation that merits it. But the principal of the blessing is that "one will chase a thousand," and this is when the Holy One, Blessed be He, Himself provides assistance. Therefore, this curse of "how could one chase a thousand" is written among the curses, because His intention is to ultimately transform the curses into blessings.

ּלְעוֹד רֵשׁ לֹוֹמַר בְּבֵיאוּר דִּבְרֵי תּוֹרַת כִּהָנִים הַנִּזְכָּר לְעֵיל "אֵת אֲשֶׁר־נָטַעְתִּי אֲנִי" וְכוּ' שֻׁשְׁמִי הַגָּדוֹל הָנִי עֲלֵיכֶם כִּבְעַל חוֹב וְכוּ' אֵין הָרָעָה יוֹצֵאת וְכוּ'. לְפִי שֶׁנּוֹדַע שֶׁיֵשׁ שְׁמֵּי מִינִי שֶׁפַע, הָאֶחָד לְהַשְׁפִּע לְתַחְתוֹנִים וְזָהוּ כְּפִי מִעֲשֶׂה הַמּחְתוֹנִים אָם רִכְּיִר אֵי יְרָבּוּ אוֹ יְמַעֲטוּ בַּשֶּׁפַע הַהוּא. הַשֵּׁנִי הַשְׁפָּעָה הַנְּשְׁפַּעַת מֵאְתּוֹ יִתְבָּרְהְ לְפַרְנָסִת עַצְמָן שֶׁל עֶשֶׂר סְפִירוֹת, יְיִטִיבוּ דְּלָא פְּסִיק לְעָלְמִין. וּמְבָּל מְקוֹם הַתּלְמִיד חָכָם וְזֹא אֵינָה תְּלוּיָה כְּלַל בַּמַעֲשֶׂה הַתַּחְתוֹנִים אֶלָּא לְעוֹלְם "נָגִד וְנָפֵק מִן־קֵדְמוֹהִי" דְּלָא פָּסִיק לְעָלְמִין. וּמְבָּל מְקוֹם הַתּלְמִיד חָכָם בִּזְמוֹ הַגְּלוּת אֵינוֹ רוֹצֶה לְקַבֵּל אוֹתָה הַשְּׁפָּעָה כְּדֵי שֶׁיִּצְטַעֵר בְּצָּרְתָן שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְזָהוּ "בְּכָל־צָּרְתָם (לֹא) [לוֹ] צָר" לְנָא"ו צַר, וְצֵיִן בָּגַאלַנְטִי עַל פַּסִּיק "וְהָיא מַר־לָהּ".

Additionally, it can be said in explanation of the words of Torat Kohanim mentioned above, "That which I have planted, I will uproot," etc., that "My great Name is upon you like that of a creditor," etc., "evil never goes forth from before Me," etc.

It is known to Kabbalists that there are two types of Divine flows of blessing. The first is to the lower realms, which is dependent on the actions of those below: if they improve their ways or worsen them, this Divine flow increases or decreases. The second is a Divine flow that emanates from Him, blessed be He, for the sustenance of the ten *sefirot* themselves. This flow is not dependent at all on the actions of those below, but rather always "streamed forth

⁴³ Ezek. 37:24.

before Him"⁴⁴ without interruption for eternity. Nevertheless, a Torah scholar in times of exile does not wish to receive that flow, in order to share in the suffering of Israel. This is the meaning of "In all their suffering, He suffered,"⁴⁵ to the *vav*, there is suffering, i.e., the *Sefirah* of *Tiferes* suffers the pain of the lower worlds, much like the heart suffers when the body is in distress.

See also *Galanti*⁴⁶ on the verse, "And it is bitter to her."⁴⁷

וּלְזָה אָמֵר אָשֶׁר בָּנִיתִי, אֲנִי אָהֶרוֹס וַ"אָשֶׁר־נָטַעְתִּי אֲנִי נֹתֵשׁ", שֶׁהָרֵי נִשְׁבֶּע הקב"ה שֶׁלֹא יִכָּנֵס בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם שֶׁל מַעֲלָה עַד שָׁיִכָּנְס בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם שֶׁל מַטָּה, וּמִכָּל מָקוֹם שְׁמִי הַגָּדוֹל הוּא לָכֶם כִּרְעַל חוֹב שֶׁבִּשְׁבִילְכֶם הוּכְרַח לְכָךְ אַף עַל פִּי שֶׁעוֹשֶׁה זָה שָׁרְצוֹנוֹ לְהִצְּטַעֵר בְּצָרַתְכֶם. וְעַל הַשֶּׁפַע הָאַחֵר שֶׁהוּא לְהַשְׁפִיעַ לַתַּחְתּוֹנִים אָמַר "מִיֶּדְכֶם הָיְתָה זֹּאֹת", שָׁאִם הָיוּ עוֹשִׁים מַעֲשִׁים מֵעֲשִׁים טוֹבִים רָבִּים הַיָּה מָתְרַבָּה וּכְשֶׁחֶטְאוֹ מִתְמַעֵּט מֵעֲצָמוֹ.

This is the meaning of what He said, "That which I have built, I will destroy, and that which I have planted, I will uproot," for the Holy One, Blessed be He, swore that He would not enter the heavenly Jerusalem until He can enter the earthly Jerusalem, i.e., when we make it holy. As Nevertheless, My great Name is upon you like that of a creditor, that on your account He is compelled to do so, even though He does so willingly, to suffer in your suffering.

Regarding the other Divine flow, which is to bestow upon the lower realms, it says: "This is from your hand," meaning that if they had performed many good deeds, it would have increased, and when they sinned, it diminished on its own.

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⁴⁴ Dan. 7:10.

⁴⁵ Isaiah 63:9.

⁴⁶ Rabbi Avraham Galanti, a student of Rabbi Moshe Cordovero ("the Ramak"), was the author of *Sefer Kol Bochim* (Venice 1589), a Kabbalistic commentary on Lamentations.

⁴⁷ Lam. 1:4.

⁴⁸ Ta'anit 5a.