

# Zera Shimshon

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## Chapter XLIII: Masei (Num. 33:1–36:13)

### Essay 7. The punishment for a failure to tithe

**פסוק** "עֲשֹׂר תַעֲשֹׂר", פֶּרֶשׁ רַשִׁי וְסִמְיָ לִיהַ "לֹא־תִבְשַׁל גְּדִי". מֵה עֲנִנְךָ זֶה אֶצְלָךָ זֶה? אָמַר לְהֵם הַקַּב"ה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל אַל תִּגְרַמוּ לִי לְבָשֵׁל גְּדִיִּים שֶׁל תְּבוּאָה עַד שֶׁתֵּן בְּמַעֵי אֲמוֹתֵיכֶן, שָׂאֵם אֵין אַתֶּם מַעֲשָׂרִים מַעֲשָׂרוֹת פְּרָאוּי כְּשֶׁהוּא סְמוּךְ לַהֲתַבְשֵׁל אָנִי מוֹצִיא רוּחַ קָדִים וּמְשַׁדְּפֶתֶן וּשְׂנֵאֲמַר וְכו' עכ"ל. וְצָרִיךְ עֵיוֹן לְמָה דְּנֻקָּא זֶה הָעוֹנֵשׁ שִׁיְהִיו גּוֹלְדִים הַפִּירוֹת וְאַחַר כֵּן מְשַׁדְּפִי אוֹתָם, וְדֻקָּא כְּשֶׁהֵם סְמוּכִים לַהֲתַבְשֵׁל. וְלְמָה אֵינוֹ מוֹנֵעַ יְצִיאָתָם מֵעִיקָרָא כְּמוֹ שְׂאוּמֵר בְּמָקוֹם אַחֵר "וְהִאֲדָמָה לֹא תִתֵּן אֶת־יְבוּלָהּ?"

There is a verse, “. . . you shall not boil a kid in its mother’s milk. **You shall surely set aside a tenth part** of the yield from your sowing that you take from the field every year” (Deut. 14:21–22). **Rashi explains** “you shall surely set aside a tenth part,” **and connects to** it the end of the previous verse, “**you shall not boil a kid.**”

In other words, Rashi always quotes a few words from Scripture to let readers know what he is about to comment on, and then provides his analysis. Here, his introduction takes the end of Deut. 14:21 and the beginning of the next verse, writing, “You shall not boil a kid . . . You shall surely set aside a tenth part.” Rashi then writes: “**What has this matter** [of a young goat and its mother] **to do with that** [of tithing]? **But the Holy One, Blessed be He, says to Israel: ‘Do not compel Me to blast by heat the tender kernels of the grain, while they are yet in their mother’s womb** [i.e., in the husks], **for if you do not tithe your products as is proper, when they are near ripening I shall bring forth the east wind and it will blast them,**’ as it is said, ‘[Therefore . . . they were] as the corn blasted before it be grown up’ (II Kings 19:26).” Thus, the first verse discusses a goat and its mother, and second verse evokes grain in its husk, which is like a goat in its mother’s womb.

**We need to study why this is precisely the punishment, that the fruits would be created and then afterward He would blast them, and precisely when they are near ripening. Why doesn’t He prevent their sprouting from the outset, as it says in another place, “He will shut up the skies so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its produce” (Deut. 11:17)?**

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<sup>1</sup> The first edition appears to have a *reish* instead of a *dalet* here, מִשְׂרַף “burn” instead of מְשַׁדְּפִי “blast with heat.” The quote from Rashi includes the word וּמְשַׁדְּפֶתֶן, which is definitely correct, as he quotes II Kings 19:26, which includes the word וּשְׁדָפָה. Thus, for the sake of parallel construction, I will assume that Zera Shimshon meant to use מְשַׁדְּפִי here, even though it appears closer to מִשְׂרַף.

וגיש לומר שפֶּכֶר יְדוּעַ שְׁשׂוּכֵר הַמַּעֲשֵׂר הוּא הַבְּרָכָה שְׁשׂוּלָח לּוֹ הַקַּב"ה בַּתְּבוּאוֹת שְׁלוֹ, כְּמוֹ שְׁאָמְרוּ ו"ל עֲשֹׂר בְּשָׂבִיל שְׁתַּתְעֲשֹׂר. וְעוֹד כְּתִיב וּבְקַנּוּנֵי נָא בְּזֹאת" וְכו' "וְנִהְרִיקְתִּי לָכֶם בְּרָכָה עַד־בְּלִיַּדִּי". וְגַמְרִי שְׁאִין הַבְּרָכָה שׁוֹרָה עַל דְּבַר רִיק כְּמוֹ שְׁכַתּוּב בְּזוֹהַר עַל פְּסוּק "הַגִּידִי לִי מֵהַיֵּשׁ־לְךָ בְּבֵית", שְׁאֵם לֹא הִיָּה לָהּ אוֹתוֹ אֲסוּדָה שְׁמֵן לֹא הִיָּתָה שׁוֹרָה עָלֶיהָ הַבְּרָכָה.

**It can be said that it is already known that the reward of tithing is the blessing that the Holy One, Blessed be He, sends to him through his crops, as [the rabbis] of blessed memory said, “Take a tithe [עֲשֹׂר] [aser] so that you will become wealthy [תַּתְעֲשֹׂר] [titasher].”<sup>2</sup> It is also written, “Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, and let there be food in My House, and thus put Me to the test—said the L-rd of Hosts; I will surely open for you the floodgates of Heaven, and I will pour down upon you blessings without measure” (Malachi 3:10). We learned that no blessing flows on something that is empty, as it is written in the Zohar (I:88a) on the verse, “Elisha said to her, ‘What can I do for you? Tell me, what have you in the house?’ ” (II Kings 4:2) that if she had not had a jug of oil, the blessing would not have flowed upon her.<sup>3</sup>**

אם כֵּן כְּשֶׁהָאָדָם אֵינוֹ מַעֲשֵׂר כְּרֵאוֹי הַדִּין הוּא שְׁיַחֲוִיל עָלָיו הַקְּלָלָה הַפֶּדָה הַבְּרָכָה, וְאֵם הָאָרֶץ לֹא הִיָּתָה מוֹצִיָּאָה כְּלוּם לֹא הִיָּתָה נִיבְרַת הַקְּלָלָה הַבָּאָה מִחֲמַת הַמַּעֲשָׂרוֹת. וְלָכֵן לַעֲשׂוֹת הַיִּכָּר שְׂבָא לּוֹ זֶה מִחֲמַת עוֹן הַמַּעֲשֵׂר, הַקַּב"ה עוֹשֶׂה שְׁהָאָרֶץ תּוֹצִיא פִירוֹתֶיהָ וְאֲסַר כֶּד שׁוֹרָה עָלֶיהֶם הַקְּלָלָה וְהוֹלְכִים לְאִיבּוֹד.

**If so, when the man does not tithe properly, the judgment is that the curse will rest upon him, the opposite of the blessing.** That is, if the man tithes, he will have crops without measure, and if not, he will see his crops wither. **If the land did not sprout anything, the next curse of the east wind blasting the crops due to the man’s failure to give the tithes would not be noticeable. Therefore, in order to create the recognition that [the judgment] is coming for him because of the sin of failing to give the tithe, the Holy One, Blessed be He, arranges that the land will sprout her fruits, and that afterward the curse will flow upon them and lead them to be destroyed.**

<sup>2</sup> Shabbat 119a. “Tithe” [עֲשֹׂר] [aser] and “wealthy” [עֲשִׂיר] [ashir] have the same root.

<sup>3</sup> In II Kings, chapter 4, the prophet Elisha goes to help the poor widow of a prophet. He asks what possessions she has in her house, and she answers that she has only a jug of olive oil. He instructs her to bring all of her empty vessels, and to borrow empty vessels from her neighbor, and to pour the oil from her jug into the empty vessels. A miracle occurs, and the single jug of oil is able to fill all of the other empty vessels, thus providing the widow with a valuable commodity that she can sell or trade. It’s brought in the Zohar I:88a, “The blessings from above won’t rest on an empty table and not in an empty place.” I.e., the blessing will rest on a person only if he has some object; but if he has nothing, then no miracle will occur for him.

והטעם שעושה זה קשהם קרובים להתבשל דוקא, יש לומר שכתבו המקובלים שכל פרי ועשב יש לו מלאך שמכהו ואומר לו גדל, ובגמר בישולו נשאר בו ניצוץ של אותו המלאך והאכלו נשמתו נהנית ואותו מלאך ניזון עכ"ל. ולכן כדי שלא ילך לאיבוד הניצוץ של המלאך אינו ממתין להשחיתם אחר שנגמר בישולם אלא קשהם קרובים להתבשל, והיינו גדיים במעי אמותיהן.

**The reason that He does this precisely when they are near ripening, is to say what the Kabbalists wrote, that every fruit and grass has an angel that hits it and says to it, “Grow!”<sup>4</sup> At the conclusion of its ripening, a spark of this angel remains within it, and when a person eats [the fruit], his soul enjoys [the spark], and this same angel is consumed.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, in order not to be led to the destruction of the spark of the angel, He does not delay to destroy them after they have completed their ripening, when there is a chance some people may take and eat a few fruits, rather He destroys them when they are near ripening, before any have been eaten, while they were still tender kernels in their mother's womb.**

ובזה נוכל לתרץ בטעם יפה למה בתוכחות של כיתבוא פרט הכתוב שלשה מיני פירות בענין הקללה, "נרע רב תוציא השדה" וכו', "פרמים תטע" וכו', "ויתים יהיו לה" וכו', והלא היה יכול לומר דרך פלל פירות יהיו לה ולא תאכלם? אלא לפי שאין חביבים במעשרות אלא אלו שלשה מינים "דגן תירוש ויצהר", רצה להודיע הכתוב שהעונש הזה בא לו דוקא מחמת עון המעשר, שאם היה מפריש המעשרות אדרבא היה באה לו הברכה כדכתיב "ונהריתי לכם ברכה עד-בליידי".

**In this way we are able to nicely solve why in the *tochachot* [“rebukes”] of parsha **Ki Tavo**, i.e., the 98 curses threatened in Deut. 28:15–68 if Israel were not to follow G-d’s commandments,<sup>6</sup> the Scripture details three kinds of fruit related to the curse. It discusses wheat: “**You will take much seed out to the field**, but you will gather in little, for the locust shall consume it” (Deut. 28:38). It discusses grapes: “**You will plant vineyards** and till them, but you will have no wine to drink or store, for the worm shall devour them” (Deut. 28:39). It discusses olives: “**You will have olive [trees]** throughout your territory, but you will have no oil for anointment, for your olives shall drop off” (Deut. 28:40). **Wasn’t [Scripture] able to say a general rule, “You will have fruits, but you won’t eat them”?** Rather, according to the fact that the only obligation in tithes are these three species, “**new grain, wine, and oil**” (Deut. 28:51),<sup>7</sup> [Scripture] wants to inform [us] that this coming punishment of the east wind blasting the crops is because of the sin of neglecting to pay the tithes. For if he had separated the tithes, then to the contrary the blessing would have come to him, as it is written, “and I will pour down upon you blessings without measure.”**

<sup>4</sup> Gen. Rabbah 10:6.

<sup>5</sup> The translator has not located a source.

<sup>6</sup> A shorter group of *tochachot* appear in Lev. 26:14–46.

<sup>7</sup> Some rabbis believe that only these three crops need to be tithed per Torah law. Raavad on Maimonides, Laws of Maaser 1:9; Rashi on Berachot 36b. Others believe that all fruits need to be tithed per Torah law. Maimonides, Laws of Terumah 2:1. All agree that tithing on vegetables is only required per rabbinic law.

ובאמת שנה הלשון של "בלי-די" קאמרי חז"ל פירוש עד שיכלו שפתותיכם וכו'. ועוד יש לומר שידוע שהמקטרגים עיניהם צרה בטובת העולם, וכשהקב"ה רוצה להשפיע טובה לאיזה אדם הם תמיד מקטרגים כדי למנוע אותה הטובה לגמרי או לפחות למעטה. ותמיד אומרים די פחות מזה, אבל כשהקב"ה שולח הברכה הוא משמרה מהמקטרגים, כמו שאמרו יברכה ה' בממון וישמרה מן המזיקין. וזהו "עד-בלי-די", שישלח לכם ברכה בענין שיתום פיהם של המקטרגים שלא יהיו יכולים לומר די בלי שום די.

**Really, it is this language of “without limit” that [the rabbis] of blessed memory are saying that your lips will be “worn out” [יכלו] [yivlu, which is similar to the word *beli*, בלי, “without”] from saying “enough” [dai] [די].<sup>8</sup> It can also be said that it’s known that the prosecuting angels have an envious eye at the goodness of the world, and when the Holy One, Blessed be He, wants to give a good influence to some person, [these angels] always advocate completely against this goodness or at least advocate to diminish it. They always say “less than that would be enough,” but when the Holy One, Blessed be He, sends the blessing, He guards it from the prosecuting angels, as they say regarding the verse “The L-rd will bless you and He will protect you” (Num. 6:24): “The L-rd will bless you” with money,<sup>9</sup> “and He will protect you” from the damaging forces.<sup>10</sup> This is the meaning of “without limit,” that He will send you a blessing in that He will shut the mouths of the prosecuting angels, that they won’t be able to say “enough” when it is not enough!**

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<sup>8</sup> Shabbat 32b; Taanit 9a, 22b; Makkot 23b. The teaching is by Rami bar Chama, quoting Rav.

<sup>9</sup> Midrash Tanchuma, Nasso 10:1; Num. Rabbah 11:15.

<sup>10</sup> Pesikta d’Rav Kahanna 1:5; Yalkut Shimoni on Nach 711:7, 842:4 and 843:1; Num. Rabbah 12:3