

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter L: Ki Tavo (Deut. 26:1–29:8)

Essay 12. A reward is available for some mitzvot in this world

"**וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם** אֶת־דְּבָרֵי הַבְּרִית הַזֹּאת" וְסָמִיד לִיה "אַתֶּם נֹצְבִים". קִצַּת מִהַמְּפָרְשִׁים דְּחָקוּ עֲצָמָם לְהַבִּין סְמִיכוֹת זֶה וְהַדִּין עִמָּהֶם, מִשּׁוּם שֶׁכָּתַב רַדְבָּ"ז (בְּתוֹבָה תִּשְׁס"ט) שְׁמוּכָרַח לומר שֶׁפְּרָשְׁתָּ "אַתֶּם נֹצְבִים" קְשׁוּרָה לְמַעַלָּה עִם פְּרָשַׁת פִּי תְּבוּאָה, דָּאִי לָאוּ הֲכִי קוּשָׁה לְמָה בְּקִלְלוֹת וְשֵׁל פִּי תְּבוּאָה לֹא נִכְתְּבוּ נְחֻמוֹת אֲחֵרֵיהֶן כְּמוֹ אוֹתָן וְשֵׁל בְּחֻקֹּתֵי, אֲלֵא לְפִי שֶׁהִכֵּל פְּרָשָׁה אַחַת יֵשׁ אַף כָּאֵן נְחֻמוֹת בְּסוּפָה בְּדִקְחֵיב "וְהָיָה כִּי־יָבֹאוּ" וְכוּ'.

“Therefore, observe faithfully all the terms of this covenant, so that you will succeed in all that you do,”¹ **and next to it** is written the opening line of the next parasha, Nitzavim, **“You are standing** this day, all of you, before the L-rd your G-d . . . to enter into the covenant.”²

Some of the commentators pushed themselves to try to understand this juxtaposition. The law is with them, since the Radbaz³ wrote (Responsa 5069) that one must say that the section “You are standing” is connected above with the section of Ki Tavo, for if not, it is difficult to understand why for the curses of Ki Tavo were consolations not written afterwards, as they were in those of Bechukotai? Rather, since it is all one section, there are consolations also at its end, as 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 and you and your children heed G-d’s command with all your heart and soul, just as I enjoin upon you this day, the the L-rd your G-d will restore your fortunes . . .”⁴

וּלְדִין נִרְאָה לְמַרְץ הַסְּמִיכוֹת בְּדִרְדָּה זֶה, שֶׁבְּפָסוּק רֵאשׁוֹן יֵשׁ קוּשָׁיָא וְגַם בְּפָסוּק שֵׁנִי יֵשׁ קוּשָׁיָא וּבְסְמִיכוֹת יְתוּרְצוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם, דָּאִיד אֲפָשֶׁר "וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם" וְכוּ' "לְמַעַן תִּשְׁפִּילוּ" וְהָא שְׂכָר מִצְוָה בְּהָא עֲלֵמָא לִיכָא, וְגַם עַל פָּסוּק שֵׁנִי כָּתַב רַש"י לְפִי שֶׁנִּשְׁבַּע שְׁלֵא לְהַחֲלִיף וְכוּ' לְכָךְ הוּא אוֹסֵר אֶתְכֶם בְּשִׁבוּעוֹת הַלְלוּ וְכוּ' מֵאַחַר שֶׁאִינוּ יְכוּלִים לְהַבְדִּיל מִכֶּם עַכ"ל.

For us it seems possible to resolve the juxtaposition in this way: in the first verse there is a difficulty, and in the second verse there is a difficulty, and through the juxtaposition both are resolved. For how is it possible [as it says], “Therefore, observe faithfully all the terms of

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¹ Deut. 29:8.

² Deut. 29:9–11.

³ David ben Solomon ibn Zimra (“Radbaz”), born ca. 1479 in Spain; died 1573 in Safed.

⁴ Deut. 30:1–3.

this covenant, so that you will succeed in all that you do,” for behold, “the reward for commandments is not in this world.”⁵ Also, on the second verse Rashi wrote: “Because He swore unto you and has sworn unto your fathers not to exchange their descendants for another nation. For this reason, He binds you by these oaths not to provoke Him to anger, since He, on His part, cannot separate Himself from you.”⁶

ומכאן נראה שכל אלו האלות והשבועות הם פביכול לטובתו של הקב"ה ולא לטובתו של ישראל ולעולם תהיה תרעומת לישראל על אלו השבועות. משום הכי כתב קרא "למען תשכיליו", ובפרק קמא דעבודה נרה ילפינו מהאי קרא שכל העוסק בתורה נכסיו מצליחין, ועוד אמרינו התם על פסוק "פי אמרתורת ה' חפצו" שהקב"ה עושה לו חפציו. ואין זה לשכר מצוה אלא בשביל ש"אתם נצבים היום כלכם" וכו', ושה' הוא דבוק בכם ואינו יכול להפדל מכם, ומי שגדבק בהקב"ה אין שום רע או מזיק יכול להתקרב אליו.

And from here it appears that all these curses and oaths are, so to speak, for the benefit of the Holy One, Blessed be He, so that he would be would not be provoked, and not for the benefit of Israel for our own improvement; and there will always be resentment for Israel concerning these oaths. Therefore, the verse wrote “so that you will succeed in all that you do,” to show that studying Torah will bring self-improvement. Also, in the first chapter of Avodah Zarah (19b) we derive from this verse that for anyone who occupies himself with Torah, his possessions succeed.

Furthermore, on the verse “But his desire is in the Torah of the Lord,”⁷ that the Holy One, Blessed be He, performs his desires. This is not considered a reward for a commandment, but rather because “You are standing today, all of you, . . . to enter into the covenant,” that the Holy One, Blessed be He, is attached to you and cannot separate from you, and one who cleaves to the Holy One, Blessed be He, no evil or harm can draw near to him.

ובדרב"ז נה' יתורץ קושית העולם על פסוק "והיה עקב תשמעו" וכו' "ושמר ה' אלהיך" וכו', דהא שכר מצוה בהאי עלמא ליכא ואיך הקב"ה עשה כמה הבטחות לטוב לנו בעולם הזה, ועוד על מה שפרש רש"י על פסוק זה אם המצות קלות שאדם דש ב' עקב תשמעו" "ושמר ה' " וכו' ישמור לה' הבטחתו עכ"ל.

In this way will be resolved the question that people ask regarding the verse, “And if you do hearken to these ordinances and observe them carefully, then the L-rd your G-d will maintain faithfully for you the covenant . . . ,”⁸ for behold, “the reward for commandments is not in this world.” So how does the Holy One, Blessed be He, make so many promises for our benefit in this world? Further, regarding what Rashi explained on this verse: “If, for the light

⁵ Kiddushin 39b; Chullin 142a.

⁶ Rashi on Deut. 29:12.

⁷ Ps. 1:2.

⁸ Deut. 7:12.

commandments which a person usually treads on with his heels, you will hearken to, ‘G-d will maintain,’ He will keep for you His promises.”⁹

וקשה שהנה לו לומר אם אף המצוות קלות וכו' שהנה משמע שהם נזהרים לגמרי בין במצוות קלות בין במצוות תמורות, אבל הלשון של אם המצוות קלות משמע שאם יהיו נזהרים במצוות קלות בלבד סגי אף אם לא יהיו נזהרים במצוות תמורות, ונה בנדאי לא יתכן לומר כן.

This explanation of Rashi is difficult to understand, for he should have said, “If even for the light commandments,” which would imply that they are completely careful both in light commandments and in severe ones. But the wording, “If for the light commandments,” implies that if they are careful only in the light commandments it suffices, even if they are not careful in the severe commandments — and it is certainly impossible to say so!

ויש לומר שאין פונת הפתוב לעשות להם אלו ההבטחות לשכר קיום המצוות, שבנדאי שכר מצנה בהאי עלמא ליפא, ומשום הכי דייק הפתוב לומר "ונהנה עקב תשמעון את המשפטים האלה", וידוע שהמשפטים הם דברים שאפילו לא נכתבו היו פדאים לקיימן, כמו שפרש רש"י בפירוש אחר מות על פסוק "את-משפטי תעשו" וכו' אלו דברים האמורים בתורה שאילו לא נאמרו היו כדאי לאמרן עכ"ל, ופירש הרא"ם בגון גזל ושפיכות דמים עכ"ל.

Rather, one may say that the intention of Scripture is not to make these promises as reward for fulfilling the commandments, for indeed, “the reward for commandments is not in this world.” Therefore, Scripture is precise to say, “And if you do hearken to these ordinances,” and it is known that “ordinances” [*mishpatim*] [משפטים] are matters that, even if they had not been written, they would be fitting to fulfill. As Rashi explained in parashat Acharei Mot on the verse, “My ordinances you shall observe,”¹⁰ “these are things stated in the Torah which, had they not been written, it would be proper to state them.”¹¹ The Re'em¹² explained: such as theft and bloodshed.

ומעתה אלו הדברים הטבע מסייב להיות נזהרים מהם אף בלא ציווי הפתוב, ומי שנזהר מהם לשם מצנת הבורא גדול זכותו והקב"ה מבטיחו פל אלו ההבטחות, ומאי דאמרין שכר מצנה בהאי עלמא ליפא, הני מילי בשאר המצוות שאין הטבע וקיום העולם מכריח לשומרם רק הם גזירת מלך על עבדיו, ובאלו אין ליטול שכרם בעולם הנה מפני שהתורה היא רוחנית, ואף שכר אותם המצוות שבא חיובם מפת התורה ראוי שיהיה רוחני, אבל אותם המצוות שאף בלא ציווי התורה היינו מקיימים אותם מפני שצריכות בעולם הנה, מי ששומר אותם לשם מצנה בנדאי שיטול שכרו בעולם הנה, ומשום הכי הבטיח הפתוב כמה הבטחות.

Now, regarding these matters, nature itself obligates that one be careful about them even without the command of Scripture. For one who is careful in them for the sake of the

⁹ Rashi on Deut. 7:12.
¹⁰ Lev. 18:4.
¹¹ Rashi on Lev. 18:4.
¹² Rabbi Elijah Mizrahi (c. 1455 – c. 1526) (“Re'em”), Talmudist, posek, and mathematician, best known for Sefer ha-Mizrahi, a supercommentary on Rashi's commentary on the Torah.

command of the Creator, great is his merit, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, promises him all these assurances. That which we say, that “the reward for commandments is not in this world,” that applies to the other commandments, which nature and the maintenance of the world do not compel one to guard, but are rather a decree of the King upon His servants. For these, one should not take their reward in this world, because the Torah is spiritual, and even the reward of those commandments whose obligation comes from the Torah ought to be spiritual. But those commandments which, even without the Torah’s command, we would fulfill, since they are needed in this world, one who keeps them for the sake of a commandment will certainly receive his reward in this world, and therefore Scripture promised many assurances.

וּמָה שֶׁפָּרַשׁ רַשִׁי"י אִם הַמְצוֹת קְלוֹת וְכוּ' הֵינּוּ נִמְי אֹתָם הַתְּלוּיֹת בְּאֵלוֹ הַמְשַׁפְּטִים שֶׁהִטְבַּע מְחַיֵּיבֵם אֲלֵא שֶׁאֵדָם דָּשׁ בַּעֲקֻבֵּי דַהֵינּוּ שֶׁאֵין הָעוֹלָם זְהִירִין מֵהֶם, כְּגוֹן שֶׁפִּיכּוֹת דְּמִים הוּא דְבָר שֶׁהִטְבַּע מְחַיֵּיב וְרוֹב הָעוֹלָם גְּזָהֲרִים מִמֶּנּוּ, אֲבָל הַמְּלַבֵּין פְּגִי חֲבִירוֹ בְּרַבִּים וְכדוּמָה אֵף עַל פִּי שֶׁהִטְבַּע מְחַיֵּיבֵו אֵין רוֹב הָעוֹלָם גְּזָהֲרִים מִמֶּנּוּ, כַּדְאֲמַרִּינָן בְּפֶרֶק ד' שֶׁמְצִיעָא הַמְּלַבֵּין פְּגִי חֲבִירוֹ כְּאֵילוֹ שׁוֹפֵד דְּמִים וְכוּ' בְּמַעְרְבָא בְּמֵאֵי זְהִירִי, בְּאַחֲרֵי אִפִּי, דְּמִשְׁמַע לֹא כֹן בְּשַׁעַר הַמְּקוֹמוֹת.

What Rashi explained, “If for the light commandments,” this also refers to those connected with these ordinances, which nature obligates, but which a person tramples with his heels, meaning that the world is not careful in them. For example, bloodshed is something which nature obligates, and most of the world is careful in it. But one who embarrasses his fellow in public, and the like — even though nature obligates it, most of the world is not careful in it, as we say in chapter 4 of Bava Metzia:

Anyone who embarrasses another in public, it is as though he were **spilling blood**. . . . We see that the red leaves [his face] and pallor comes [which is tantamount to spilling his blood]. Abaye said to Rav Dimi: **In the West**, [i.e., the Land of Israel,] **with regard to what are they [especially] vigilant? In [not] embarrassing [another], which implies that it was not so in other places.**

- Bava Metzia 58b

וְהִשְׁתָּא תּוֹ לִיכָא לְמִיטְעִי וְלוֹמַר דְּבִשְׁמִירַת מְצוֹת קְלוֹת בְּלַחֲדוּדֵיהוּ סָגִי, דְּהוּאִיל שֶׁהִטְבַּע מְחַיֵּיב בְּאֵלוֹ מְכַל שְׁכֹן בְּחִמּוּרוֹת וְאֵי אֲפִשֶׁר שֶׁיִּקְבַּל טוֹבָה מִי שֶׁפּוֹשֵׁעַ בְּהֶם אֲלֵא מִי שֶׁזְהִיר לְשֵׁם מְצוּהָ כְּנֶאֱמַר לְעֵיל.

Now there is no longer room to err and to say that with guarding only the “light commandments” it suffices, for since nature obligates in these, all the more so in the severe ones. It is impossible that one who transgresses them will receive good, but only one who is careful for the sake of the commandments, as said above.

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