

# Zera Shimshon

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## Chapter LI: Nitzavim (Deut. 29:9–30:20)

### Essay 1. The curses need not be taken literally

**"אתם נצבים"** פ'רש רש"י, נסמכה פ'רשת אתם נצבים לקללות? לפי ששמעו ישראל מאה קללות חסר שתיים חוץ ממ"ט שבתורת פהגנים, הוריקו פניהם ואמרו מי יוכל לעמוד באלה, התחיל משה לפייסם, "אתם נצבים היום" הרבה הכעסותם למקום וכו' עכ"ל.

**"You are standing today, all of you, before the L-rd your G-d."**<sup>1</sup> Rashi explained, **Why was the parashah of "Nitzavim" juxtaposed to the curses? Because when Israel heard one hundred curses less two, besides the forty-nine in Leviticus, their faces turned pale, and they said, "Who can withstand these?" Moses began to appease them: "You are standing today," [meaning] you have frequently provoked the Omnipresent to anger, and yet He has not made an end to you, but you still continue in His presence.**<sup>2</sup>

קשה טובא למה הוריקו פניהם באלה התוכחות ולא כן בתוכחות של בקחתי והלא גם בהם הנה די והותר להורקת פנים, ועוד למה אמר מאה קללות חסר שתיים הנה לו לומר צ"ח קללות, כמו שאמר חוץ ממ"ט שבתורת פהגנים, שהרי מאה אין כאן ולמה נקט מאה. ועוד מה תירוץ הוא לומר "אתם נצבים היום" וכו', ואי משום שהרבה הכעיסו לפניו ולא עשה בהם קליה הלא זה אינו תירוץ מספיק, דדילמא לא עשה בהם קליה, לפי שעדיין לא עברו בכרית ולא היו עדיין אלה התוכחות בעולם, אבל מכאן ואילך אין הכי נמי שיש להם לישראל לדאוג מי יוכל לעמוד באלה.

**It is very difficult** to understand this.

Question 1: **Why did their faces turn pale at these rebukes and not so at the rebukes in *Bechukotai*, for there too there was more than enough cause for a face to go pale?**

Question 2: **Furthermore, why did [Rashi] say "one hundred curses less two"? He should have said "ninety-eight curses," just as he said "besides the forty-nine in Leviticus," where he gave the exact number, instead of saying "fifty less one." For here there are not one hundred, so why did he phrase it as one hundred?**

Question 3: **Furthermore, what kind of answer is it to say "You are standing today ..."? If it's because they had frequently provoked Him to anger and He did not destroy them, this is not a sufficient answer. For perhaps He did not destroy them because they had**

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<sup>1</sup> Deut. 29:9.

<sup>2</sup> Rashi on Deut. 29:12.

not yet entered the covenant, and these rebukes, which relate to the covenant, were not yet in effect. But from now on, indeed Israel had reason to worry: Who can withstand these rebukes?

וַיֹּאמֶר דְּעַקְר הוֹרֶקֶת פְּנֵיהֶם שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֵלֶּה הַתּוֹכָחוֹת הַיְתֵדָה, לְפִי שְׂכָתוֹב כָּאֵן "גַּם כָּל־חֲלֵי וְכָל־מַכָּה אֲשֶׁר לֹא כְּתוּב" וְכוּ', וְגַם אֵלֶּה הֵם שְׁמֵי קִלְלוֹת חֲלֵי וּמַכָּה אֵלֶּה שְׂלֹא נִכְתְּבוּ, וְאִם כֵּן הֵם מֵאָה קִלְלוֹת אֵלֶּה שְׂלֹא נִכְתְּבוּ כִּי אִם צ"ח.

Rather, it may be said that the main reason their faces turned pale at these rebukes was because it is written here, “also, every other disease and plague that are not mentioned in this book of Teaching, the L-rd will bring upon you, until you are wiped out.”<sup>3</sup> These are two curses, i.e., “disease” and “plague,” only they were stated in general terms and not specified. If so, they are one hundred curses, only that ninety-eight were written, and two were not.

וְלָמָּה אֵלֶּי נִכְתְּבוּ וְאֵלֶּי לֹא נִכְתְּבוּ צָרִיךְ לֹאמֵר שְׂאוֹתֵן שְׂנִיכְתְּבוּ יִתְקַיְיֵמוּ הַתּוֹכָחוֹת כְּפִשְׁטָן וְכַכְתְּבוּ, אֲבָל אוֹתָם שְׂלֹא נִכְתְּבוּ אֵינָן כָּל כֶּף חֲמוּרוֹת, וּמִנֵּי דַיֵּשׁ הַפְּרִשׁ בֵּין זֶה לְזֶה, שֶׁהָרִי עַל מֵה שְׂאָמֵר יַעֲקֹב "וְהִבֵּאתִי עָלַי קִלְלָה וְלֹא בְּרָכָה" הַקְּשׁוּ הַמְּפָרְשִׁים מֵהוּ "וְהִבֵּאתִי עָלַי" הֵיכָּה לֹא לֹאמֵר "וַיִּתֵּן לִי קִלְלָה", וְעוֹד לָמָּה כָּפֵל "וְלֹא בְּרָכָה" דְּפִשְׁטָא שְׂאִם יִתֵּן לוֹ קִלְלָה לֹא יִתֵּן לוֹ בְּרָכָה.

Why were some of these written and others not written? It must be said that those which were written, the rebukes will be fulfilled according to their plain meaning and as they are written, but those which were not written are not so severe. How do we know there is a distinction between them? For what was said about Jacob when Rivkah told him to deceive Isaac, “If my father touches me, I shall appear to him as a trickster and bring upon myself a curse, not a blessing.”<sup>4</sup> The commentators asked, what does “and bring upon myself a curse” mean, and why the repetitive language “and not a blessing,” as it is obvious that if he would receive a curse, he would not receive a blessing.

אֵלֶּה הַטַּעַם הוּא שֶׁיַעֲקֹב הָיָה מְסוּפֵק בְּהַבְנַת הַפְּסוּק "אָרוּר מִשְׁגָּה עוֹר" וּפְרָשׁ רַש"י שְׁנוֹתָן לְחַבִּירוֹ עֲצָה שְׂאֵינָה הוֹגְגֹת, וְזֶה הַפִּירוּשׁ חוֹזֵן מִפְּשׁוּטוֹ שֶׁל מִקְרָא. וְנִסְתַּמֵּק יַעֲקֹב אִם זֶה הָאָרוּר שֶׁיֵּיךְ לְכָל מִי שְׂמַטְעָה אָדָם עוֹר אוֹ סוּמָא, כְּמוֹ שֶׁהָיָה צָרִיךְ הוּא לַעֲשׂוֹת לְהַטְעוֹת אֶת אָבִיו שֶׁיִּהְיֶה סְבוּר שֶׁהוּא עֲשׂוֹ, וְלָכֵן אָמַר "וְהִבֵּאתִי עָלַי קִלְלָה", כְּלוּמַר כְּהַטְעָאָה זֶה שְׂאֵינִי עוֹשֶׂה לְאָבִי שֶׁהוּא סוּמָא אֲנִי מִתְיַרָא פֶּן אֶמְשִׁיךְ עָלַי הַקִּלְלָה שֶׁל "אָרוּר מִשְׁגָּה עוֹר" וְאִז אֶפִּילוֹ אִם יִרְצֶה אָבִי לְתַת לִי הַבְּרָכוֹת אֵינָם יְכוּלוֹת לְחוּל בְּמִקּוֹם שֶׁיֵּשׁ כָּבֵר הַקִּלְלָה וְהָאָרוּר.

Rather, the reason is that Jacob was uncertain in understanding the verse “Cursed be he who misleads a blind person,”<sup>5</sup> and Rashi explained the verse to mean: “He who gives his fellow advice that is not proper,” which is an interpretation beyond the plain meaning of Scripture. Jacob was unsure whether this curse applies to anyone who misleads a blind or

<sup>3</sup> Deut. 28:61.

<sup>4</sup> Gen. 27:12.

<sup>5</sup> Deut. 27:18.

visually impaired person, as he had to mislead his father into thinking he was Esau. Therefore, he said, “and bring upon myself a curse,” meaning: through this deception I am doing to my blind father, I fear lest the curse of, “cursed be he who misleads a blind person” come upon me, and even if my father wishes to give me the blessings, they cannot take effect in the place where the curse has already been placed.

ואמו אמרה לו "עלי קללתך בני", כלומר הפסוק אינו מובן כפשוטו אלא כמו שפרש רש"י שנותן להבירו עצה שאינה הוגנת, ואם כן אם הייתה עצה שאינה הוגנת הקללה הייתה ראויה לבוא עלי ולא עליה, אף אדרבא שמע בקולי שבנכות המצנה שתשמע לדברי אמה תבוא לה הברכה.

**But his mother said to him, “Upon me be your curse, my son,” meaning the verse is not to be understood literally, but as Rashi explained: “He who gives his fellow advice that is not proper.” If so, if the advice were improper, the curse would rightly come upon me and not on you. Rather, heeding my words, in the merit of the commandment to listen to his mother, the blessing will come to you.**

והכי נמי בשלמא אם נאמר שאין הדברים כפשוטן נוכל לומר שיבואו עליהם ייסורין רבים אבל באהבה כמו שמייסר איש את בנו, או יהיו ייסורין דומים לאלו הכתובים אבל לא יהיו דומים לגמרי, כדאשכחן בפרק ט' דברכות דבר הדין הנה מפרש לאבי הרבה פסוקים של אלו התוכחות לטיבותא, כגון "שורה טבות לעיניך" נפיש עסקיה, וטבתה ולא אכלת ושתית מחדוותא דליבך, ואפילו לרבא דמפרש ליה לריעותא לא מפרש ליה כפשוטו, אלא אמר לו פסיד עסקך ולא אהנית לה למיכל מעוצבא דליבך וכן הרבה כיוצא בזה. אבל הואיל שיש שנים שלא פתחו וכל השאר פתחו יש מקום לומר שנהו סימן מובהק שמה שכתב רוצה שיתקיימו הדברים כפשוטן ממש, ומשום הכי הוריקו פניהם דנקא באלו ולא באותן של תורת כהנים, ומשום הכי אמרו מאה קללות חסר שנים.

**Likewise, granted, if we say that the matters are not according to the literal sense, we could say that many afflictions will come upon them, but with love, as a man chastises his son; or the afflictions will be similar to those written, but not exactly the same.**

This is as we saw in Chapter 9 of Berachot (56a), that Bar Haddaya, who was an interpreter of dreams, had a custom to give a good interpretation for those who paid them, and a bad interpretation for those who did not pay him. An identical dream was experienced by Abaye and Rava, in which Biblical verses of rebuke were read to them. Bar Haddaya **explained to Abaye, who paid him, many verses of these rebukes for good, such as**, for example, the curse from last week’s parasha, *Ki Tavo*, “**Your ox shall be slain before your eyes and you shall not eat thereof,**”<sup>6</sup> he explained that “**your business will succeed, but when you will slaughter an ox, you will not eat or drink, because of the joy of your heart.**”<sup>7</sup> Even for Rava, who did not pay him, and for whom he interpreted it negatively, he did not interpret it according to the plain meaning, but rather said to him, “**Your business will be lost and you will derive no pleasure from eating**

<sup>6</sup> Deut. 28:31.

<sup>7</sup> This text appears in Ein Yaakov 9:15. The text in Berachot 56a is somewhat different, with the element of drinking wine coming from a different verse, “Go your way, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart” (Eccl. 9:7).

because of the sadness of your heart,” and similarly he interpreted many verses in this way, for good or bad, depending on the audience.

Thus, the answer to Question 1 is that Rashi felt that the people were not as afraid of the curses of Leviticus and even of *Ki Tavo*, for they were not necessarily to be taken literally. **But since here in Nitzavim there are two curses that were not written, and all the rest were written, there is reason to say that this is a clear sign: that what is written is intended to occur according to its literal meaning. For this reason, their faces turned pale specifically at these, and not at those in Leviticus.**

The answer to Question 2 is that it was for this reason, [the Rabbis quoted by Rashi] said: “one hundred curses, less two,” because there were ninety-eight curses explicitly stated, and two more stated only in general terms, “every other disease and plague.”

הַתְּחִיל מִשָּׁה לִפְיִסּוֹן "אַתֶּם נֹצְבִים הַיּוֹם" וְכוּ' הַרְבֵּה הַכְּעֶסְתֶּם וְכוּ', כְּלוּמַר הֲלֹא עֲשִׂיתֶם אֶת הָעֲגֹל וְכַתִּיב בֵּיהּ "זָבַח לְאֱלֹהִים יִתְּרִם" וְעַם כָּל זֶה לֹא עָשָׂה אֶתְכֶם כְּלִיָּהּ, שְׂאִין הַקֵּב"ה מֵעֲנִיֵּשׁ אֶת הָאָדָם כִּפְשֻׁטוֹ דְּקָרָא לִפִּי שְׂפָכָר גִּשְׁבַּע לְאַבּוֹת שְׂאִין מִתְּחִיל וְרָעַם בְּאוֹמָה אַחֲרַת כְּמוֹ שְׂפָתָב כְּאֵן רַשִׁ"י ז"ל בְּפִרְשֵׁהּ זֹ. וְאִין הִכִּי גַמִּי שְׁגַם אֱלֹהִים הַקְּלָלוֹת לֹא יִתְקַיְּמוּ כִּפְשׁוּטוֹ, שְׂהָרִי בְּפִסּוּק "גַּם כְּלִי-חַלִּי וְכִלְ-מִכָּה" וְכוּ' כְּתוּב "וַיַּעַלְם ה' עֲלֵיהֶם עַד הַשְּׁמֵדָה", וּמִזֶּה מוֹכַח שְׂאֵף אוֹתָן שְׂלֹא נִכְתְּבוּ הֵן תְּמוּרוֹת הַרְבֵּה שְׂהָרִי יֵשׁ בְּהֵן הַשְּׁמֵדָה חֵס וְשְׁלוֹם. וְזֶה הוּא לְהַפְּךָ מִמָּה שְׂהִיִּתָם סְבוּרִים שְׂאִינָן כָּל כֶּה תְּמוּרוֹת, אֲלֹא שְׂמִכְל מְקוּם מוֹכְרִים אֲנִי לֹמַר שְׂ"עַד הַשְּׁמֵדָה" אִינֹו דִּנְקָא וּבְנֻדָּאֵי לֹא יִתְקַיְּמוּ כִּפְשׁוּטוֹ, שְׂהָרִי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יִכְרַתוּ מִהַיּוֹת גּוֹי לְעוֹלָם.

**Moses began to appease them: “You are standing today,”** i.e., as Rashi explained, “**you have frequently provoked the Omnipresent to anger, and yet He has not made an end to you, but you still continue in His presence,**” as if to say, “**didn’t you make the Golden Calf, about which is written, ‘Whoever sacrifices to a god other than the L-rd alone will be destroyed,’<sup>8</sup> and with all this, He did not destroy you,**” for the Omnipresent does not punish a person strictly according to the literal sense of Scripture, since He had already sworn to the forefathers that He would not exchange their offspring for another nation, as Rashi wrote here in this section.

Likewise, it is also true that even these curses will not be fulfilled literally, for in the verse “**also, every other disease and plague that are not mentioned in this book of Teaching,**” it is written, “**the L-rd will bring upon you, until you are wiped out,**” and from this it is evident that even those not written are very severe, for they contain the potential for destruction, heaven forbid. This is the opposite of what you might have thought, that they are not so severe. Nevertheless, we must say that “**until you are destroyed**” is not literal, and certainly will not occur according to the plain sense, for Israel will never cease to exist as a people.

וְזֶהוּ "אַתֶּם נֹצְבִים הַיּוֹם כְּלַכֶּם לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם", כְּלוּמַר לְעוֹלָם הַקֵּב"ה הִנֵּה וְהִנֵּה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וּמִכְּלָל זֶה אַתֶּם לְמַד שְׂתִּהְיוּ אַתֶּם קַיְּמִים, וְהַקְּלָלוֹת בֵּין אוֹתָן שְׂנִכְתְּבוּ בֵּין אוֹתָן שְׂלֹא נִכְתְּבוּ לֹא יִתְקַיְּמוּ מִמֶּשׁ כִּפְשׁוּטוֹן שְׂל דְּבָרִים.

**This is** the answer to Question 3, which asked if perhaps He had not destroyed them previously because they had not yet entered the covenant, and these rebukes, which relate to the

<sup>8</sup> Ex. 22:19.

covenant, were not yet in effect. Rashi's answer is that **“You are standing today, all of you, before the L-rd your G-d,” is as if to say, the Holy One, Blessed be He, was and will always be your G-d. From this you learn that you yourselves will endure, and the curses, both those written and those not written, will not occur exactly according to the literal sense of the words.**

וְנָהוּ שֶׁאָמַר הַכְּתוּב "וַיְהִי בְשָׁמְעוֹ אֶת־דְּבָרֵי הָאֱלֹהִים הַזֹּאת וַהֲתַבְרַךְ בְּלִבּוֹ" וְכוּ', "לֹא־יֵאבֹה ה'" וְכוּ' "כָּל־הָאֱלֹהִים הַכְּתוּבָה בְּסֵפֶר הַזֶּה", שֶׁהַקּוֹשִׁיּוֹת מְבוֹאֲרוֹת, אֲלֵא כִּי הִיא הַפְּנוּנָה הַזֹּאִיל שֶׁאֲמַרְנוּ שֶׁאֵלֶּה הַקְּלָלוֹת לֹא יִתְקַיְיֵמוּ כִּפְשׁוּטָן כִּן יְבוֹא אָדָם וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יְבוֹאוּ קָלָל רַק שְׁלוֹם יִהְיֶה לִּי כִּפְתָרוֹן בַּר הַדְּיָא לְאַבְיִי, וּמִשּׁוֹם הַכִּי מוֹסִיף חֹטֵא עַל פְּשָׁע, אִז "לֹא־יֵאבֹה ה'" סֵלֶח" וְכוּ' אֲלֵא יִשְׁלַח עָלָיו הַדְּבָרִים כִּפְשׁוּטָן מִדָּה כְּנֶגֶד מִדָּה, וְנָהוּ "אֶת־כָּל־הַקְּלָלָה הַכְּתוּבָה" דְּהֵינּוּ הַכְּתוּבָה מִמֶּשׁ.

**This is what is meant by the verse[s], “and it come to pass, when he hears the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying: ‘I shall have peace, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart,’ . . . ; the L-rd will not be willing to pardon him . . .”<sup>9</sup>**

**The difficulties are explained: the intention is that, since we said these curses will not occur literally, lest one come and say they will not occur at all, and all will be peaceful for me, such as the solution of Bar Haddaya to Abaye regarding his dream, and because of this, add sin to transgression. Therefore, it says, “the L-rd will not be willing to pardon him,” but rather will send the matters according to the principle of measure-for-measure punishment. This is the meaning of “all the curses written,”<sup>10</sup> that is, those actually written literally.**

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<sup>9</sup> Deut. 29:18–19.

<sup>10</sup> Deut. 29:26.