



RABBI SHALOM

ROSNER

RAV KEHILLA, OHEL EPHRAIM IN NOFEI HASHEMESH

MAGGID SHIUR, DAF YOMI, OU.ORG

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From the Tochacha

One of the striking features of *parashat Ki Tavo* is the imbalance between the blessings and the curses. Why does the Torah devote relatively few *pesukim* to the *berachot* and many more to the *kelalot*.

Many commentators suggest that every blessing contains within it an abundance that cannot be fully captured in words. A single blessing overflows with goodness, while curses require lengthy description. Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz¹, however, offers a different and deeply insightful perspective. Rather than focusing on the blessings, he asks us to reflect on the nature of the curses themselves. He explains that the process that creates a reality of curse is far simpler than the creation of blessing. The moment something departs from its proper order, it already becomes a curse. This is not because negativity is stronger than goodness. Rather, blessing represents an optimal state, when there is harmony and everything is balanced. Human beings experience blessing when life is *just right*. Ironically, although the word *beracha* implies abundance and overflowing goodness, the experience of blessing often depends on a precise equilibrium.

Consider something as simple as the weather. If it is too hot, we complain. If it is too cold, we complain. A few degrees in either

direction and our sense of comfort disappears. The same is true with health, wealth, relationships, and countless other aspects of life. We constantly seek the perfect balance. In the nature of reality there is more room for curses than for blessings, because blessing is the optimal state of a person.

This idea is reflected in the famous story of *Honi HaMe'agel*.² After his prayers brought desperately needed rain, the downpour became overwhelming. The people pleaded with him to pray again, asking that the rain be moderated. Too little rain is a curse; too much rain can also become a curse. Human beings struggle not only with suffering but even with excessive blessing when it is out of proportion.

EXPANDING OUR DEFINITION OF BLESSING

Perhaps this understanding carries an implicit challenge. The problem may not only be that blessing occupies a narrow space; it may also be that we define blessing too narrowly.

If our standards for happiness are excessively rigid, then almost everything will feel lacking. If, however, we broaden our vision and learn to recognize the many forms that Divine goodness takes, we will discover that our lives contain far more blessing than we imagined.

Instead of demanding perfection, we can learn to appreciate the good that already exists.

READING THE TOCHACHA

AFTER JEWISH HISTORY

Rabbi Steinsaltz adds a second, profoundly

¹. Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, Hayei Olam,

². Ta'anit 23a

moving insight. The Klausenberger Rebbe, who lost his wife and eleven children during the Holocaust, was once listening to the public reading of the *Tochacha*. As is customary, the *ba'al korei* lowered his voice during the reading of the curses.

The Rebbe stopped him and said: "*Louder! Louder!*" When those around him looked on in astonishment, he explained: "We have nothing to fear, these curses have already happened." After all that the Jewish people have endured, there is no need to whisper these verses. We have lived through them

This should remind us of the closing passage of Masekhet Makot.³ When the Rabbis saw a fox emerging from the ruins of the Beit HaMikdash, they wept, but Rabbi Akiva laughed. He explained that once the prophecy of destruction had been fulfilled, he was certain that the prophecy of redemption would also come to pass. If we have witnessed the fulfillment of the verses of destruction, then we can be equally certain that the promises of consolation and redemption will also be fulfilled.

THE TOCHACHA TEACHES TWO COMPLEMENTARY LESSONS.

First, blessing often exists within a delicate balance. If we insist on perfection, life will seem filled with curses. However, if we expand our capacity to recognize goodness, we will uncover blessings that were always present.

Second, Jewish history itself strengthens our faith. We have seen prophecies of suffering fulfilled with heartbreaking clarity. That very fact should deepen our confidence that the prophecies of redemption are equally certain.

As we read the *Tochacha* each year, we pray that we have already experienced the darkest

³. Makot 24b

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chapters of our national story, and that we stand at the threshold of the brighter half of the prophecy. May we merit to witness the fulfillment of the words:

עוד יֵשְׁבוּ זָקֵנִים וְזָקֵנוֹת בְּרֻחוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם... וְרֻחוֹת
הָעִיר יִמְלֹאוּ יְלָדִים וְיָלְדוֹת מִשְׁחָקִים בְּרֻחוֹתֶיהָ.

*Old men and old women shall yet sit in the streets of Jerusalem... and the streets of the city shall be filled with boys and girls playing there.*⁴

May we soon see the day when every curse is transformed into blessing. ■

⁴. Zehariah 8:4-5

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