

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter L: Ki Tavo (Deut. 26:1–29:8)

Essay 11. Each day will be more cursed than the previous

סוטה פֶּרֶק ט' אָמַר רַבָּא, כָּל יוֹם נְיוֹם מְרוּפָּה קַלְלָתוֹ מִשָּׁל חֲבִירוֹ, שְׁנֵאָמַר: "בִּבְקָר תֹּאמַר מִי־תֵתֵן עָרֵב וּבְעָרֵב תֹּאמַר מִי־תֵתֵן בֶּקֶר?" הִי בִקְרָא? אֵילִימָא בִקְרָא דְלִמְסָר, מִי יָדַע מָאי הֵוִי? אֵלָא דְחִלְף וְאַזְל.

Sotah, chapter 9:

Rava says: Each and every day is more cursed than the adjacent one, as it is stated: “In the morning you will say, if only it were evening, and in the evening you will say, if only it were morning” (Deut. 28:67). Which morning does the verse mean? If we say the following morning, who knows what will be [that he should yearn for its arrival]? Rather, [it must mean the time period] that has passed.

- Sotah 49a

מְקוֹשִׁים הָעוֹלָם לְמָה מוֹכִיחַ מְסִיפָא דְקָרָא דְכְתִיב "וּבְעָרֵב תֹּאמַר מִי־תֵתֵן בֶּקֶר". מְרִישִׁיָּה דְקָרָא הִנָּה לִיָּה לְהוֹכִיחַ, דְכְתִיב "בִּבְקָר תֹּאמַר מִי־תֵתֵן עָרֵב", הִי עָרֵב? אֵילִימָא עָרֵב דְלִמְסָר, מִי יָדַע מָאי הֵוִי? אֵלָא דְעֵבֵר וְשָׁמַע מִינָּה שְׁהִצְרָה מְרוּפָּה מְאֵתְמוּל.

Everyone asks why the proof that each day is more cursed than the adjacent one is brought from the latter part of the verse, which states, “in the evening you will say, if only it were morning,” for which Rava explains that the following morning is meant. [Rava] could have also proved this from the beginning of the verse, as it is written, “In the morning you will say, if only it were evening.” That is, he could have asked: “Which evening? If we say the coming evening, who knows what will be? Rather, [it must mean the time period] that has passed.” We could hear from this a proof that the distress is greater today than [the night before].

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ותירץ מהרש"א דמרישיה דקרא ליכא ראיה, דאימא "מייתן ערב" דלמחר ומצפה ומקנה למזל יום אחר שיתחיל בערב. אכל גבי ערב, "מייתן בקר" שפיר קא קשיא ליה כיון דערב ובקר שלאחריו מזל יום אחר הוא מי ידע מאי הני עכ"ל.

The Maharsha explained that there is no proof from the beginning of the verse, "In the morning you will say, if only it were evening," that the speaker is talking about the past evening. That's because one might say, "if only it were the evening that is coming," and he is waiting and hoping for a day with better fortune, which will begin that evening. I.e., halachically, a day begins in the evening.

However, regarding the proof that Rava presented based the end of the verse, "In the evening, you will say, if only it were morning," it is indeed a strong question, since regarding evening and the following morning, as far as fortune, it is the same day! Who knows what will be? I.e., if the speaker is experiencing curses in the evening, at the beginning of the day, he knows that the following morning will be part of the same cursed day. Thus, the speaker must have been talking about the previous day, which was not as bad.

וקשה דלפי תירוץ זה לא אתי שפיר לישנא דמי ידע מאי הני, שיהי אדרבא הוא יודע שהמזל של אותו יום הוא רע שפיר התחיל בערב וגם הבקר שלאחריו יהיה בודאי רע, והנה לו לומר אילימא דלהבא נהא ידע מאי הני דהיינו שיהיה רע כמו שהתחיל בערב.

This proposed solution of the Maharsha is difficult, because according to this explanation, the Gemara's language "who knows [מי ידע] [*mi yada*] what will be" is not ideal. To the contrary, he knows that the fortune of that same day is bad, as [the day] already began in the evening before. Since it is the same day, and the evening had bad fortune, then also the morning afterward will certainly be bad. Thus, he should have said, "if you say it's the following morning, but it is known [הא ידע] [*ha yada*] what will be," which is that it will be bad as it began at night. Then you can say that the speaker must have been talking about the previous day, which was not as bad.

ולדידן נראה לתרץ שהוכחתו של רבא היא לפי שהכתוב כפל דבריו, דבשלמא רישא דקרא "בבקר תאמר מייתן ערב" אפטר שהיא מצפה ומקנה שהערב הבא יהיה יותר טוב. ו"מייתן ערב" אין הכי נמי שה[ו]א ערב דלהבא. אכל סיפיה דקרא "ובערב תאמר מייתן בקר" אם פנונת הכתוב לומר בקר דלהבא דהיינו שהיא מצפה ומקנה שיהיה לו רינח מצרתו, אמאי איצטריך קרא לכפול דבריו, פשיטא שבכל יום וכל לילה יאמר כן ואין לדבר סוף.

And for us, it seems we can solve this question of why Rava is focusing on the end of the verse. It is that Rava's proof is because the verse has repetitive language. Indeed, the beginning of the verse, "In the morning you will say, if only it were evening," it's possible, as the Maharsha said, that he is watching and hoping that the coming evening will be better, and that regarding his statement, "if only it were evening," it is indeed so that it is referring to the coming evening.

But regarding the end of the verse, “and in the evening you will say, if only it were morning,” perhaps the intent of the Scripture is to say the coming morning. I.e., the Maharsha discounts this because it is the same halachic day, and if there was bad fortune at night, the day will already be marred. But why can’t it be interpreted **that [the speaker] is watching and hoping that he will have a break from his troubles** midway through a day? Since both the beginning and end of the verse could be interpreted to mean that the speaker is hoping for a better future, **what need is there for the repetitive language of the verse? It is obvious that every day and every night, he would say this, and there’s no end to the matter.**

In other words, the parasha with its *tochacha* is warning us of the curses that we may experience if we ignore G-d’s word. It’s obvious that when it says, “In the morning you will say, if only it were evening, and in the evening you will say, if only it were morning,” that it means that things are continually getting worse, or at least not getting better. If the Torah were talking about a bad situation that was improving, that wouldn’t be considered a curse.

Since we experience time linearly, it is curious that Rava himself doesn’t just state, “Each and every day is more cursed than the previous one.” Why does he instead state “the adjacent one” and then have a discussion about whether the speaker is referring to the previous time (i.e., pining for when the situation was better) or to the coming time (i.e., hoping for improvement)?

אֵלָא וְדַאי מִדְחִזֵּר לֹמֵר "וּבְעֶרֶב תֹּאמַר מִיֵּיתֵן בֹּקֶר" צָרִיךְ לֹמֵר דְּחִידוּשָׁא קַמְשִׁמְעָא לֵן, וְלֹא דְמִי לְרִישֵׁיהּ דְּקָרָא דְהֵתָם "בְּבֹקֶר תֹּאמַר מִיֵּיתֵן עֶרֶב" הֵיאֵ אֹמֵר כֵּן מִצַּד הַסִּפְּקָא וּמִצַּד שְׁהֵיָה מְצַפֵּה וּמְקוֹנָה, וְאִין הָכִי נִמְי שְׁלֵא הֵיָתֵה הַצָּרָה מִתְּגַבְּרָת רַק נִמְשַׁכֵּת מִיּוֹם לְיּוֹם כְּמוֹ שְׁהֵיָא עֲכָשְׁיּוֹ וְהוּא הֵיָה מְקוֹנָה שְׁתַּעֲבֹר מִיּוֹם לְיּוֹם, וְהָכֵא בְּסִיפָא חוֹזֵר לֹמֵר עַל הַנְּדָאוֹת כְּדִי לְהוֹדִיעַנּוּ שְׁתֵּהֵיָה מִתְּגַבְּרָת וְהוֹלֵכֵת בְּכָל יוֹם וְיּוֹם. וְהִשְׁתָּא פְּרִיךְ שְׁפִיר אֵילִימָא בֹּקֶר דְּלִמְחָר מִי יָדַע מַאי הֵיָי אֵלָא וְדַאי צָרִיךְ לֹמֵר בֹּקֶר שְׁעֵבֵר, וּמוֹכַח מִכָּאן שְׁבָכֵל יוֹם קָלְלָתוֹ מְרוּבָה מִשְׁלַח חֲבִירוֹ מְדַאי צְטָרִיךְ קָרָא.

Rather, since it is repetitive to say, “and in the evening you will say, if only it were morning,” we must say that the novelty it teaches us is not the same as the teaching from the beginning of the verse.

For there at the beginning of the verse, “In the morning you will say, if only it were evening,” [the speaker] is saying so out of uncertainty, from the position that he is watching and hoping for a better future. Perhaps it is indeed so that the suffering is not growing, but only continuing at the same level from day-to-day, as it is now, and he is hoping that it will pass the next day.

Thus, at the end of the verse, the repetition of the desire for better times is to inform us definitively of the teaching that it will continue to get worse each day.

Now, it’s fine that Rava asks: If we say the following morning, who knows what will be [that he should yearn for its arrival]? Rather, you must say it refers to the previous morning. It is proven from here that each day, the curse is greater than that of the adjacent day, as the verse needed to emphasize this.

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