

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter L: Ki Tavo (Deut. 26:1–29:8)

Essay 6. Children and sustenance

"**בְּרוּךְ פְּרִי־בֶטֶן וּפְרִי אֲדָמָתְךָ**" וְאַחֵר כֶּה "בְּרוּךְ טַבָּח וּמִשְׁאֲרֹתָיִךְ", וְהַקְלָלוֹת הוּא לְהִפְךָ "אֲרוּר טַבָּח וּמִשְׁאֲרֹתָיִךְ" וְאַחֵר כֶּה "אֲרוּר פְּרִי־בֶטֶן", וְקִשָּׁה לְמָה הֵיפֵךְ הַסֵּדֶר.

In this week's parasha, regarding the blessings, we read: **"Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb, your produce from the soil, and the offspring of your cattle, the calving of your herd and the lambing of your flock,"**¹ and afterward, we read: **"Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl."**² But the curses are in the opposite order: **"Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl,"**³ and afterward, **"Cursed shall be the fruit from your womb and your produce from the soil, the calving of your herd and the lambing of your flock."**⁴ A question is why did [Moses] reverse the order?

וְיֵשׁ לומר דבין בבִּרְכָה בין בקללה כתיב כסדר הראוי, דבפִּרְק ג' דנדה אֲמַרְיִנוּ בָּא זָכָר לְעוֹלָם בָּא פִּיפְרוּ בְּיָדוֹ, זָכָר זֶה פֶּר, נְקִיבָה נְקִיבָה בָּאָה, עַד דְּאֲמַרְהָ מְזוּנִי לֹא יִהְיֶה לָּהּ. וּפִירֵשׁ מִהֲרַשׁ"א וְהַכֹּל הוּא עֲנִינְהּ הַמְזַל דְּהָא פְּכָרוּ בְּיָדוֹ דְּהֵינּוּ מְזוּלוּ בֵּין לְרַע בֵּין לְטוֹב וְנִקְבָה אִין לָהּ מְזַל, וְנִקְבָה בָּאָה בְּלֹא מְזַל שְׁמִזְלָה תְּלוּי בְּמִזְל אֲבִיָּה וּבְעֵלָה וְכוּ' עכ"ל. וּבְסוּף קִידוּשֵׁי אֲמַרְיִנוּ אֲשָׁרֵי מִי שְׁבָנִיו זְכָרִים וְאִין לֹא לְמִי שְׁבָנִיו נְקִיבוֹת וְכוּ'.

It can be said that for the blessing or for the curse, it is written per the appropriate order, as in the 3rd chapter of tractate Niddah

When a male comes into the world, his loaf [of bread, i.e., his sustenance], **is in his hand.** [I.e., he can provide for himself.] [The word] **"male"** [זָכָר] [*zachar*] [is interpreted as] **"this is sustenance"** [זֶה כָּר] [*zeh kar*].

When a female comes into the world, nothing [i.e., no sustenance, comes] with her. [I.e., the word] **"female"** [נְקִיבָה] [*nekeva*] [is interpreted as] **"she comes clean"** [נְקִיבָה בָּאָה] [*nekiya ba'ah*]. **Until she says:** [I need] **sustenance, they don't give it to her.**

- Niddah 31b

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¹ Deut. 28:4.

² Deut. 28:5.

³ Deut. 28:17.

⁴ Deut. 28:18.

The Maharsha explains that this is all a matter of luck, that “his loaf of bread is in his hand,” which is that he has his own luck, whether bad or good, but that a female does not have her own luck, for her luck depends upon the luck of her father and her husband.

At the end of tractate Kiddushin, it is said: “Happy is one whose children are male, and woe to one whose children are female.”⁵

ולפי זה בברכות דהענגן הוא שיהיו לו בנים זכרים משום הכי הקדים הפתוב "ברוך פרייבטנג" שיהיו זכרים ויביאו מזל טוב לאביהם ואז יהיה "ברוך טנג" וכו'. אבל בקלות פתב להפך שיהיה לאב מזל רע וזהו "ארור טנג" וכו' ולעולם יתקיים בו זה המזל רע לפי שבניו יהיו נקבות ותהינה תלויות במזל רע שלו וזהו "ארור פרייבטנג" וכו'.

According to this, for blessings, the focus is that he'll have male children. Because of this, the verse begins, “blessed shall be the fruit from your womb,” that they should be male and should bring good luck to their fathers. Then, “blessed shall be your basket.”

But for the curses, he wrote the opposite, that the father should have bad luck, and this is the meaning of “curses shall be your basket.” This bad luck will endure, because his children will be female. Thus, they won't have their own luck, but instead they will depend upon his luck, which is bad. This is the meaning of, “cursed shall be the fruit from your womb.”

אי נמי בדרך אהרת דאמרינו בכתובות פרק י"ב (דף ק"ג) אלמנה שאמרה אי אפשי לזוז מבית אבא, יכולים היו שיש לומר לה אם את אצלנו, יש לך מזונות. אם אין את אצלנו, אין לך מזונות. ופריך בגמרא וליתבו לה פי יתבה התם? אמר ר' הונא ברפת הבית מרובה, ופרש רש"י מזלא דרבים עדיף עכ"ל. ואם פן פשה מרובים בבית יש יותר ברכה, דהיינו אף על פי שפשה מועטים נמי יש ברכה אפלו הכי פשה מרובים יש ברכה יותר גדולה.

Alternatively, in another approach to the question, it is stated in a Mishnah in Ketubot, chapter 12 (page 103a):

[If a widow said:] I do not want to move from my husband's house, the heirs are not able to say to her: Go to your father's house and we will sustain you. Rather, they sustain her [in her husband's house] and they give her living quarters befitting her dignity.

But if a widow said: **It's impossible [for me] to move from my father's house [and you should support me there], the heirs are able to say to her: If you are [living] with us, you will have sustenance [from us], but if you are not [living] with us, you will not have sustenance [from us].**

- Mishnah Ketubot 12:3; Ketubot 103a

Regarding the widow who wants to stay in her father's house, **the Gemara asks: “And [why is this so?] They should give her [support just as they would if] she were living there, [i.e., in her husband's house.] This supports [the view of] Rav Huna, as Rav Huna said: The blessing of**

⁵ Kiddushin 82a.

the house is in its abundance [of residents].”⁶ Rashi explained that the luck of an abundance [of residents] is preferable. I.e., when many live together in one home, the expenses per person are lower. Thus, the heirs can say to her that if she stays with them in her late husband’s house, her upkeep will cost them less than if she lives on her own in her father’s house. **If so, when there are many in the house, they have more blessing. That is, even if they are few in number, there’s still a blessing, and when there are many, the blessing is even greater.**

וְלִכְּוֹן בְּבִרְכוֹת הַקְּדִים "בְּרוּךְ פְּרִי־בִטְנָה" שֶׁשְּׂשִׁינְהוּ בְּנֵי בֵּית מְרוּבִים תִּהְיֶה יוֹתֵר גְּדוּלָּה הַבְּרָכָה, וְשֶׁפִּיר אָמַר אַחֵר כֶּן "בְּרוּךְ טְנָאָה", וּבִקְלָלָה אִם הָיָה מְקֻדִים "אֲרוּר פְּרִי־בִטְנָה" וְאַחֵר כֶּן "אֲרוּר טְנָאָה" הָיָה מִשְׁמַע שְׁלֹא יִתְמַעַט אֶלָּא הַרְבּוּי שֶׁנִּתְרַבָּה מִחֲמַת רוֹב הַבְּנִים וְעִכְשָׁיו שְׂמֵתוֹ וְנִתְמַעְטוֹ, נִתְמַעְטָה אַף הַבְּרָכָה, אֲבָל לֹא נִתְמַעַט אֶלָּא הַתּוֹסֶפֶת. וּמִשּׁוּם הֵכִי הַקְּדִים "אֲרוּר טְנָאָה" כִּדְּי לֹאמַר דְּאִפִּילוּ שְׂיִהְיוּ בְּנֵי בֵּית מְרוּבִים לֹא תִהְיֶה הַבְּרָכָה. וּמִפְּלִ שְׁכֹן שֶׁתְּמַעְטוֹ כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב אַחֵר כֶּן "אֲרוּר פְּרִי־בִטְנָה" וְכוּ' שְׂאִזֹּו יִתְמַעְטוּ יוֹתֵר הַמְּזוֹנוֹת.

Therefore, for the blessings, he first mentions “blessed shall be the fruit of your womb,” because when there are many household members, the blessing will be greater. It is fine the he said afterward “blessed shall be your basket.”

However, for the curse, if he had first said “cursed shall be the fruit of your womb” and then “cursed shall be your basket,” it would imply that the curse of the basket would only diminish the increase that came about due to having many children. Now that there has been a curse on the fruit of the womb, [the children] have died and their number has decreased, even the blessing due to the large household would decrease, but only the additional part would decrease.

Therefore, he mentioned “cursed shall be your basket” first, to indicate that even if there are many household members, there would be no blessing. Even more so, if [the household numbers] would diminish, as he mentioned afterwards, “cursed shall be the fruit of your womb.” Then, with the fewer household members, the sustenance would decrease even more.

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⁶ Ketubot 103a.