

Parashat Ki Tavo



The Ramban's Perspective of the Torah's Blessings and Curses

- What do all of the mitzvot included in the list of “curses” have in common?
- What is the meaning of the phrase “who does not uphold the words of the Torah?”
- Why does the passage of the blessings and curses feature twice (in parashat Bechukotai, and here)?
- Are these blessings and curses natural or unnatural?

1. “CURSED IS HE WHO DOES NOT UPHOLD THE WORDS OF THIS TORAH”

The curses

In parashat Ki Tavo, we read the list of curses uttered by the Levi'im facing Har Eval:

”The Levi'im shall recite to all the people of Israel in a loud voice:	וְעָנוּ הַלְוִיִּם וְאָמְרוּ אֶל כָּל
”Cursed is anyone who makes an idol—a thing detestable to the Lord, the work of skilled hands—and sets it up in secret.”	אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל קוֹל רָם: אָרוּר הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה פֶסֶל וּמִסְכָּה תוֹעֵבַת ה' מַעֲשֵׂה יָדַי חֲרָשׁ וְשָׂם בְּסֵתֶר וְעָנוּ כָּל הָעָם וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן:
Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”	אָרוּר מִקְלָה אָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ וְאָמַר כָּל הָעָם אָמֵן:
”Cursed is anyone who dishonors their father or mother.”	אָרוּר מִסִּיג גְּבוּל רֵעֵהוּ וְאָמַר כָּל הָעָם אָמֵן:
Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”	אָרוּר מִשְׁגָּה עוֹר בְּדַרְךְ וְאָמַר כָּל הָעָם אָמֵן:
”Cursed is anyone who moves their neighbor's boundary stone.”	

Then all the people shall say,
“Amen!”

“Cursed is anyone who leads the
blind astray on the road.”

Then all the people shall say,
“Amen!”

“Cursed is anyone who withholds
justice from the foreigner, the
fatherless or the widow.”

Then all the people shall say,
“Amen!”

“Cursed is anyone who sleeps
with his father’s wife, for he
dishonors his father’s bed.”

Then all the people shall say,
“Amen!”

“Cursed is anyone who has sexual
relations with any animal.”

Then all the people shall say,
“Amen!”

“Cursed is anyone who sleeps
with his sister, the daughter of
his father or the daughter of his
mother.”

Then all the people shall say,
“Amen!”

“Cursed is anyone who sleeps
with his mother-in-law.”

Then all the people shall say,
“Amen!”

אָרוֹר מִטָּה מְשֻׁפֵּט גַּר יְתוֹם
וְאַלְמָנָה וְאָמַר כָּל הָעָם אָמֵן:

אָרוֹר שֹׁכֵב עִם אִשְׁתּוֹ אָבִיו כִּי
גָלָה כְּנָף אָבִיו וְאָמַר כָּל הָעָם
אָמֵן:

אָרוֹר שֹׁכֵב עִם כָּל בְּהֵמָה
וְאָמַר כָּל הָעָם אָמֵן:

אָרוֹר שֹׁכֵב עִם אֲחֹתוֹ בֵּת
אָבִיו אוֹ בֵּת אִמּוֹ וְאָמַר כָּל
הָעָם אָמֵן:

אָרוֹר שֹׁכֵב עִם חֵתְנָתוֹ וְאָמַר
כָּל הָעָם אָמֵן:

אָרוֹר מִפֶּה רַעֲהוּ בְּסִתְרָה
וְאָמַר כָּל הָעָם אָמֵן:

אָרוֹר לֹקַח שֹׁחַד לְהַכּוֹת נַפְשׁ
דָּם נָקִי וְאָמַר כָּל הָעָם אָמֵן:

אָרוֹר אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָקִים אֶת
דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת לַעֲשׂוֹת
אוֹתָם וְאָמַר כָּל הָעָם אָמֵן.

“Cursed is anyone who kills their neighbor secretly.”

Then all the people shall say,
“Amen!”

“Cursed is anyone who accepts a bribe to kill an innocent person.”

Then all the people shall say,
“Amen!”

“Cursed is anyone who does not uphold the words of this Torah by carrying them out.”

Then all the people shall say,
“Amen!”

(Devarim 27: 14-26)

**Secret
deeds**

What characterizes the prohibitions included in this list, and why were these the mitzvot selected to be formulated as “curses” at the covenant ceremony held before Bnei Yisrael’s entrance to the Land?

The Rashbam (on verse 15) explains that this list includes acts done in secret, which therefore cannot be brought to trial to the Bet Din, and thus Bnei Yisrael receive special warning in regard to these mitzvot.¹ The Rashbam points out two

1 These are his words:

“ושם בסתר” – ...וכולה עבירות שרגילים להיות בסתר הם, כמו שאפרש בכלם, חוץ משנים שרגילים להיות פעמים בגלוי ופעמים בסתר, והן ע”ז ומכה רעהו ולכך פירש בשניהם בסתר. שעל עבירות שבגלוי לא באו לקלל, כי בית דין יענשוהו על הגלויות כמו שכתב בסוף כל הקללות הנסתרות לה’ אלהינו, הוא יקח נקמה מן הנסתרות שהרי נתקללו בשם הקב”ה, אבל הנגלות לנו ולבנינו עד עולם לעשות את כל דברי התורה הזאת, מלקות סקילה שריפה הרג וחנק. הלא תראה אין כתוב כאן “ארור שוכב עם אשת רעהו” כי מה לו ליכנס בבית אחרים ולא יליזו עליו. מקלה אביו במקום בית גידולו, אין אחרים רגילין שם. וכן משיג גבול בגנבה

exceptions, which are often committed in public: “Cursed is anyone who makes an idol” (15) and “cursed is he who kills his neighbor” (24), and therefore the Torah adds the word “בסתר” – in secret, to both of them, in order to emphasize that these sins are relevant here when committed in secret.

**Cursed is
he who
does not
uphold**

The passage ends with “Cursed is anyone who does not uphold the words of this Torah by carrying them out. Then all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’” This warning differs from the others, which all warn against sins (negative mitzvot) that a person does (in secret), while this final statement is a commandment

הוא עושה, שאם יראה, ימחה בידו. וכן משגה עור ומטה משפט, כל אילו דברי סתר. שכב עם אשת אביו זהו במקום שהוא גדל שם ואין רואה. עם כל בהמה אין זה כי אם בסתר. וכן אחותו. התנתו, האם רגילה בבית בתה.

“And sets it up in secret” ...all these are sins usually committed in secrecy, as I will explain them all, except for two which are sometimes committed openly and sometimes committed in secrecy, which are idol-worship and striking another, and therefore in both cases, the words “in secret” are added. For sins committed openly one is not accursed, for the court will punish him for the open sins, as it is written at the end of all the curses, the hidden things belong to the Lord our God, He will take His revenge for the secret things that God’s name was cursed through, but the revealed are for us and our children for ever to fulfill all of the words of these Torah, lashes, stoning, burning, death by the sword and strangulation. As you can see, it is not written “cursed is he who lies with his neighbor’s wife,” for how can he enter his neighbor’s house without being detected. He may dishonor his father in the house where he grew up, for others are not usually there. He would only adjust his neighbor’s border in secret, for if the neighbor were to see, he would rebuke him. And similarly one who misleads the blind or perverts judgment does so secretly. If he lies with his father’s wife in the house where he grew up, no one would see. Lying with animals would only be in secret. And so too his sister. His mother in law is often in her daughter’s house.

and an induction to be proactive, to uphold the words of the Torah. This incongruity has led commentators to wonder why this warning was added on to such a list of prohibitions, and why a warning to uphold the mitzvot of the Torah must be phrased so negatively – as a curse?

Moreover, commentators have found the expression “this Torah” difficult – does it refer to all mitzvot of the Torah, or specifically those listed in the above list?

Sins or
mitzvot in
secret

In the Rashbam’s opinion, the final “cursed” relates to all the mitzvot in the Torah, and this general warning is phrased as a curse in order to discourage people from transgressing any mitzvot **in secret**. The specific list includes the mitzvot that are **usually** transgressed in secret, while the final “cursed” is a general warning against transgressing any of the mitzvot, which a person **sometimes** does in secret (and the prohibition against making idols or striking one’s neighbor are acts explicitly mentioned as they are usually carried out in public).

The Ibn Ezra agrees that the final warning is not a summary of the warnings stated during the covenant, but he rejects the Rashbam’s explanation because the Torah’s language, “to carry them out,” indicates that it is referring to **positive commandments**, rather than to sins. Therefore, the Ibn Ezra explains that this warning applies to those who fails to carry out

positive commandments in private.²

**The entire
Torah**

Rashi agrees with the Ibn Ezra that the final “cursed” refers to all the mitzvot in the Torah, but he argues that “cursed” does not refer to positive mitzvot - rather, it is a general warning to keep the entire Torah, which also needs to be phrased thus:

Here, the entire Torah is included, and they accepted it with this oath.
"אשר לא יקים" – כאן כלל את כל התורה כולה וקבלו עליהם באלה ובשבועה.

Faith

The Ramban agrees with Rashi that this is a general warning regarding the entire Torah; but in his opinion “who does not uphold” does not refer to the **actual execution** of the mitzvot, but rather to the faith in the mitzvot’s authenticity and in the concept that reward or punishment awaits those who keep or transgress them.³

2 And this is the language of the Ibn Ezra:

"אשר לא יקים" – יש אומרים, על כל התורה. ויש אומרים, על אלה הנזכרים. ולא אמרו כלום, בעבור שכתוב "לעשות אותם". והנכון בעיני, כי קלל על מצות לא תעשה הנזכרים. וקלל מי שלא ישמור גם בסתר מצות עשה, על כן אמר לעשות אותם.

"Who do not fulfill" – some say, the entire Torah. And some say, all those [sins] mentioned. And no one said anything, as it says "by carrying them out." It seems correct to me that the curse is on the negative commandments mentioned. And accused is he who also does not fulfill positive mitzvot in secret, and it therefore says "to carry them out."

3 The Ramban writes thus:

ולפי דעתי, כי הקבלה הזאת, שיודעה במצות בלבן ויהיו בעיניו אמת ויאמין שהעושה אותן יהיה לו שכר וטובה והעובר עליהן יענש, ואם יכפור באחת מהן או תהיה בעיניו בטלה לעולם הנה הוא ארור. אבל אם עבר על אחת מהן, כגון שאכל החזיר והשקץ לתאותו או שלא עשה סוכה ולולב לעצלה, איננו בחרם הזה, כי לא אמר הכתוב אשר לא יעשה את דברי התורה הזאת, אלא אמר אשר לא יקים את דברי התורה הזאת לעשות, כטעם קיימו וקבלו היהודים (אסתר ט כז). והנה הוא חרם המורדים והכופרים.

And in my opinion, this acceptance, that he will admit to the

The Ramban brings proof for his words from the text itself: the Torah does not say “cursed is he who does not do the words of this Torah,” but “who does not uphold...” which shows that the expression “cursed” does not relate to the actual performance of the mitzvot but to the acceptance and belief of the entire Torah, as in the sense of “קיימו וקבלו היהודים” – “עליהם... להיות עושים” – “the Jews upheld and accepted... to carry out” in Megillat Esther (9:27).⁴ Another support for this argument lies in the fact that the entire list relates to acts performed in secret, and this closing statement relates to the underlying base of a person’s commitment to the Torah, which is inherently secret because it is an internal choice – to a person’s internal acceptance of the mitzvot and his belief in them.

mitzvot in his heart and he will perceive them as the truth and believe that whoever does them will be rewarded and whoever transgresses them will be punished, and if he denies one of them or perceives it as irrelevant, then he is accursed. But if he transgressed one of them, for example, he ate pork or insects out of greed, or did not build a sukkah or lulav out of laziness, he is not included in this taboo, for it is not written who does not *do* the words of this Torah, but who does not *uphold* the words of this Torah to carry them out, like the reason “the Jews upheld and received” (Esther 9:27). And this taboo concerns the rebellious and the heretics.

- 4 From the continuation of the Ramban’s words, it seems that he insists that “י קי ם” is not to “fulfill” but to “uphold” (and he therefore brings Chazal’s interpretations in the matter of upholding the words of the Torah (“for is there such a thing as a falling Torah?”). The Ramban therefore interprets that to uphold the Torah means to establish the principles and religious foundations that the Torah is based upon, that is the theory of reward and punishment and the belief in the authenticity of the mitzvot. [In Megilat Esther it says “upheld and accepted” - to uphold does not mean to carry out, but to decide upon the eternal establishment of the days of Purim].

Belief in reward and punishment and their authenticity and eternity is a crucial, basic principle of faith, and the Ramban emphasizes this many times in his commentary on the Torah. An important point of reference in the discussion of reward and punishment can be found in these parshiyot of reward and punishment, which appear in the Torah in both parashat Bechukotai (Vayikra 26) and in chapter 28 of our parasha, immediately following the passage of “cursed.”

We will now discuss the Ramban’s words in regard to the blessings and curses in our parasha, and on the subject of reward and punishment in general.

2. THE CURSES AS PROPHETIC ANTICIPATION OF HISTORY

The
curses of
Bechukotai
and the
curses of Ki
Tavo

In parashat Ki Tavo, the blessings and curses describe the reward for the fulfillment of the mitzvot, and goes in to great detail about the many punishments that will follow the failure to listen to God’s voice.⁵

The Ramban’s commentary on parashat Ki Tavo is very brief, and (in 28:42) he refers the reader to parashat Bechukotai, where he explains his principles regarding reward and punishment at great length.

Two
revelations

One of the issues that the Ramban explains is the prophetic historical significance of the passages of the blessings and the curses, and the difference between

5 Concerning the large amount of curses in contrast with the small amount of blessings, see my discussion of parashat Bechukotai.

parashat Bechukotai and parashat Ki Tavo. In his opinion, these episodes appear twice as a hint to two historical periods: the destruction of the First Temple and the Babylonian exile; and the destruction of the Second Temple and its consequent exile, and these are his words:

<p>Know and understand that these curses [in Bechukotai] hint to the first exile, for in the period of the First Temple all the words of this covenant came to pass during the exile and redemption...but in the second covenant the Torah hints to our [current] exile and to the redemption through which we will be redeemed...</p>	<p>ודע והבן כי האלות האלה (בפרשת בחוקותי) ירמוז לגלות ראשון, כי בבית הראשון היו כל דברי הברית הזאת הגלות והגאולה ממנו... אבל הברית שבמשנה תורה ירמוז לגלותנו זה ולגאולה שנגאל ממנו...</p>
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This interpretation is characteristic of the Ramban’s approach. He often claims that the stories of the Torah are not a story of the past, but an anticipation of history. Thus, he explains that the six days of Creation hint at the six thousand years of the world’s existence,⁶ and likewise, he interprets the acts of the forefathers as “a sign for the sons.”⁷

The blessings and curses as a prediction of the future

If so, in the Ramban’s opinion, the parshiyot of blessings and curses are not only promises and warnings, but actual **prophecy** of what will befall Israel in the future.



6 See his commentary on Bereshit 2:3.
 7 See, for example, his commentary on Bereshit 12:6; 26:20; 32:4-9; 47:28; Shemot 17:9.

3. REWARD AND PUNISHMENT AS HIDDEN MIRACLES

**Material
reward – a
hidden
miracle**

In parashat Bechukotai, the Ramban explains an important principle regarding blessings and curses at great length. He explains that the blessings, which serve as a reward for the observance of the mitzvot, are hidden miracles that result from God's direct intervention in his world in order to reward those who keep His mitzvot and punish those who sin.⁸ Reward and punishment are not the natural consequence of a person's deeds, and it is therefore more accurate to define them as "miracles"⁹; and the reason that these

8 From the Ramban's commentary on Vayikra 26:11:

...והשעם בזה, כי הברכות אע"פ שהם נסים, הם מן הנסים הנסתרים שכל התורה מלאה מהם כאשר פירשתי (בראשית י"ז, א). והם אפילו ליחיד העובד, כי כאשר יהיה האיש החסיד שומר כל מצות ה' אלוהיו, ישמרדו האל מן החולי והעקרות והשכול וימלא ימיו בטובה.

The reason for this, is that even though the blessings are miracles, they are hidden miracles of the kind that the whole Torah is filled with, as I explained (Bereshit 17:1). And they are even relevant to the individual, for if a person is devoted and observant of all the mitzvot of the Lord his God, then God will save him from illness and barrenness and bereavement and He will fill his days with good.

This principle appears in the Ramban's commentary on other places in the Torah, such as in Shemot 6:2:

For a person will only be rewarded for a mitzvah or punished for a sin through a miracle, and if the person would be left to nature or fate his deeds would not add or subtract from [his life]. But the reward and punishment of all the Torah in this world is only through miracles that are hidden, although all who see him assume it happens naturally, but they are really the result of reward and punishment.

9 He writes similarly in his commentary on Bereshit 46:15:

The Torah is entirely based on hidden miracles. The reasoning behind the Torah only stems from miracles, not miracle or custom. For the Torah's ends are all feats and wonders. For one who transgresses one of the [laws of] forbidden relations

“miracles” seem to come naturally is because they are “hidden miracles,” Divine intervention integrated in a natural way.¹⁰

or who eats forbidden fat will not be cut off or die naturally as a result, nor will the sky be as unyielding as iron because we planted in the seventh year. And likewise all the good that happens in the Torah is a result of the righteous's successful deeds, and all the prayers of David our king and all our prayers – wonders and miracles, only that they do not obviously change the nature of the world.

The Ramban's words challenge the Rambam, who wrote (in *Guide for the Perplexed*, II 29) that “when God created the Universe with its present physical properties, He made it part of these properties, that they should produce certain miracles at certain times.” That is, God created the world in such a way that it would continue running based on the natural laws He set in motion. The Rambam bases these words on the midrash (Bereshit Raba 5:4): “The Holy One, blessed be He, conditioned the sea so that it would split before Israel... not only did God condition the sea thus, but with all that was created in the six days of Creation... that the fire would not harm Hananiah, Mishael and Azarya, that the lions would not harm Daniel, that the fish would spit Jonah onto the shore...”.

10 Thus he also explains God's promise to Avraham that he would bear a son in old age (Bereshit 17:1):

“אל שדי” – ...ורבי אברהם פירשו... מנצח ומשודד מערכות השמים. וזהו הנכון, כי היא מדת הגבורה מנהגת העולם שיאמרו בה החכמים (ב"ר לה ד) “מדת הדין של מטה”.

וטעם להזכיר עתה זה השם, כי בו יעשו הנסים הנסתרים לצדיקים, להציל ממות נפשם, ולחיותם ברעב, ולפדותם במלחמה מיד חרב, ככל הנסים הנעשים לאברהם ולאבות, וככל הבאים בתורה בפרשת אם בחקותי (ויקרא כ"ו גמו) ובפרשת והיה כי תבא (דברים כ"ח אסח) בברכות ובקללות שכולם נסים הם, כי אין מן הטבע שיבואו הגשמים בעתם בעבדנו האלהים, ולא שיהיו השמים כברזל כאשר נורע בשנה השביעית, וכן כל היעודים שבתורה, אבל כולם נסים ובכולם תתנצח מערכת המזלות... ולכן אמר עתה לאברהם אבינו כי הוא התקיף המנצח שיגבר על מזלו ויוליד, ויהיה ברית בינו ובין זרעו לעולם, שיהיה חלק ה' עמו, וברצונו ינהיגם, לא יהיו תחת ממשלת כוכב ומזל...

“El Shaddai” – and Rabbi Avraham commented... triumphing the heavenly system. And this is correct, for it is the attribute of Gevurah ruling the world, about which Chazal said (Bereshit Raba 35:4) “the Midat HaDin (the attribute of judgment) that rules the world below.”

And the reason to mention this Divine name here is that through it, hidden miracles are performed for the righteous, to save them from ¹¹Death, to sustain them in times of famine,

One of the most problematic religious questions is why the Torah only mentions material reward as a reward for fulfilling the mitzvot (rain in its proper time and material wealth), while spiritual pleasure in heaven or eternal life in the World to Come is never mentioned explicitly. How can it be, that the purpose of the mitzvot is to bring a person only material satisfaction? Why does the Torah never focus – or never even mention – the next world, or Heaven and Hell?

The Ramban addresses this issue according to his beliefs, explaining that rewards in this world are hidden miracles. The fact that fulfillment of the mitzvot will lead to spiritual pleasure and the soul's eternal life is a simple, logical fact, and the Torah, therefore, had no need to explicitly mention this. Rather, the Torah teaches us that, against all odds and all logic, spiritual acts actually affect the physical world, because spirit and matter are inextricably entwined and affect each

to save them from the sword in wartime, like all of the miracles performed for Avraham and the forefathers, and all that is brought in the Torah in parashat Bechukotai (Vayikra 26:3-46) and all the blessings and curses mentioned in parashat Ki Tavo (Devarim 28: 1-68), which are all miracles, for it is not natural that rain should fall in its time when we serve God, but the sky be 'like iron' when we plant in the seventh year, and so it is with all such ends in the Torah, but all are miracles and all will triumph over the zodiac system... and therefore He now tells Avraham that he will triumph over his fate and bear a son, and there will be an everlasting covenant between Him and his offspring, that God's portion will lie with him, and in His will they will be guided, and they will never be governed by star or fate...

other.¹¹

Open
miracles
teach us
about the
hidden
miracles

These concealed ties, between the material and the physical world, are a wonder that cannot be fully understood by intellect, and they are therefore defined as hidden miracles.

How will people know to discern that material reward is not natural, but rather a hidden miracle? In the Ramban's opinion (brought at length in his commentary to Shemot 13:16)¹² the miracles of Egypt, which were open miracles, came to prove God's existence, His open intervention in the world, and His ability to change nature.¹³ With the help of the mitzvot

11. וכך הוא אומר בפירושו לשמות ו', ב:

ומפני זה תאריך התורה ביעודים שבעולם הזה, ולא תבאר יעודי הנפש בעולם הנשמות, כי אלה מופתים שכנגד התולדה, וקיום הנפש ודבקה באלוהים הוא דבר ראוי בתולדתה שהיא תשוב אל האלוהים אשר נתנה.

As he explains in his commentary on Shemot 6:2:

And because of this the Torah focus on goals in this world, rather than explain the spiritual goals of the world of souls, for these are unnatural wonders, while the existence of the soul and its connection to the God Who bestowed it is a natural, obvious result.

12 His words will be quoted in the next comments.

13...ועתה אומר לך כלל בטעם מצות רבות. הנה מעת היות ע"ג בעולם מימי אנוש החלו הדעות להשתבש באמונה, מהם כופרים בעיקר ואומרים כי העולם קדמון, כחשו בה' ויאמרו לא הוא, ומהם מכחישים בידיעתו הפרטית ואמרו איכה ידע אל ויש דעה בעליון (תהלים ע"ג, יא), ומהם שיודו בידיעה ומכחישים בהשגחה ויעשו אדם כדגי הים שלא ישגיח האל בהם ואין עמהם עונש או שכר, יאמרו עזב ה' את הארץ.

וכאשר ירצה האלהים בעדה או ביחיד ויעשה עמהם מופת בשנוי מנהגו של עולם וטבעו, יתברר לכל בטול הדעות האלה כלם, כי המופת הנפלא מורה שיש לעולם אלוה מחדשו, ויודע ומשגיח ויכול. וכאשר יהיה המופת ההוא נגזר תחלה מפי נביא יתברר ממנו עוד אמתת הנבואה, כי דיבר האלהים את האדם ויגלה סודו אל עבדיו הנביאים, ותתקיים עם זה התורה כלה.

לכן יאמר הכתוב במופתים: "למען תדע כי אני ה' בקרב הארץ" (שמות ח', יח), להורות על ההשגחה, כי לא עזב אותה למקרים כדעתם. ואמר (שם ט', כט) "למען תדע כי לה' הארץ", להורות על החידוש, כי הם שלו שבראם מאין. ואמר (ט יד), "בעבור תדע כי אין כמוני בכל הארץ" להורות על היכולת, שהוא שליט בכל, אין מעכב בידו, כי בכל זה היו המצריים מכחישים או מסתפקים.

which commemorate these miracles, such as Pesach, tefillin, mezuzah etc,¹⁴ we must always remember

Now I will tell you a rule that applies to the reasoning behind many mitzvot. Ever since idolatry began in the days of Enosh, people's faith has become corrupt, who are heretics who say that the world has always existed, denying God and saying that He is not, denying His personal knowledge, saying "how does God know? Is there knowledge in the most High? (Psalms 73:11), while some admit His knowledge but deny His providence, saying He made people like the fish of the sea, who God does not watch over, with no punishment or reward, they say God has left the Land.

And when God is concerned with a congregation or an individual and he performs wonders that change the ways of the world or nature, then all of these opinions are proved wrong, for these wondrous miracles show that the world has a God who renews and knows and watches over and is able. And if that wonder is first predicted by a prophet, it also proves the authenticity of prophecy, for God spoke to humankind and revealed His secrets to those who serve Him, and the entire Torah will be upheld through this.

Therefore, the text speaks of wonders: "so that you shall know that I am the Lord, in the midst of the earth" (Shemot 8:18), to prove that there is providence, for He did not abandon it to chance. And it says (ibid. 9:29) "so that you may know that the earth is for God," to show the innovation, for they are His that He created from nothing. And it says (9:14) "so that you may know that there is none like Me in all the earth," to show His ability, that He rules over everything, and no one can hold Him back, for the Egyptians denied or were doubtful of all this.

If so, then the great wonders and signs are faithful witnesses of God's faith and the entire Torah.

14 These are his words:

...ובעבור כי הקב"ה לא יעשה אות ומופת בכל דור לעיני כל רשע או כופר, יצוה אותנו שנעשה תמיד זכרון ואות לאשר ראו עינינו, ונעתיק הדבר אל בנינו, ובניהם לבניהם, ובניהם לדור אחרון. והחמיר מאד בענין הזה כמו שחייב כרת באכילת חמץ ... והכל להיות לנו בכל הדורות עדות במופתים שלא ישתכחו, ולא יהיה פתחון פה לכופר להכחיש אמונת האלוהים. כי הקונה מזוזה בזו אחד וקבעה בפתחו ונתכוון בענינה כבר הודה בחדוש העולם ובידיעת הבורא והשגחתו, וגם בנבואה, והאמין בכל פנות התורה, מלבד שהודה שחסד הבורא גדול מאד על עושי רצונו, שהוציאנו מאותו עבדות לחירות וכבוד גדול ליכות אבותיהם החפצים ביראת שמו.

ולפיכך אמרו (אבות פ"ב מ"א) הוי זהיר במצוה קלה כבחמורה שכולן חמודות וחביבות

these open miracles, and thus we will know how to recognize such hidden miracles as well:

Through the great, publicized miracles, a person becomes aware of the hidden miracles which are the underlying basis

ומן הנסים הגדולים המפורסמים אדם מודה בנסים הנסתרים שהם יסוד התורה כלה, שאין לאדם חלק בתורת משה רבינו עד

מאד, שבכל שעה אדם מודה בהן לאלהיו, וכוונת כל המצות שנאמין באלוהינו ונודה אליו שהוא בראנו, והיא כוונת היצירה, שאין לנו טעם אחר ביצירה הראשונה, ואין אל עליון חפץ בתחתונים מלבד שידע האדם ויודה לאלוהיו שבראו...

...because God will not perform miracles and wonders in every generation, in front of all the wicked and the heretics, He commanded us to always remember what our eyes saw, and we will transmit this to our children, and their children to their children, until the last generation. And He is very severe in this matter, for example, one deserves to be cut off for eating chametz on Pesach...and all this is to ensure that in every generation, we will have testimony so that we will not forget, and no heretic will be able to deny God's faith. For one who buys a mezuzah for one zuz and fixed it in his doorpost with intention is admitting to the world's creation and the knowledge of the Creator and His providence, and also in prophecy, and believes in every detail of the Torah, besides the fact that he thus admits that the Maker's kindness is very great to all who do His will, for He took us out of slavery to freedom and great honor for the merit of our forefathers, who desired to fear His name.

And it therefore says (*Avot 2:1*) "Be careful in a small mitzvah as much as in a great one, for all are sweet and greatly beloved, for through them, at all times, a person thanks his God," and the purpose of all the mitzvot is for us to believe in our God and to thank Him for creating us, and that is the intention of these creations, for there is no other point in the first creation, and the Supreme God is only interested in the world below so that humanity can know and thank the God Who created us...

of the entire Torah, for a person has no share in the Torah until he believes that all we say and do are miracles that transcend nature and the ways of the world, both on an individual and a collective scale, that a person will only succeed if he does mitzvot, and if he transgresses them he will be punished, all according to Divine decree... (Ramban, Shemot 13:16)

שנאמין בכל דברינו ומקרינו שכלם נסים אין בהם טבע ומנהגו של עולם, בין ברבים בין ביחיד, אלא אם יעשה המצות יצליחנו שכרו, ואם יעבור עליהם יכריתנו ענשו, הכל בגזרת עליון...

The special miracles that took place in Egypt and other such miracles in Israel's history teach us that hidden miracles are also from God. This is the main reason behind the special importance of Seder night: the detailed recounting of the open miracles that took place during the Exodus from Egypt reinforces the entire family's awareness of God's providence, helping them to sense it during everyday life; helping them recognize God's hidden miracles.

The important principle that the Ramban wishes to emphasize here is that the acts we do in this world do not only affect a person's spiritual life, but through God's "hidden miracles," they also affect a person's material life.

4. ISRAEL'S HISTORY AS AN OPEN MIRACLE

Individual
and
collective
reward

The Ramban emphasizes that in the parasha of blessings and curses, reward and punishment are described as a collective punishment for all of Israel.¹⁵

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15 He phrases it thus (on Vayikra 26:11):

Similarly to individual reward, the reward promised to Israel on a collective scale will not defy the laws of nature, but will come through hidden, apparently “natural” means.

God's governing of Israel is openly recognized

However, despite the similarity between individual blessing and collective blessing, the Ramban points out the differences between them: when an individual is rewarded (or punished) in a “natural” way, this is in fact a **hidden** miracle; but when Israel are collectively rewarded with the abundance God intends for them when they keep His mitzvot, it is a **clear, open** miracle, even when it seems to happen in a natural way.<sup>16</sup>

אבל אלו הברכות שבפרשה הזאת הן כלליות בעם, והן בהיות כל עמנו כלם צדיקים... וכבר בארנו כי כל אלה הברכות כולם נסים אין בטבע שיבאו הגשמים ויהיה השלום לנו מן האויבים ויבא מורך בלבם לנוס מאה מפני המשה בעשותנו החוקים והמצוות, ולא שיהיה הכל הופך מפני זרענו השנה השביעית.

But these blessings in this parasha are on a collective scale, when all our people are righteous... and we already explained that all these blessings are miracles, for it is not natural that rains will come and we will have peace from our enemies and a hundred of them will flee out of fear of five when we observe laws and mitzvot, but that the opposite will happen because we planted in the seventh year.

16 The Ramban writes thus:

ואף על פי שהם (הברכות לכלל ישראל) נסים נסתרים, שעולם כמנהגו נוהג עמהם, אבל הם מתפרסמים מצד היותם תמיד לעולם בכל הארץ.

כי אם הצדיק האחד יחיה, ויסיר ה' מחלה מקרבו, וימלא ימיו, יקרה גם זה בקצת רשעים. אבל שתהיה ארץ אחת כולה, ועם אחד תמיד, ברדת הגשם בעתו, ושובע, ושלוח, ושלום, ובריאות, וגבורה, ושברון האויבים, בענין שאין כמוהו בכל העולם, יודע לכל כי מאת ה' היתה זאת. ועל כן אמר (דברים כ"ז) וראו כל עמי הארץ כי שם ה' נקרא עליך ויראו מורך.

והיפך זה יהיה בקלות, בעונשי הארץ שאמר (פסוק יט) ונתתי את שמיכם כברזל, ועונשי החולי כמו שאמר (דברים כח נט) וחלאים רעים ונאמנים, שיקולל המאכל ויחליא, ויתפרסם הנס בהיותו תמיד קיים בכלום. על כן כתוב (שם כ"א) ואמר הדור האחרון בניכם אשר יקומו מאחריכם והנכרי אשר יבא מארץ רחוקה וראו את מכות הארץ והיא ואת תחלואיה... כי כן יהיה פעמים רבים כמנהגו של עולם בכל האומות שיבאו מקרים רעים באיש אחד, רק בארץ ההיא יתמהו וישאלו כל הגוים על מה עשה ה' ככה לארץ הזאת (שם פסוק כג), כי

When reflecting upon Israel's history, God's open intervention cannot be overlooked. For many generations, Am Yisrael suffered from the curses described in our parasha, which, in the Ramban's opinion, were all fulfilled in "this exile," that is, the exile that began with the destruction of the Second Temple. However, Am Yisrael miraculously survived all this suffering, against all natural odds and unlike other nations. Today, the Ramban's words continue to ring true: Am Yisrael has been granted to return to its Land, and no other nation has ever been so long in exile and then returned to its own land. While this seems to have unfolded naturally, it is, in fact, an open miracle.

## 5. COMPLETE BLESSING

The complete fulfillment of the blessings

In the Ramban's opinion, the blessings will only be completely fulfilled when Am Yisrael's devotion and service of God is perfected.<sup>17</sup>

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כולם יראו וידעו כי יד ה' עשתה זאת ויאמרו (שם פסוק כד) על אשר עזבו את ברית ה' אלוהי אבותם.

17 In his commentary on Vayikra, *ibid.*, he writes thus:

הכלל כי בהיות ישראל שלמים והם רבים, לא יתנהג ענינם בטבע כלל, לא בגופם, ולא בארצם, לא בכללם, ולא ביחיד מהם, כי יברך השם לחמם ומימם, ויסיר מחלה מקרבם, עד שלא יצטרכו לרופא ולהשתמר בדרך מדרכי הרפואות כלל, כמו שאמר (שמות טו כו) כי אני ה' רופאך...

When Israel are collectively perfect, they will not be concerned with nature at all – neither bodily, nor in their land, nor collectively nor individually, for God will bless them with their bread and water, and remove all illness from amongst them, and they will have no need of a doctor nor be concerned with health or medicine at all, as it says (Shemot 15:26) for I am the Lord, your Healer...

**Blessing in  
everything**

In a perfect situation, everything is blessed: each and every detail is blessed, and proceeds in the most perfect way. Indeed, the blessings in our parasha touch upon every part of life – fertility, agriculture, rain, livelihood, victory over enemies, leadership, and success in everything we do:

Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country. Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out. The Lord will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways. The Lord will command the blessing on you in your storehouses and in all to which you set your hand, and He will bless you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה בְּעִיר וּבְרוּךְ  
אַתָּה בְּשׂוּדָה: בְּרוּךְ פְּרִי  
בְטֶמֶךְ וּפְרִי אֲדָמָתְךָ וּפְרִי  
בְהֶמְתֶּךָ שֹׁגֵר אֲלֶיךָ  
וְעִשְׂתָּרוֹת צֹאנֶיךָ: בְּרוּךְ  
טוֹבְאֶךָ וּמִלְשֵׁאֲרֹתֶיךָ: בְּרוּךְ  
אַתָּה בְּבֹאֶיךָ וּבְרוּךְ אַתָּה  
בְּצֵאתְךָ: וַתְּהִי ה' אֵת אֵיבֶיךָ  
הַקָּמִים עֲלֶיךָ נִגְפִים  
לְפָנֶיךָ בְּדַרְכְּךָ אֶחָד יֵצְאוּ  
אֵלֶיךָ וּבְשִׁבְעָה דְרָכִים  
יִנְוְסוּ לְפָנֶיךָ: יֵצֵאוּ ה' אֶתְךָ  
אֶת הַבְּרָכָה בְּאַסְמִינֶיךָ  
וּבְכָל מִלְשַׁח יָדְךָ וּבְרָכְךָ  
בְּאַרְצֵךָ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ  
נָתַן לְךָ: וְקִיַּמְךָ ה' לְעַם  
קָדוֹשׁ פְּאֻשֶׁר גִּשְׁבַּע לְךָ  
כִּי תִשְׁמֹר אֶת מִצְוֹת ה'  
אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְהִלַּכְתָּ בְּדַרְכָּיו:

The Lord will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in His ways. Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they shall be afraid of you. And the Lord will grant you plenty of goods, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your ground, in the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers to give you. The Lord will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. And the Lord will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath. (28:3-13)

וְרָאוּ כָּל עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ  
כִּי שֵׁם ה' נִקְרָא עָלֶיךָ  
וְיָרְאוּ מִמֶּנִּי: וְהוֹתַרְךָ  
ה' לְטוֹבָה בְּפָרִי  
בְּטַנְךָ וּבְפָרִי בְּהִמְוֹתֶךָ  
וּבְפָרִי אֲדָמְתֶךָ עַל  
הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע  
ה' לְאַבְרָהָם לֵאמֹר לְךָ:  
יִפְתַּח ה' לְךָ אֶת אוֹצְרוֹ  
הַטּוֹב אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם  
לְתֵת מִטֶּר אֲרָצְךָ בְּעֵתוֹ  
וּלְבָרְךָ אֶת כָּל מַעֲשֵׂה  
יָדְךָ וְהָלִוִית גוֹיִם רַבִּים  
וְאַתָּה לֹא תִלְוֶה: וְנָתַתְּ  
ה' לְרֹאשׁ וְלֹא לְזָנָב  
וְהָיִיתָ רַק לְמַעְלָה וְלֹא  
תִהְיֶה לְמַטָּה:

## 6. “DO NOT RELY ON MIRACLES”

**There is  
no perfec-  
tion in idol  
worship**

The Ramban emphasizes that such blessing is the ideal situation that is dependent on Israel’s achievement of perfect worship of God. However, such abundance does not come naturally: Am Yisrael must come a long way before they reach such perfection.

The Torah recognizes the reality of this world – that people are far from perfect and must deal with the problems of this world, and its words are chosen with such an audience in mind.

### Natural leadership

Therefore, even though Am Yisrael is ideally governed by miracles, the Torah commands us to run our lives in a natural way, rather than to rely on miracles or supernatural provenance. For example, God commands Am Yisrael to prepare an army and to send spies to check out the territory before entering the Land.<sup>18</sup>

18 Regarding the census before entrance to the Land (Bamidbar 1:45):

... כי היה זה כדרך שהמלכות עושה בבואם למלחמה. כי עתה היו מזומנים ליכנס לארץ ולבא במלחמה עם מלכי האמורי אשר בעבר הירדן ועם השאר כולם... והיו משה והנשיאים צריכין לדעת מספר חלוצי צבא המלחמה וכן מספר כל שבט ושבט ומה יפקוד עליו בערבות מואב במערכות המלחמה, כי התורה לא תסמוך על הנס שירדוף אחד אלה. וזה טעם "כל יוצא צבא בישראל", כי המנין מפני צבא המלחמה. לגבי שליחת המרגלים (שם י"ג, ב):

...כי ישראל אמרו כדרך כל הבאים להלחם בארץ נכריה שישולחים לפניהם אנשים לדעת הדרכים ומבוא הערים ובשובם ילכו התרים בראש הצבא להורות לפניהם הדרכים... וזו עצה הגונה בכל כובשי ארצות, וכן עשה עוד משה עצמו שנאמר (להלן כא לב) וישלח משה לרגל את יעזר, וכן ביהושע בן נון (יהושע ב א) שנים אנשים מרגלים, ועל כן היה טוב בעיני משה. כי הכתוב לא יסמוך בכל מעשיו על הנס, אבל יצוה בגלחמים להחליץ ולהשמר ולארוב... דוגמה נוספת לעקרון זה היא הציווי לנח על בניית התיבה (בראשית ו', יט):

"מכל בשר וגו'" – ידוע כי החיות רבות מאד, ומהן גדולות מאד... וכאשר תאסוף לכלם מאכל אשר יאכל לשנה תמימה, לא תכיל אותם התיבה הזאת, ולא עשר כיוצא בה. אבל הוא נס, החזיק מועט את המרובה.

ואם תאמר יעשנה קטנה ויסמך על הנס הזה... עשו אותה גדולה, למעט בנס, כי כן הדרך בכל הניסים שבתורה או בנביאים לעשות מה שביד אדם לעשות, והשאר יהיה בידי שמים.

For this is what kings would do before setting out to war. For now they were about to enter the land and go to war with the kings of the Emori in Transjordan...and Moshe and the chiefs needed to know the number of those able to go to war and likewise the number of each tribe...for the Torah does not rely upon a miracle, that one should pursue a thousand, and this is the reason for "every member of the army in Israel," for

That is, on one hand, the Torah promises blessing in the form of supernatural, miraculous providence; but on the other hand, the Torah dictates that Am Yisrael should not rely on such miracles, and should lead natural lives. This is because the Torah was given to people, to fallible mortals, who are far from perfect and therefore must deal with the real, natural

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they counted because of the army.

Regarding the sending of spies (ibid. 13:2)

...כי ישראל אמרו בדרך כל הבאים להלחם בארץ נכריה ששולחים לפניהם אנשים לדעת הדרכים ומבוא הערים ובשובם ילכו התרים בראש הצבא להורות לפניהם הדרכים... וזו עצה הגונה בכל כובשי ארצות, וכן עשה עוד משה עצמו שנאמר (להלן כא לב) וישלח משה לרגל את יעזר, וכן ביהושע בן נון (יהושע ב א) שנים אנשים מרגלים, ועל כן היה טוב בעיני משה. כי הכתוב לא יסמוך בכל מעשיו על הנס, אבל יצוה בנלחמים להחליץ ולהשמור ולארוב...

For Israel said, Whoever goes to fight in a foreign land sends people before them to know the ways and the layout of the cities and upon their return they report to the head of the army to show them the way...and this is fair advice for all conquerors of lands, and Moshe himself did so, as it says (21:32) and Moshe sent to spy out Jazer, as did Yehoshua Bin Nun (Joshua 2:1), who sent two spies, and therefore it was good in Moshe's eyes. For the text will not entirely rely upon miracles, but will command the fighters to escape and to take care and to lay ambush...

Another example of this principle can be found in Noah's commandment to build an ark (Bereshit 6:19):

"מכל בשר וגו'" – ידוע כי החיות רבות מאד, ומהן גדולות מאד... וכאשר תאסוף לכלם מאכל אשר יאכל לשנה תמימה, לא תכיל אותם התיבה הזאת, ולא עשר כיוצא בה. אבל הוא נס, החזיק מועט את המרובה.

ואם תאמר יעשנה קטנה ויסמך על הנס הזה... עשו אותה גדולה, למעט בנס, כי כן הדרך בכל הניסים שבתורה או בנביאים לעשות מה שביד אדם לעשות, והשאר יהיה בידי שמים.

"from all flesh" – it is known that there are many kinds of animals, some of them very big...and when enough food for them all for an entire year was collected, the ark would not have been able to contain it all, nor even ten such arks. But a miracle occurred, and the small contained the great. And if it had been said, Make it small and rely on a miracle...[yet they still] made it big, to reduce the miracle, for so it is with all miracles in the Torah or in Nevi'im, to do everything possible for a person to do, and the rest is in the hands of Heaven.



challenges of this world.

**Spiritual  
and mate-  
rial aspira-  
tion**

It can be understood from the Ramban that in this world, people must operate on two levels, striving both materially and spiritually. A person must serve God to the best of his ability, strive to fulfill the mitzvot the best way he can, and the further he advances down the path of devotion to God, the more blessing that will be bestowed upon him. At the same time, a person must take practical steps to ensure his material existence, rather than to rely on miracles, for no one is so perfect that he can be sure that Divine providence will miraculously take care of all his needs.

**Can't we  
rely on  
miracles?**

Wouldn't we expect that the Ramban, who considers that "each and everything that happens to us is a miracle," would adopt the approach of "relying upon miracles,"<sup>19</sup> but in fact, he emphasizes the importance of the principle "*not* to rely on miracles."<sup>20</sup> Why is this

19 As it can be understood from his words at the end of his commentary on Vayikra 26:11:

... אבל הדורש השם בנביא לא ידרוש ברופאים. ומה חלק לרופאים בבית עושי רצון השם, אחר שהבטיח וברך את לחמך ואת מימך והסירותי מחלה מקרבך, והרופאים אין מעשיהם רק על המאכל והמשקה להזהיר ממנו ולצוות עליו... אבל ברצות השם דרכי איש אין לו עסק ברופאים.

But a person who inquires of a prophet will not inquire of the doctors. And what is left for doctors to do in the homes of those who do God's will, after He promised to bless your bread and water and to remove illness from your midst, when the doctors' job is only to advise about warning about and recommending food and drink... but when a man's ways please God, he has no business with doctors.

20 In continuation to the words which I quoted in the previous comment (Vayikra 26:11) the Ramban says that despite the fact that "when a man's ways please God, he has no business

so?

God's  
providence  
in the nat-  
ural world

It seems that according to the Ramban's approach, the tremendous power of God's miracles and providence is most fully manifested where the spiritual and the material intersect. The Ramban has taught us to be attuned to God's hidden miracles – that is, how God's providence is expressed in the natural world. Complete belief in God's perpetual providence, in His hidden miracles, is faith of a higher degree than belief in His open miracles. Therefore, blessing that stems from human effort and industry is greater than an open miracle alone. Providence over Am Yisrael and the future redemption is characterized by potency that connects Am Yisrael's spiritual and practical deeds with the special blessing that God bestows upon His people, which strengthens them and transforms nature into “a public miracle.” That is, God's perpetual providence over us is always connected to our spiritual and material efforts. This Divine and human cooperation, and the knowledge that God's hand guides everything, is what paves our

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with doctors,” the Torah still knows that this is not a realistic situation in this world, and therefore talks about healing and so on, and does not rely on miracles:

”ורפא ירפא” – ”מכאן שנתנה רשות לרופא לרפאות”... ועל כן האנשים הנעים שהכו זה את זה באבן או באגרוף (שמות כ”א, יח) יש על המכה תשלומי הרפואה, כי התורה לא תסמוך דיניה על הנסים, כאשר אמרה (דברים ט”ו, יא) כי לא יחדל אביון מקרב הארץ, מדעתו שכן יהיה.

“and a doctor will heal” – from here we learn that doctors have permission to heal...and therefore fighting people who hit one another with stones or fists (Shemot 21:18) must pay doctor's fees, for the Torah will not base its laws on miracles, as it says (Devarim 15:11) there will always be destitute people in the land, it is of the opinion that there will be.

## special path as God's chosen people.<sup>21</sup>

21 Thus, perhaps, we can explain the discussion in the Talmud (*Berakhot* 8a):

גדול הנהגה מוגיעו יותר מירא שמים דאילו גבי ירא שמים כתיב: "אשרי איש ירא את ה' ואלו גבי נהנה מוגיעו כתיב: "יגיע כפיך כי תאכל אשריך וטוב לך", אשריך בעולם הזה וטוב לך לעולם הבא, ולגבי ירא שמים וטוב לך לא כתיב ביה.

One who enjoys the fruits of his toil is greater than one who fears Heaven, for regarding fear of Heaven it is written: "Happy is he who fears the Lord," while in regard to one who enjoys the fruits of his toil it says: "When you eat the fruits of your toil, you will be happy and goodness will be yours," happy in this world and good for you in the next, and regarding fear of Heaven "goodness will be yours" is not written.

And as the "*Ketav Sofer*" explains in his commentary on the Torah (*Devarim* 32:46):

ולבאר ולפרש כוונת המאמר הלז אקדים לפרש דברי חז"ל (ברכות ח ע"א) שאמרו "גדול הנהגה מוגיע כפו יותר מירא שמים", ורבים עמדו על הקושיה: אם הנהגה מוגיע כפו אינו ירא שמים פשיטא דודאי אינו גדול מירא שמים, ואם הוא גם ירא שמים עכ"פ מאי מעליותא מפני שנהנה מוגיע כפו יותר ממי שאינו נהנה מוגיע כפו. ונ"ל כי כוונת חז"ל נהנה מוגיע כפו שנהנה בדרך הטבע, שעושה פעולה לפרנס עצמו או שמתפרנס ע"י אחר ג"כ נקרא יגיע שמכניע עצמו אליו וצריך להודות לו והכל בדרך הטבע, ומי שאינו נהנה באופן זה היינו כישראל במדבר שה' המטיר להם לחם מן השמים שלא בדרך הטבע ולא עשו שום פעולה לדבר, וכר"ש בן יוחאי שנעשה לו נס במערה שהיה לו לאכול ולשתות. והנה מי שאינו עושה פעולה לפרנסתו רואה השגחת השם תמיד ואין באפשר שישכח זמן מה ויסור ה' מן לבו, כי רואה בעין תמיד גבורותיו ונפלאותיו, ואינו יכול לתלות בכחו ועוצם ידו ומוסיף יראת ה' תמיד. אבל מי שנהנה מוגיע כפו ותחבולותיו בקל יבוא להסיר את לבו מה' ולהודות ולשבח עצמו, ולא ימצא עצמו מחוייב לשבח ולעבוד ולירא את ה'. ואם מ"מ אינו חושב כן ויראת ה' על פניו תמיד ומן ה' אל יסיר לבו זה גדול מזה. וז"כ גדול הנהגה מוגיע כפו והוא ירא שמים הוא יותר מירא שמים ואינו נהנה רק על יד ה' כמ"ש.

To explain and interpret that one's intention, I will first interpret Chazal's words (*Berakhot* 8a) who say "One who benefits from his toil is greater than one who fears Heaven," and many have pointed out the difficulty: if one who enjoys the fruits of his toil does not fear Heaven, it is obvious that he is certainly not greater than one who does fear Heaven, and if he also fears Heaven, in any case, why is considered greater if he enjoys the fruits of his toil than if he does not enjoy the fruits of his toil? It seems to me that Chazal's intention is, one who enjoys the fruits of his toil is one who enjoys them naturally, who works to sustain himself or who gets his livelihood through another is also called one who toils who subordinates himself to another and must thank him and all

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happens naturally, and whoever does not enjoy in this way is like Israel in the desert, when God rained down bread from Heaven for them in an unnatural way and they did nothing at all for it, or like Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, for whom a miracle was performed in the cave to provide him with food and drink. And whoever does nothing for his own sustenance sees God's constant providence and he cannot forget God or remove Him from his heart for any amount of time, for he constantly sees His might and wonders, and he cannot depend on his own strength or ability and he is always fearful of God. But whoever enjoys the fruits of his own toil and his own labors can easily come to remove God from his heart, and thank and praise himself, rather than find himself obligated to praise and serve and fear God. And if he still does not think like that, and fears God anyway, constantly, and does not remove God from his heart, then he is much greater than that. And this is the meaning of "One who benefits from his toil is greater than one who fears Heaven" – for he is greater than one who fears Heaven, and does not only enjoy from God's hand, as it is written.





