



Likkutei Sichos

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To See Blessings

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A note on the translation: Rounded parentheses and square brackets reflect their use in the original *sichah*; squiggly parentheses are interpolations of the translator or editor. The footnotes in squiggly parentheses are those of the translators or editors, and do not correspond to the footnotes in the original. Considerable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the translation, while at the same time maintaining readability. The translation, however, carries no official authority. As in all translations, the possibility of inadvertent errors exists. **Your feedback is needed — please send all comments to: info@projectlikkuteisichos.org**

1.

A TALE OF TWO TRANSLATIONS

The first verse of our *parshah* reads,¹ “Behold, I present before you today a blessing and a curse.” *Onkelos* translates “a blessing and a curse” as *birchan v’lotin* {Aramaic for “blessings and curses”}. He maintains the same translation in the verses that follow.

However, the first two times the word “curse” appears (“a blessing and a curse”; “and the curse”),² *Targum Yonasan* translates “and a curse” as “*vechilufa*” — “and its substitution.” (Similarly, *Targum Yerushalmi* translates “curses” in the second verse as “*vechilufeihen*” — “and their substitutions.”)

We need to clarify: Why do the two *Targums* differ in translating the word “curse?”

To add to the confusion, in the subsequent verse, “and {those receiving} the curse upon Mount Eval,”³ *Targum Yonasan* changes his translation, rendering it (not as “its substitution,” as he did earlier, but) as “those {receiving the curse}” (similar to *Onkelos*).

2.

SUBSTANCE OF SUBSTITUTION

There are additional puzzling points in *Targum Yonasan*:

- a) “A curse” stands on its own merits; “a substitution” means **substituting** one entity for a different (pre-existing) entity or situation.⁴

¹ *Devarim* 11:26.

² *Devarim* 11:27.

³ *Devarim* 11:29.

⁴ {I.e., this seems to be an inaccurate translation of “a curse.”}

b) To substitute things, they must be **distinct** from each other, which is why a substitution would be made. At the same time, they must have similarities, which makes substitution **possible**. But two things that are polar opposites, like a blessing and a curse, cannot serve as a substitute for the other.

[We find a similar idea regarding the substitutions of letters, where only letters that share some commonality can be substituted for each other. As the *Zohar* writes, “וַעַד” {*va’ed*} is the same as “אחד” {*echad*} by **substitution** of letters.” This is possible only because the letters in “*va’ed*” are similar to the letters in “*echad*.” The “ו” {*vav*} in *va’ed* replaces the “א” {*alef*} in *echad*, since they both belong to the group of letters known as “אָהוּי” (letters that flow, resting letters, letters of breath.)⁵ The “ח” {*ches*} of *echad* is substituted for the “ע” {*ayin*} of *va’ed*, because they both belong to the group of letters known as “אָחָע,” which are vocalized from the throat. The **large** “ד” {*dalet*} is substituted with the standard *dalet* of *va’ed* — since both are the same letter, *dalet*.

In light of these considerations, how can a “curse” be translated as a “**substitution**” for a blessing?

3.

A TALE OF TWO STYLES

The explanation is as follows:

The difference between *Targum Onkelos* and *Targum Yonasan* (and *Yerushalmi*) (**generally**) is that *Targum Onkelos* **interprets** the words simply. Even when the latter explains the subject matter, it hews to the **simple** approach. In contrast, *Targum Yonasan* (and *Yerushalmi*) often do more than

⁵ In pronunciation, they flow from the consonants preceding them; they are sometimes silent and “resting;” they serve as conduits for the breath that serve to power all the other letters.

just translate; they add explanations, cite *Midrashim*, offer halachic rulings, and the like.

For this reason, *Onkelos* (whose aim is to translate according to the plain meaning of Scripture) translates “and a curse” as “*v’lotin*.”

From the perspective of *Midrash*, however, a question remains: Since the verse says, “**I present** before you today,” i.e., the blessing and curse come from Hashem, how can we interpret this to mean that **Hashem** gives — {and our Sages teach} “All who give, give generously”⁶ — **confers** something that is the opposite of goodness and blessing? It is obvious that “no evil descends from Above,”⁷ and “evil will not emanate from the mouth of the Most High!”⁸

For this reason, *Targum Yonasan* **explains** that in this context, “curse” refers to “a substitution” — a substitute for a blessing. Meaning, a curse results from the recipient's behavior, and not from Hashem {declaring}, “**I present.**” Due to the undesirable **behavior** of the Jewish people, the blessing is substituted by a curse (before it reaches the recipients), **similar** to how the proper behavior of “obeying the *mitzvos* of Hashem, your G-d”⁹ brings about “I present... a blessing.”

But in a later verse, which says,¹⁰ “**You shall position...** the curse on Mt. Eval,” since the Torah does not refer to Hashem as the source of the curse, even *Targum Yonasan* translates it according to its plain meaning, “those who {receive the} curse.”

⁶ *Bava Basra* 53a.

⁷ So quoted in numerous places in Chassidus (see *Iggeres Hakodesh*, ch. 11).

⁸ *Eicha* 3:38.

⁹ *Devarim* 11:27.

¹⁰ {*Devarim* 11:29.}

4.

LEVELS OF CONCEALMENT

However, this explanation is not entirely satisfactory: How can we say that Hashem is not the source of the “substitution – curse,” but that it originates from the people? Why, the verse states clearly that “**I present** before you today a blessing and **a curse!**” Evidently, the clause “I present” also refers to the curse, especially since “וּקְלָלָהּ” {and a curse} has the **conjunctive** prefix “וְ” {*vav*, translated as “and”}.

The explanation:

Generally, the idea to translating the Torah for the benefit of **Jews**¹¹ — from the Holy Tongue¹² into Aramaic (and other languages) — was necessitated by the exile and subjugation of the Jewish people, requiring the translation of the Torah into the various languages of the seventy nations.

But in responding to this situation, there can be two approaches to view and explain the suffering of exile:

- a) According to the approach of *Targum Onkelos* — the *targum* of **Babylonia**, the place where Divinity was most concealed and hidden due to exile¹³ — we view these afflictions exactly as they seem: they are “*lotin*,” curses.
- b) According to the approach of *Targum Yonasan* and *Yerushalmi* — *targumim* of the Land of Israel, where the concealment and hiddenness of Divinity resulting from exile was not as pronounced — we are privy to the deeper meaning of this suffering. (This also dovetails with what was mentioned above, that their approach to *targum* includes homiletic

¹¹ As opposed to the translation of the Torah into seventy languages by Moshe (described in *Devarim* ch. 27), which was for the purpose of sharing the Torah’s message with the nations of the world. At that time, the Jewish people had no need for a translation, as their exclusive language was the Holy Tongue.

¹² {“*Lashon HaKodesh*,” in the original, referring to biblical Hebrew.}

¹³ See *Sanhedrin* 24a: “He has set me in darkness’ — this is the *Talmud* of Babylonia.”

teachings of our Sages, which express the inner meaning of the written Torah.) Therefore, we truly view curses as substitutions, which, as explained above, can only be made with two similar entities. For only the way a blessing is expressed has changed, while its intent and purpose (and inner meaning) remains goodness and blessing.

This is similar to the meaning of the verse: “He afflicted you and let you hunger... that just as a father will chastise his child, so Hashem, your L-rd, chastises you,” so that “you shall observe the commandments of Hashem, your L-rd... {for He is} is bringing you to a good land.”¹⁴ {These afflictions are} for the purpose of refining the Jewish people, enabling them to absorb the awesome revelations¹⁵ of the Redemption.¹⁶

This {the deeper meaning of the curses} is conveyed in translation (not in the Holy Tongue), the obvious purpose of which is to enable even simple folk, who do not understand the Holy Tongue, to understand the Torah’s teachings. That is, the deeper meaning behind the “curses” and afflictions of exile is not only revealed to Torah scholars, who are not as affected by {the challenges of} exile, but also, and **primarily**, to the simple folk. They are so severely affected by the concealment and hiddenness of Divinity in exile, that they require that the Torah be translated into seventy languages — even the simple folk are taught the deeper meaning of the “curses” and the afflictions of exile.

All this is only relevant to the beginning of our *parshah*, which encapsulates its message. Meaning, when the Torah expresses the purpose of, and the deeper meaning behind the “curses,” the overall theme and purpose of our *avodah*¹⁷ is articulated. However, when it is time to undertake actual *avodah* — “it shall be that when Hashem, your L-rd, brings you to the land to which you

¹⁴ *Devarim* 8:3-7

¹⁵ See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 4, p. 1331, and vol. 15, p. 453 ff., which explain that the *Babylonian Talmud* maintains that a situation should be evaluated based on contemporaneous events, whereas the *Jerusalem Talmud* maintains that it should be evaluated based on future events. See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 19, p. 73 ff. at length.

¹⁶ See *Toras Chaim*, *Bereishis* 40d; *Ohr Hatorah*, *Massei*, pg. 1385 ff; notes of the Tzemach Tzedek to *Eichah*, *Ohr Hatorah*, *Nac”h*, vol. 2 pg. 1045, and 1082. And elsewhere. {Ed. note — the Rebbe refers to this footnote two additional times later in the *sichah*.}

¹⁷ {Divine service.}

come to possess it”¹⁸ — in order to influence and tame the animal soul and the evil inclination {with this message}, the *Targum* must express the idea plainly: “and {those receiving} the curse,” for only in this way can the evil inclination be overpowered, as our Sages teach, “A person ought to always incite his good inclination against his evil inclination.”¹⁹

5.

THE HIGHEST BLESSINGS

The reason that the Torah teaches that the curses that “I present before you” are a “substitution” is not merely to alleviate the difficulty of this form of *avodah* for the Jewish people. Rather, this idea of “substitution” is also germane to {clarifying} the concept itself.

The deeper explanation:

On a simple level (as well as according to *Midrash Rabbah*), “I, אנכי, present,” in this context refers to Hashem.²⁰ Seemingly, this leads to the following question: Since {the personal pronoun} “I, אנכי (present)” refers to — a more sublime level of G-dliness than the Divine Names, and {more sublime than even the level of G-dliness alluded to by} the tip of the letter *yud*, as explained in *Zohar*,²¹ but is — a simple Oneness, how can we say that from simple **Oneness**, a **second** form of expression could emerge, that of (“curses” and) “substitution”?

The explanation is in line with what has been explained elsewhere,²² viz., true simplicity is expressed in diversity: Expressing the non-complex Essence of Hashem in numerous ways, especially when those ways contradict each other, proves that the Hashem’s Essence is not defined or formed by any definition or

¹⁸ {*Devarim* 11:29.}

¹⁹ *Berachos* 5a.

²⁰ {As opposed to Moshe.}

²¹ *Zohar*, vol. 3, p. 257b.

²² *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 9, pg. 157 ff.

form, G-d forbid. Rather, He is the ultimate of simplicity; therefore, diverse and contradictory expressions of Divinity do not present a “challenge” to Him.

Since the “simple” Essence of Hashem is demonstrated, so to speak, specifically by the contradictory path of “substitutes,” the level of Divinity expressed in **this** way is, as it were, higher and deeper than the level of Divinity expressed through “blessings,” i.e., manifest goodness.

This aligns with the Alter Rebbe’s explanation²³ (put differently) that the deeper meaning of suffering is an experience of concealed goodness, stemming from the first two letters (ח”י) of Hashem’s name, which is more sublime than revealed goodness. Suffering is hidden kindness, which cannot be expressed as revealed kindness.

This is also the (deeper) meaning of the dictum, “Those who Hashem loves, he rebukes”²⁴ — Hashem expresses His great love and intimacy in the form of “rebuke,” hidden kindness, because revealed kindness is {merely} superficial.

This helps to further explain the reason that afflictions and the like, which seem to be “curses,” are referred to as “substitutions,” for “in truth, they are only blessings” and they are loftier than revealed blessings. They are just “substitutions” — the **manner** in which kindness is expressed is exchanged, owing to the fact that curses originate from an even more exalted source than revealed **kindnesses**.

But in order for these lofty blessings and kindnesses to be revealed as such, for us to be able to physically perceive them as kindnesses, the Jewish people must know and recognize that afflictions are hidden kindnesses which come from Hashem. This inspires us to “rejoice in suffering,” which in turn reveals its deeper reality and source even now, i.e., “Hashem will grant goodness”²⁵ ... that is manifest.”²⁶

²³ See *Tanya*, ch. 26; *Iggeres Hakodesh* ch. 11.

²⁴ *Mishlei* 3:12.

²⁵ {*Tehillim* 75:13.}

²⁶ *Iggeres Hakodesh*, Epistle 22.

6.

INSISTING ON HASHEM'S GOODNESS

In light of the above, the relationship between our *parshah* and its *haftorah*, as well as with the seven *haftorahs* of consolation,²⁷ is very clear:

These *haftorahs* discuss the consolation that Hashem Himself will offer to the Jewish people, as it says, “I, yes I, am the One who comforts you.”²⁸ The repetition of “I” signifies a greater degree of revelation than that at the Giving of the Torah, where “I” was stated only once.²⁹ Similarly, these *haftorahs* discuss the tremendous flow of “abundant goodness to the House of Israel”³⁰ (not merely ordinary goodness), which is unique to these *haftorahs*.

The reason for this: The inner meaning of the **hidden** kindness is revealed during the period in which the seven *haftorahs* of consolation are read. In contrast, during the “Three Weeks,” when the three *haftorahs*³¹ of retribution are read, the hidden kindness remains obscured. As discussed above, this goodness and kindness cannot be perceived clearly due to its lofty source; on the contrary, on the surface, the kindness is experienced as constraints and calamities. The effect of the seven *haftorahs* of consolation is that even this sublime form of goodness is revealed.³²

The sequence and **method** of the revelation is also alluded to in these *haftorahs*, especially in this week's *haftorah*, {which begins with the words} “O afflicted, storm-tossed one, who has not been consoled.”³³

Avudraham, quoting the *Midrash*, offers a rationale for the seven *haftorahs* of consolation and for the order in which they are read: In the first

²⁷ {The *haftorahs* read on the seven Shabbasos between Tishah B'Av and Rosh Hashanah; their main theme is consolation for the destruction of the Temple.}

²⁸ *Yeshayahu* 51:12

²⁹ {*Shemos* 20:2 “I am Hashem your L-rd...,” the opening words of the Ten Commandments.}

³⁰ *Yeshayahu* 63:7.

³¹ {The *haftorahs* read during the “Three Weeks,” from the 17th of Tammuz to Tisha B'Av.}

³² See *Ohr Hatorah, Massei*, pg. 1386, that this is the meaning of Shabbos *Nachamu* as well as all of the seven consolatory weeks. See also the *maamar* “*Nachamu*” 5670.

³³ *Yeshayahu* 54:11.

haftorah, Hashem tells the prophets to go “console, console My people”;³⁴ that **they** should be the ones to console the Jewish people. To this, the Jewish people respond (in the second *haftorah*), “Zion said, ‘**Hashem** has forsaken me’”³⁵ (i.e., they consider this consolation offered by the prophets {in the first *haftorah*} as abandonment by Hashem). They wish for Hashem Himself to console them directly (rather than through the prophets). When the prophets relay this message to Hashem (in the third *haftorah*) by saying, “O afflicted, storm-tossed one, who has not been consoled,” Hashem responds (in the fourth *haftorah*) by saying, “**I, yes I**, am the One who comforts you”; Hashem accepts their demand, and He consoles them Himself. Subsequently (in the fifth and sixth *haftorahs*) it says, “Sing out, O barren one, who has given birth,”³⁶ and, “Arise, shine, for your light has come,”³⁷ which are messages of consolation to the Jewish people from Hashem Himself. The Jewish people respond to this (in the seventh *haftorah*) by saying, “I will rejoice intensely **with Hashem**,”³⁸ because by this point, after Hashem Himself has consoled us with, “Sing out, O barren one,” and, “Arise, shine,” we exclaim, “I will rejoice intensely with Hashem, my soul will exult with my G-d” — with Hashem Himself.

Seemingly, this requires clarification: Hashem is omniscient and knows the future. From the start, He knew that the consolation offered by the prophets would be rejected by the Jewish people, and that He Himself would console them. So why did he delay, as it were, **His** consolation until the Jewish people claimed that “Hashem has forsaken me; my L-rd has forgotten me?”

This can be clarified, though, by means of the above explanation: Since we find ourselves in the time following the terrible descent of Tishah B’Av, it is possible that the Jewish people would be content to be consoled through the prophets, especially since the Jewish people are offered a double consolation. But that would mean that the Jewish people view calamity as a punishment and a curse, G-d forbid (for which the consolation of the prophets would suffice). It

³⁴ {*Yeshayahu* 40:1.}

³⁵ {*Yeshayahu* 49:14.}

³⁶ {*Yeshayahu* 54:1.}

³⁷ {*Yeshayahu* 60:1.}

³⁸ {*Yeshayahu* 61:10.}

would indicate that the Jewish people do not appreciate that hidden within calamity itself is lofty kindness, which comes from Hashem Himself.

However, since after the consolation of the prophets, the Jewish people claim that “Hashem has forsaken me; my L-rd has forgotten me,” i.e., that the consolation of the prophets is not merely insufficient, but the Jewish people regard it as {abandonment by Hashem}, “Hashem has forsaken me; my L-rd has forgotten me,” this demonstrates that the Jewish people know and sense that the calamities and descent are nothing but a “substitution.” In truth, they constitute hidden kindness. This leads the Jews to complain that the prophets’ consolation does not represent the full revelation of the inner meaning and purpose of exile. For the enormity of the calamities indicates that they contain very lofty kindness, kindness and comfort that could come only from Hashem Himself directly.

This very recognition and awareness {that calamities contain hidden kindness} brings about the disclosure {of their deeper meaning}; Hashem validates the Jewish people’s claim that the consolation of the prophets falls short — “O afflicted, storm-tossed one, who has not been consoled” — and He Himself says, “I, yes I, am the One who comforts you.” The full and complete consolation will occur with the true and complete Redemption, when we will see, clearly, and in a material sense, Hashem’s kindnesses, as open and revealed goodness.

-From a talk delivered on Shabbos *parshas Re’eh*, 5726 (1966)