

Parshat Ki Tavo 5777

Chamishi in this week's Sedra describes the different curses (and implicitly blessings) which were to be given to and accepted by the Jews on Har Gerizim and Har Eival once they entered Eretz Yisrael. All of the initial curses are very specific, relating, for example, to one who curses their parents, one who intentionally gives bad advice or one who speaks Lashon Hara (as explained by Rashi).

The section then concludes with a broader statement:

ארור, אשר לא יקים את דברי התורה הזאת לעשות אותם'

'Cursed is the one who does not uphold the words of this Torah to do them'

The Mefarshim offer different interpretations of the scope of this curse and what it means to 'not uphold the Torah.

The Ibn Ezra suggests that this curse primarily acts as a conclusion to those which preceded it, cursing those who transgress any of the negative Mitzvos Lo Sa'aseh outlined beforehand. He further explains that 'לעשות אותם' extends this curse to anyone who does not perform positive Mitzvos Aseh, specifically *in private*. The Rashbam similarly makes this comment. This is targeting a particular human failing, whereby it is easy to fall into the trap of only performing positive Mitzvos in public when we feel we have something to gain, be it to a sense of honour or even just a sense of belonging but then when it comes to doing things behind closed doors where these motivations are not prominent we may not take performing Mitzvos so seriously; we do not Chas VeShalom end up actively sinning but lack the motivation to put in the effort to perform positive Mitzvos appropriately. In so doing, we fail to 'uphold the Torah' in appreciating that performing Mitzvos has intrinsic value as a fulfillment of Hashem's commands He gave us in the Torah; here the Jews accepted upon themselves not to fall into this trap.

Rashi understands this curse to apply more broadly saying that in accepting this curse, the Jews were accepting the whole Torah upon themselves both with a promise (in answering Amen) and a curse. Within this approach, the Or HaChaim points out that we do not all have the capacity to perform all Mitzvos; for example, one who does not own a field cannot perform the Mitzvah of Peah, leaving a corner of his field to the poor. Therefore, the Torah doesn't simply say 'אשר לא יקים', which would have been

interpreted as cursing anyone who does not fulfil all Mitzvos, rather it says 'אשר לא יקים...לעשות', which he explains to mean who does not *accept upon himself to do*, namely if he has the opportunity to do so. This curse therefore acts as a general warning to ensure one has a complete sense of Kaballas Ol Malchus Shamayim, a willingness to perform all Mitzvos as and when one has the opportunity and not placing any limits on one's willingness to serve Hashem. In answering 'אמן' the Jews affirmed their total commitment to keeping the Torah as a whole.

The Ramban takes a similar approach though in a more philosophical sense; explaining that this curse adjured the Jews to accept the *validity* of the whole Torah, believing that one who fulfils it receives reward and one who does not is punished such that anyone who denies or claims that any Mitzvah has become nullified receives this curse. It does not refer to one who transgresses an Aveirah out of lust or a lack of self control or it would have said 'ארור אשר לא יעשה', cursed is one who does not perform. This statement is therefore about accepting the fundamental truth and validity of the Torah as a whole rather than the breach of any individual transgressions. He points out that this is similar to the expression in the Megilla, 'קיימו וקבלו היהודים' which the Gemara explains acted as a re-acceptance of the entire Torah.

The Ramban then goes on to quote a different interpretation from the Yerushalmi in Sotah, where Rabbi Asi said in the name of Rabbi Tanchum bar Chiya that 'even if one has learnt and taught, guarded and practiced Torah but had an opportunity to strengthen Torah observance and did not, they are considered cursed'. The Ramban explains that this refers to those in positions of leadership who have the capacity to strengthen Torah observance amongst those who do not keep it. We perhaps see in our time that the ability to strengthen Torah observance is not limited to those in positions of such authority and should consider not only how we ourselves can ensure we keep the Torah but how we can further help others to do so as well. In so doing we 'uphold' the Torah, ensuring it is given prominence amongst our whole nation.

The Ramban concludes with an Aggadic interpretation of the Passuk in the Yerushalmi, where Rabbi Shimon ben Yakim says this refers to the Chazzan. The Ramban sees from here a reference to the Mitzvah of Hagbah, raising the Torah and showing it to all those present in shul. This acts to not only physically uphold the Torah but to display its importance to us and the prominence we give it as a people.