

# CURSES THAT ARE NOT

by Nechama Stampler

## Curses That Are Not<sup>1</sup>

*The Heavens over your heads will be copper, and the ground underneath iron.*

Rashi: Moshe spoke these curses, while Hashem spoke the ones at Sinai.<sup>2</sup> The ones in Vayikra therefore use the first person, while those here in Devarim employ the third person, since it is Moshe who describes here what Hashem will bring about. Moshe goes easy on the curses, using the singular, as if speaking to only a single person; the curses of Vayikra use the plural, implying that everyone is included. In our pasuk we also see this pattern reflected. The two metals are reversed in Vayikra, making a bad thing even worse. There, the skies are like iron, which doesn't "perspire" at all. In other words, the oppressive heat will know no respite at all. At the same time, the earth is likened to copper, which does "perspire," meaning that whatever little does grow in the drought will be subject to rot. In our pasuk, the effects are not as severe, even within the curse of a severe drought. Nonetheless, the skies will be like copper, allowing some moisture, and the ground like iron, protecting the limited growth from rot.

Maharal: Don't ascribe the difference between the two sections of tochechah/ rebuke to a different attitude Moshe's part relative to HKBH. Both shared the same intention. The curses in Vayikra are harsher (and the blessings more potent!) simply because they were spoken by Hashem Himself. Because G-d is infinite, knowing no limits, what emanates from Him is going to be bigger in scope and more powerful than what comes from a human being.

We don't mean to say that the curses are a product of Moshe's mind alone. Moshe wrote nothing in the Torah without explicit instruction from Hashem. We can understand these curses in one of two ways. Moshe may have originated them, and Hashem accepted them and made them part of the Torah. Or, they may have originated with Hashem, Who then instructed Moshe, "Tell the Bnei Yisrael the following." Either way, with Moshe as either the originator of the curses or their conduit, they bear the imprint of a human being, and take a different, more dilute form than those coming directly from G-d. (Even though Moshe also transmitted the rest of the Torah to Klal Yisrael by speaking to them, there Hashem placed the words that he wished spoken in the mouth of Moshe. In Devarim, Moshe first received the words from G-d, and then spoke them to the people on his own.)

Keeping in mind this difference between words coming directly from Hashem and those conveyed by Moshe as a faithful agent, we can account for other differences between the tochechah sections

of Vayikra and our parshah. Unlike the one in Vayikra, the tochechah in our parshah is not followed by a section of optimistic consolation. No evil ever ensues directly from Hashem. A corollary is that whatever He does or decrees is entirely good - including a curse! Inevitably, some good will grow directly from the what seems to be a decree of pain and suffering. The curses in Vayikra, coming directly from Hashem, must inexorably lead to some blessing; the Torah takes note of that in the consolation section. That nechamah is not a pleasant afterthought. It is a direct consequence of the curses. Moshe's curses, however, not coming entirely from Hashem, do not necessarily generate a series of dots that can be connected to some positive consequence.

A variation of this theme will shed additional light on the difference between the two sections of rebuke. The curses in Vayikra seem harsher. (They are more numerous in Devarim - exactly twice as numerous. But that is the point. Each of the curses in Devarim is of lesser impact than those of Vayikra. Moshe's rebuke compensates for this lesser effect by adding to them in quantity.) Chazal<sup>3</sup> list factors that facilitate redemption. One of those is pain and suffering. When we process them properly, they season and mature us, and leave us as better candidates for geulah. The very harshness of the Vayikra rebuke paves the way for redemption! Geulah is therefore immediately described following Hashem's rebuke. The milder curses of Devarim do not necessarily have the same therapeutic effect. Therefore, the Torah does not attach a consoling section speaking of the inevitable geulah.

The unparalleled goodness of HKBH shines through, even in the process of rebuke and predicting hardship!

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1. Based on Gur Aryeh, Devarim 28:23 and 1:11; Tifferes Yisrael chap. 43
  2. Vayikra 26:14
  3. Yerushalmi, Taanis 1:1
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