

# Parsha Ponders

Re'eh | Aug 10, 2023 | 24 Av 5783

## *Preemptive incentives*<sup>1</sup>

את-הברכה אשר תשמעו אל-מצות יקוק אלקיכם אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם היום: והקללה אם-לא תשמעו אל-מצות יקוק אלקיכם וגו'

The blessings [you'll receive] for your listening to the *mitzvos* of Hashem your G-d, that I command you all today. And the curses [you'll receive] if you don't listen to the *mitzvos* of Hashem your G-d<sup>2</sup>

The *parsha* begins with instructions to the Jewish people which they are to follow upon entering the land. They are to divide onto two mountains, one called *Har Gerizim* and one called *Har Eival*, and a series of blessings and curses are to be enunciated. These blessings are to follow upon proper Torah observance, and the curses for the opposite. However, many note<sup>3</sup> an inconsistency in the verses which describe this ceremony. When describing the blessings, it says they are to follow "for listening to the *mitzvos*". However, when describing the curses, it says they are to follow "if you don't listen". The curses sound conditional, and the blessings more definite. What gives?

*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* interacts with us like a father interacts with his child<sup>4</sup>. Some parents, as a way to motivate their kids, will present them with incentives or treats to encourage proper behavior. Often, these incentives are given in advance. However, a parent would never discipline a child until they actually did something wrong. It wouldn't be preemptive.

Hashem acts the same way. Our Sages point out<sup>5</sup> that Hashem gives us so many great things, even before we perform His *mitzvos*. Before we get a *mitzvah* to give our son a *bris milah*, Hashem has already bestowed us with a child. Before we get a *mitzvah* of building a fence around our roof, we've already acquired a house. Hashem gave us the Land of Israel, and only then did the land-based *mitzvos* apply.

However, Hashem never punishes us until we've actually transgressed His Torah<sup>6</sup>. This is despite Hashem being all-knowing, will full knowledge the person will eventually sin. Nevertheless, Hashem doesn't judge a person by what they *will* do. Hashem only judges a person by where they are now<sup>7</sup>.

With this in mind, we can understand the inconsistency in the verses. Regarding the curses, it says they will follow if we don't listen to the Torah. That fits with what we just said, that punishments are only after actual transgressions. However, regarding the blessings, it says they will follow for listening to the Torah. The idea being is that Hashem gives us blessing right away. They are simply given on condition that we eventually follow through with our end of the deal<sup>8</sup>. Good Shabbos

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<sup>1</sup> Based on [Sefer Apiryon](#) to [Deuteronomy 11:27,28](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Deuteronomy loc. cit.](#)

<sup>3</sup> See [Abarbanel](#), [Gur Aryeh](#), [Rav Yaakov Milisa's Nachalas Yaakov](#), and [Torah Temimah ad. loc.](#), [Shenei Luchos HaBris parshas Re'eh Torah Ohr § 9](#), [Chasam Sofer's Toras Moshe](#) to [Numbers 6:26](#). See also [Malbim Ayeles HaShachar 11:105](#) and to [Leviticus 4:22](#)

<sup>4</sup> See [Deuteronomy 8:5](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Midrash Tanchuma Emor § 7](#) and [Vayikra Rabbah 27:2](#), based on [Job 41:3](#)

<sup>6</sup> See [Kiddushin 40a](#). The [Torah Temimah loc. cit.](#) actually cites this *gemarra* in order to present his resolution to the verse, in an approach similar to the [Sefer Apiryon](#)

<sup>7</sup> See [Genesis 21:17](#) with [Rashi](#)

<sup>8</sup> See [Rashi](#) to [Deuteronomy 11:27](#)