

ויקרא פרק יט:יד  
לא תקלל חרש  
ולפני עור לא תתן מכשל  
ויראת מא-להיך  
אני ה':

### Vayikra 19:14

You must not curse a deaf person;  
and in front of a blind person, you must not place a stumbling block;  
and you must fear your G-d;  
I am Hashem.

On first thought, the connection between cursing the deaf and tripping the blind seems obvious; each of them is particularly vulnerable to this type of assault.

But on second thought, at least one difference is evident; the blind person is actually harmed, whereas there is at least room to question whether a deaf person can be harmed by a curse he or she never hears.

And on third thought, Chazal rather interestingly interpret around the parallelism between the cases rather than exploiting it. They say that

“Do not curse the deaf” refers to an actual deaf person (although because Exodus 22:27 forbids cursing judges or princes, the law ends up forbidding cursing any living person who falls between these extremes of powerlessness and power);

“And in front of a blind person, you must not place a stumbling block”, however, is taken metaphorically, and it is understood to refer to giving bad business advice to the practically blind, or to facilitating the transgressions of the spiritually blind.

Later halakhic sources discuss whether physically tripping a physically blind person violates this prohibition, using “a verse does not leave its peshat” in an original Talmudic sense, as preserving the significance of the literal meaning of a metaphorically intended text.

In this sense, Ibn Ezra and Rashbam here, by insisting respectively that the blind and deaf are examples of the most vulnerable and most likely to be abused, are genuinely following a tradition of peshat.

Ramban (appended and translated) coopts Ibn Ezra and Rashbam, as he often does, adding two small wrinkles of his own:

- a) the deaf and the blind will never understand what happened to them
- b) the powerful are often cursed in secret, and so in that sense are like the deaf.

Meshekh Chokhmah (appended) notes that Rashi Chullin 3a attributed the literalist position to the Cuthim. Meshekh Chokhmah nonetheless accedes to their position and says that *lifnei iver* refers *primarily* to physically tripping the physically blind. He nonetheless believes that the secondary, metaphorical, extensions are halakhically binding as well.

The underlying exegetical question is why Chazal choose to undo the parallelism. It should be understood that they had two options for avoiding this – leaving *lifnei iver* literal, in the manner of the Cutim, or extending *killelat cheres* metaphorically.

Now within Rabbinic literature, parallelism and juxtaposition are often substantively insignificant or even misleading. This is because a primary organizing principle of oral culture is mnemonics, putting things together and phrasing them in ways that make them easier to memorize.

Incongruence is as useful to memory as congruence – we remember patterns well, but also the breaks in a pattern. For example, remember what shoe a person wore on their right foot generally makes it effortless to recall that they wore a matching shoe on their left, but on the other hand, it would also be easy to remember the occasional anomalous person wearing black on their left foot and white on their right.

Do for example: A beraita on Kiddushin 31 teaches that a child “must not stand in his father’s place, and must not sit in his father’s place”.

Rashi explains that “standing in his place” refers to occupying a physical position with specific social or political meaning – “a place where his father stands amidst a council of elders with his colleagues for consultation”. He makes no comment about “sitting in his place”. It is possible that sitting in his places refers as well to a politically significant physical position, but it also possible that “sitting” should be understood simply and literally as occupying a favorite chair, and that Rashi sees any explanation as superfluous not because of his previous comment, but rather because the text requires no interpretation beyond translation.

Torah, however, is written, and therefore one might argue that parallelism and juxtaposition should be presumed to be substantively significant.

Our question is perhaps a subset of the question Dr. Moshe Bernstein challenged me with many years ago as to whether it is theologically acceptable to understand Torah as containing meaningless puns, or other literary devices which have no substantive significance. Noach (נח) finds חן in Hashem’s eyes, whereas ער is רע – does the fact that each description inverts the letters of the descriptee’s name tell us that each inverted their essential nature? Or does it simply enhance our experience of reading?

My suspicion is that Chazal understood Torah as having mnemonic purposes as well – that while it is formally forbidden to convert Written Torah into Oral, the Written Torah nonetheless functions in memory as well – it is written on the walls of our heart as well.

Shabbat shalom!

## רמב"ן ויקרא פרק יט פסוק יד

"לא תקלל חרש" –

אין לי אלא חרש, מנין לרבות כל אדם?

תלמוד לומר "בעמך לא תאור";

א"כ, למה נאמר חרש?

מה חרש מיוחד שהוא בחיים - יצא המת שאינו בחיים,

לשון רש"י, והוא שנוי בתורת כהנים (פרשה ב יג).

אבל המדרש בגמרא (סנהדרין סו א) אינו כן, אלא הזהיר הכתוב בנכבדים בעם הדיין והנשיא,

שאמר (שמות כב כז) א-להים לא תקלל ונשיא בעמך לא תאור,

וחזר והזהיר באמללים שבעם והוא החרש,

ומהם ילמדו בנין אב אל כל שאר העם, כי מן הראש ועד הסוף הכל בכלל האזהרה.

ומלת "בעמך" נדרש בעושה מעשה עמך, להוציא הרשעים:

ועל דרך הפשט:

הזכיר החרש בקללה, כי אף על פי שלא ישמע ולא יתקצף בקללתו, הזהירה התורה עליו, ואין צריך לומר בשומעים

שיתביישו ויחר להם מאד.

ועוד, כי יזהיר בהווה, שאדם מקלל החרש ומכשיל העור, שלא יירא מהם כי לא ידעו ולא יבינו,

על כן "ויראת מא-להיך" שהוא רואה הנסתרות.

והוסיף לאו אחר במושלים, הנשיא והדיין,

בעבור שדרך האנשים לקללם בחדרי משכבם,

כאשר בהשפטו יצא רשע, ובקללת הנשיא והדיין תקלות רבות, כי המון העם בסכלותם ישנאו אותם ויתעוררו לקום

עליהם, והם במשפטם יעמידו ארץ:

### Ramban Vayikra 19:14

"You must not curse a deaf person" –

This teaches me only the deaf; from where can I include all humans?

Exodus 22:27 writes "among your nation you must not curse"

Why then does it say "deaf"?

Just as deaf person is characterized by being alive – excluding the dead, who are not alive.

This is the language of Rashi, which is taught in Torat Kohanim.

But the midrash in the gemara is not so, but rather that Scripture prohibits specifically regarding the honored ones of the nation, the judge and the prince,

as it said "A judge you must not curse, and a prince among your nation you must not curse".

and then returned and prohibited regarding the bereft of the nation, namely the deaf,

and from them learned a *binyan av* to the rest of the nation, for from the beginning to the end, all are included in the prohibition.

while the word "among your nation" is interpreted as "when he acts in the manner of your nation", to exclude the wicked.

But in the manner of pshat:

It mentions the deaf with regard to cursing, because even though he won't hear and won't become irate when he is cursed, the Torah prohibits regarding him, and it did not even need to mention the hearing, who will be ashamed and very angry.

Furthermore, it prohibits the likely, because a person tends to curse specifically the deaf and trip specifically the blind, as he is not afraid of them, as they will not know or comprehend (what has happened to them),

therefore "and you must fear your G-d", because He sees the secret things, and adds another DO NOT regarding rulers, the princes and the judges,

since it is the way of people to curse them in their bedrooms , since when they are judged wickedness results, and many negative things happen when princes and judges are cursed, because the masses in their foolishness hate them and are aroused to rise up against them, when they sustain the land with their justice.

### **משך חכמה ויקרא פרק יט פסוק יד**

"ולפני עור לא תתן מכשול" –

הכותים מפרשים כמשמעו, שלא יתן אבן לפני עור בדרך להפילו [רש"י חולין ג, א], ו  
כן הוא אמת.

ומזה אזהרה לפותח או כורה בור ברשות הרבים.

ומשום זה אמרו בור ברשות הרבים של שני שותפים... אי דאמרי ליה זיל כרי לן (ואזל כרי להו),

אין שליח לדבר עבירה (עכ"ל), היינו דלאו ד"לא תתן מכשול" איכא

[ואיסורה דבר תורה, דלא כמשנה למלך בפרק ב מהלכות רוצח].

ובבור ברשותו, איכא אזהרה בספרי מ"לא תשים דמים בביתך" (דברים כב, ח), יעויין שם.

והלאו כולל גם אם מכשיל חבירו בדרך שהוא עור בדעתו, או מחמת תאוותו וזדון לבבו.

ואם מיעצו לפי דרכו וכיוצא בזה הוי כמו לאו שבכללות, לכן אין לוקין עליה,

כן נראה לי.

וכן מצאתי לרבינו בספר המצוות בשורש ט, יעויין שם.