

# PSHUTO SHEL MIKRA

From the Teachings of Rav Yehuda Copperman zt"l

## PARSHAT NITZAVIM

### Teshuvah and the use of Lashon Benoni

כִּי הַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם לֹא נִפְלְאָת הִיא מִמֶּךָ וְלֹא רְחֹקָה הִיא

*For this mitzvah that I command you today, it is not hidden from you and it is not distant (Devarim 30:11)*

A basic question arises concerning this *pasuk*: what is “this mitzvah” to which the *pasuk* is referring, and regarding which it informs us that it is not “hidden” or “distant” from us?

The **Ramban** comments:

*“This mitzvah” refers to Teshuvah, which has been mentioned (earlier in the perek). For the words “וְהִשְׁבַּת אֶל לְבָבְךָ” — You will take it to your heart” (pasuk 1), and “וְשָׁבַת עַד ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ” — You will return to Hashem, your God” (pasuk 2) express a mitzvah that Hashem is commanding us to perform. It was stated in **lashon benoni** in order to allude to the assurance that this will take place in the future.*

### Lashon Benoni

The idea of *lashon benoni* to which the Ramban is referring is a grammatical form whereby the Torah does not present a mitzvah using the imperative form [such as “קִדְּשׁ לִי כָּל בְּכוֹרִי — Sanctify every firstborn for Me,”] but rather in a form which states that something will happen in the future: “וְשָׁבַת — You will return.” This is called “*lashon benoni*” on account of it being

“in between” the two different ideas of instruction and description, and it is capable of expressing both of them:

1. A **mitzvah: Instructing** that it will be so.
2. A **statement** regarding the future: **Informing** that it will be so.

To illustrate, the Torah says (*Devarim* 8:10) “וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ וּבֵרַכְתָּ.” These three words are all phrased in *lashon benoni*, but their meaning is not the same. The first two words, “You shall eat and you shall be satisfied,” are descriptive; while the third word, “You shall bless,” constitutes the source of the mitzvah known as *birkat hamazon*.

In our *pasuk*, too, the Ramban maintains that the word “וְשָׁבַתְ” written in *lashon benoni* represents a **mitzvah** to do *teshuvah*. However, he then adds that by writing this mitzvah in *lashon benoni* the Torah also alludes to something that will happen in the future, namely, that B’nei Yisrael will do *teshuvah*.

## Further Examples: Appointing a King

Another sugya where the Ramban discusses the idea of *lashon benoni* is with regards to appointing a king. In Perek 17 of *Devarim* (*pasuk* 15), the Torah writes “שׁוּם תָּשִׂים עָלֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ” — *You shall surely place a king over yourselves,*” which is a mitzvah. In the preceding *pasuk*, it writes “וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲשִׁימָה עָלַי מֶלֶךְ כְּכָל הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר סְבִיבֹתַי” — *You will say ‘I will appoint a king over me, like all the nations that are around me.’*” The question which arises is: Do these words also represent a mitzvah? In other words, is asking for a king itself a mitzvah, or is the mitzvah merely to appoint a king if people ask for one?

The Ramban writes:

*According to Rabboteinu (Sanhedrin 20b), the pasuk is understood as **instructing us** to say “I will appoint a king over me” once we have inherited and settled the Land.<sup>1</sup> It is grammatically similar to the way the Torah commands (*Devarim* 22:8) “וַעֲשִׂיתָ מִצְעָקָה לְגִגְךָ — You shall make a fence for your roof.”*

*In my opinion, the pasuk is also **alluding to future events**, for this is indeed what happened when the people asked for Shaul, they said to Shmuel (*Shmuel* I, 8:5), “שִׁימָה לָנוּ מֶלֶךְ לְשִׁפְטֵנוּ כְּכָל הַגּוֹיִם” — *Appoint for us a king to judge us, like all the other nations.*<sup>2</sup> Similarly, they said (*ibid.*, *pasuk* 20), “וְהָיינוּ גַם אֲנַחְנוּ כְּכָל הַגּוֹיִם” — *And we will be like all the other nations, our king will judge us.*” For why would the Torah include asking for a king “like all the nations which surround me,” when Yisrael should not be learning from them, or being envious of those who perform injustice?<sup>3</sup> Rather, this (concluding phrase) is alluding to that which will be,<sup>4</sup>*

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1 As expressed in *pasuk* 14: “וַיִּרְשָׁתָהּ וַיִּשְׁבָּתָהּ בָּהּ.”

2 Similar to the words “like all the nations around me” in our *pasuk*.

3 Based on *Tehillim* 37:1 “אֵל תִּקְנָא בְעֵשִׂי עוֹלָה.”

4 [See also Ramban to *Devarim* 4:25, who states that the words (*Devarim* 4:25) “כִּי תוֹלִיד בְּנִים וּבְנֵי בְנִים... וְהִשְׁחַתְּמָם וְגו'” —

*and it is for this reason these words are written in lashon benoni, as I have already explained.*

In other words, since *lashon benoni* can denote either a mitzvah or a prediction, and *pasuk* 14 contains both [“I will appoint a king over me” is a mitzvah and “like all the nations that are around me” is a prediction], it is introduced using *lashon benoni*.

In this regard, it is worthwhile pointing out a converse situation, where, according to the Ramban, words that are primarily stated as a prediction also function as a mitzvah. In *Devarim* 7:24, Moshe says:

וְנָתַן מַלְכֵיהֶם בְּיָדְךָ וְהָאֲבֹדֶתְךָ אֶת שְׁמָם

*He (Hashem) shall deliver their kings into your hand and you shall destroy their name.*

Ramban there (s.v. *venatan*) writes:

*Even though this parsha is stated as an assurance, I have already noted that in Mishneh Torah,<sup>5</sup> Moshe Rabbeinu will assure and also instruct.*

Once again, the same word written in *lashon benoni* [in this instance, the word “וְהָאֲבֹדֶתְךָ”] can serve as an assurance and an instruction at the same time.

The idea behind these comments is one we have discussed earlier on in this *sefer*,<sup>6</sup> namely, that when the Torah chooses a word which can mean more than one thing, this is done in order to allow it to mean more than one thing. All of this is based on the fundamental principle that there is no happenstance (מקריות) when it comes to the writing of the Torah. Every word is chosen for its precise meaning, and if the word the Torah uses could have more than one meaning, it is precisely for that reason it was chosen!

*B'virvat ketiva vachatima tova.*

This week's divrei Torah are dedicated *le'ilui nishmas*

Benjamin Angel ז"ל

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*when you beget children and grandchildren ... and you will grow corrupt etc.*” are introduced with the word “כי — when,” and not “אם — if,” on order to allude to the fact that this is something that will indeed happen.].

5 In other words, this phenomenon is unique to *Chumash Devarim*.

6 See *Parshat Lech Lecha*, Chapter 10.