

Oz Torah

The Ramban Method

The Torah portion that we read this Shabbat begins in an atmosphere of tension.

The brothers Yaakov and Eisav are about to meet again after many years of estrangement. Yaakov wants to create a good climate for their meeting, so he sends messengers ahead of him.

Ramban says that this is what a person should always do, prepare so well for an encounter that any possible tension will have dissipated in advance.

Ramban's advice motivated an experience I had some years ago. As chairman of a committee I knew that there was a dispute between two committee members, so the day before a scheduled meeting I had an off-the-record chat with the two of them and we ended up agreed and smiling.

When the committee had its meeting all went well and there were no fireworks - the Ramban method at work!

Ramban's advice applies not only between human beings but between man and God.

The prophet Amos says (4:12), "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!" This is what we do when we say the central prayer, the Amida.

We praise God for what He has done

for us and our ancestors, and only then do we formulate our petitions.

One might ask, "Does God really need to be praised before we pray to Him? Is He really susceptible to His creatures' praises?"

The answer isn't that our praises make Him any greater or happier, but they identify who it is that we are addressing in prayer - the tried and true God who has brought such meaning to our lives.

Rabbi Apple served for 32 years as the chief minister of the Great Synagogue, Sydney - Australia's oldest and most prestigious congregation. He was Australia's highest profile rabbi and held many public roles. Retired, he now lives in Jerusalem. Rabbi Apple is president of the RCA Israel Region. He blogs at www.oztorah.com

