

From the Abravanel Jacob Solomon

The blessings G-d promises for those who observe the teachings of the Torah open with:

If you follow My laws and are careful to keep My commandments... I will give you rain at the right time. The land will yield its crops and the trees... will yield fruit (26:3-4).

Like many other commentators, Abravanel observes that the promised rewards are physical: plenty to eat, and safety from the enemy. But there is no mention of the eternal reward that awaits the soul in the World to Come.

This, suggests Abravanel, is because the blessings are delivered in the plural form and not in the singular form. They address the community, not the individual. If a particular person is unworthy of prosperity and safety but the public as a whole deserve them, then that individual may enjoy the benefits as well. If the person is worthy, but the community is not, then he or she may suffer along with the rest of the people. But that, explains Abravanel, only applies in this world, not in the World to Come. There, individuals are judged solely on their own merits and not on the achievements and shortcomings of the community.

The Rambam (Hilchot Teshuva 9:1) brings the idea that prosperity and safety allow people to follow their optimum paths as human beings to the greatest positive effect and fulfillment. The blessings are the means to the end: a life well-lived and duly rewarded in the World to Come. The curses that follow are barriers that make such achievements increasingly difficult.

It may additionally be suggested that the Torah avoids direct mention of the soul's eternal reward for the following reason. "Be like those who serve without expectation of reward; with the fear of Heaven on you" (Avot 1:3). Serve G-d with the love that grows from hakarat hatov, gratitude for life and the wonderful things that happen daily, with the fear of G-d to prompt you to perform the positive mitzvot with due thoroughness.

Reb Reuven and Reb Shimon are newly qualified rabbanim. Each is appointed to a different community on a three-year contract. Reb Reuven gives his best to everything and everyone in the kehilla, young and old, rich and poor. He fully engages himself in its activities, building genuine growing bonds with the community and its individuals, day in and day out. He makes his mistakes; it takes him time to "get" the nuances and rhythms. But the people sense that he values relation-

ships for the sake of the people involved, as opposed to what they can do for him. They get used to Reb Reuven, they warm to him, and they enjoy working with him for the common good. Reb Reuven thrives and the kehilla prospers.

Like Reb Reuven, Reb Shimon puts his greatest effort into the different aspects of kehilla life. But the fear: "Will they renew my contract?" underlies his thinking. The kehilla sense the subtext in his work: "Will that help me to keep my position." They feel vaguely uncomfortable when he is around. Reb Shimon works faultlessly and probably too hard, but he is alienating people at the same time. His work ticks all the boxes, but the kehilla feel distinctly uneasy.

Our sacred traditions focus on today: here and now. "I am giving you life today... Choose life so that you and your children will live" (D'varim 30:15,19). As Reb Reuven, strive to do the right thing now with joy and happiness, and light up the world as you go. 📖