

## From the Abravanel Jacob Solomon

Twice, the Parsha describes the good things awaiting the Israelites in the Land in contrast with the Egypt that they had left behind. Near the beginning:

**For HaShem your G-d is bringing you into a Land... with streams of water, springs and underground water emerging in the mountains and the valleys... a Land of wheat, barley, grapes, figs, and pomegranates, a Land of olive oil and honey dates. A Land where you will not eat bread out of poverty, a Land that lacks nothing. A Land whose stones are iron and from whose mountains you will mine copper (8:6-9).**

1. Widespread fresh water resources meant that the Israelites could settle throughout the Holy Land, in contrast with the Egyptian people who were confined to the delta and the very narrow strip along the Nile (today forming about 8% of its land area). Indeed virtually every ancient settlement in the Holy Land was sited where fresh water was naturally available: Jerusalem, situated on the Shilo'ach is no exception.

2. The seven fruits (plus the milk and meat from the sheep and goats which they obtained on their travels) would be sufficient to supply a balanced, healthy diet. Together with fresh water, they included the six essential nutritional categories:

proteins (from grain, meat and milk), sugars (fruits), starches, (grains), fats (olive oil), vitamins (grains and fruits) and roughage (grains). Abravanel refers to the work of Galen, whom he sees as 'the chief of the physicians' in suggesting that a person should limit oneself to foods from the seven fruits (bread, wine, figs, dates, and honey), which are the prime edibles that promote health.

3. Several of these products were unsuitable for Egypt's climate and gave the Israelites trading advantages. For example olive oil which was, and is, used as an essential ingredient in food, cosmetics, and medicines: King Solomon traded 1000 kor of wheat and 20 kor of beaten oil annually in exchange for a steady supply of cedar and cypress wood from Sidon (Melachim Alef 5:24-25; Divrei Hayamim Bet 2:14-15).

4. Excellent supply of building materials: the Targum Yerushalmi understands the above verse to mean that Israel contains quarries of hard rock which will be ideal for constructing homes, walls, and guard towers. That contrasts with surrounding countries such as Egypt, whose people build structures from the locally available clay bricks that are dangerous for their inhabitants. Indeed most of the hard limestone rocks of Jerusalem contain iron, which give the local soils a reddish color after they have been oxidized.

Later on, the Parsha refers to the land again, and this time in explicit contrast with Egypt:

The Land... is not like Egypt... where you could plant your seed and irrigate it by yourself, just like a vegetable garden. But... it is a land of mountains and valleys that may be irrigated by rain of the heavens only... G-d has His eyes on it at all times (11:10-11).

Abravanel reads these words as an expression of the Holy Land's being productive, but vulnerable. It does not have an easily-accessible and reliable reserve of water that is comparable to the Nile. It depends on a regular supply of rainfall: the word shamayim, heavens, refers to both the clouds in the sky, and to Heaven ensuring that the rain falls according to the needs of the people. He quotes the Ramban, who compares the "healthy body" of Egypt with the "delicate body" of Israel. A person with a robust constitution duly sees it as a gift from G-d, but is not constantly anxious about health. However, the person with a delicate constitution is perpetually concerned that he or she is living a suitable lifestyle to promote health and minimize risks. Thus the Israelites are being told that the Land constantly holds their fate in the balance: if they fail to promote spiritual health by "going astray" (11:16), then "He will close the skies

and there will be no rain. The land will not yield crops. You will rapidly perish..." (11:17)

The Land is good, but the Land is spiritually demanding with built-in checks and balances to ensure that its inhabitants live compatibly with the Land's spiritual qualities.

Indeed, that sums up our position today. Even with desalination of sea-water, the Land remains vulnerable: situated in an earthquake-risk region, with the constant threat of war from immediate neighbors and more distant peoples. 🕊️