



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

What is the Blessing?

The sidra opens with God's promising us a blessing if we obey His commands.

Our first thought is that "blessing" means becoming rich, enjoying the pleasures of material prosperity, living a luxurious life surrounded by servants and banquets, possessing property, power and plenty.

That is one way of looking at it, and if that's how your life pans out, good luck to you - please enjoy your money, mansions and possessions, and whilst enjoying them remember to think of others at all times and be generous to them in appreciation of what you yourself possess.

However, I suspect that is not what the verse really means at all. It thinks of visions and values, not chariots and cheques.

The greatest blessing is not material at all. It is to have a dream to pursue, a vision to implement, values to work for, spiritual realms to inhabit, ideas to savour, ideals to cherish, aspirations to exhilarate and inspire you, a better world to create, a heaven to bring down to earth, an earth to bring up to heaven.

That's the real blessing that the Almighty is offering His earthly creatures, and what makes it all the more valuable is when you harness it to bring blessing to others.

Free Will and the Kotzker Rebbe

R'EI, the first word in the parasha, is in the singular.

Three words later the verse becomes plural: "See (singular), I place before you (plural) this day blessing and curse" (D'varim 11:26). This verse is the basic Biblical source for the doctrine of Free Will.

Why does it first address each of us as an individual and then as a community?

The Kotzker Rebbe deals with the question in this way: Every individual is challenged to apply his or her Free Will as an individual, not merely as a member of the group. No-one is a carbon copy of anyone else. What the other person decides has to be right for them but it is not necessarily right for me.

Certainly, there are times when the issue involves my group identity - for example, when I have to respond as a Jew to something which integrally affects my Jewishness, but even then I do not have to be a clone of any other Jew.

The sort of Jew I choose to be will be influenced by my upbringing, environment and commitments, but even if I decide to be similar to people of a similar type, I am still a separate, unique person who might have my own nuance and idiom to contribute.

-OZ

Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH