



The Pardes Parsha Discussion by Rabbi Alex Israel

Naso: “May God Bless You and Protect You”

The priestly blessings are one of Judaism’s most famous texts:

May God bless you and protect you!

May God make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you!

May God lift up His face to you, and give you peace!

This is a blessing that increases. The first verse has 3 words, the second has 5 words, and the third has seven. The first verse talks about blessing, the second has God’s face lighting up to the object of the blessing, the third escalates to God lifting his face – engaging in direct vision - and granting the greatest of all blessings, namely peace.

“May God bless you and protect you!”

What blessing is invoked? What is God’s protection here?

Rashi:

“**May God bless you**”- that your assets be blessed

“**And keep you**” - that thieves should not come and take your assets. A person who bestows a gift ... cannot safeguard ... if thieves come and take it what benefit has he from it? But the Holy One blessed be He both gives and stands guard... (*Rashi*)

Haamek Davar (Netziv):

“**May God bless you**” - This implies the blessing appropriate to each person; to the student of Torah - success in his studies; the businessman - in his business, etc. (*Ha'amek Davar*)

“**And keep you**” - A blessing requires guardianship so that it should not, God forbid, be turned to a wrong purpose. The Torah scholar requires guardianship to save him from pride and bringing the name of the Lord into disrepute, and the like. The businessman requires guardianship against his wealth becoming a stumbling block to him as in the case of Korah and Naboth...

Please discuss:

How do Rashi and Haamek Davar differ in their interpretation of:

1. The blessing
2. The guarding of the blessing

... I would say:

1. For Rashi, the blessing is material. For the Netziv, it can be a skill or an aptitude.
2. For Rashi, the blessing of guarding is to prevent the loss of a financial gain. For Netziv, it represents that a blessing can sometimes have detrimental or harmful side-effects.

Please discuss:

- What do we mean that a blessing can have a negative effect?
- Is it, then, a blessing?
- Is the dynamic, say, of wealth or talent leading to arrogance or insensitivity, inevitable or can it be prevented?

Lastly, the first blessing is material or relating to human skill. But then it moves up to a relationship with God!

- What is “God will light up His face to you”? What does that mean?
- What is the blessing of “peace”. Please think of an alternative word for “peace”. What is the intention of this prayer?

Here are a few suggestions:

Rashi: May God lift his face – reign in His anger

Ibn Ezra: It is the opposite of (Isaiah 1:15), “I will turn my eyes away from you”... Peace – no harm neither from wild animals nor from an enemy

Rashbam – He will turn to you as a lover would to act with affection

- Do these interpretations work?
- Do you have any other translations of this “peace” concept?

Shabbat Shalom!