



GROWTH

At The SHABBAT TABLE

PARSHAT KI TAVO

When Life Forces Us to Choose

Parshat Ki Tavo is perhaps best known for its powerful blessings and curses, presenting the profound consequences that follow from listening to Hashem's commandments – or, conversely, turning away from them. In concluding the list of blessing that will shower those who heed the word of G-d, the Torah states (Deut. 28:3): "You will be blessed in the city, and you will be blessed in the field."

What exactly is this enigmatic line trying to convey? What practical relevance lies behind what sounds like poetry?

I saw a remarkable explanation written by the Ben Ish Chai. He explains: there can be instances where a single individual can have conflicting desires. He shares an anecdote about a person who owns a large quantity of produce, both retail goods for purchase in urban communities and crops to be harvested in rural fields. On the one hand, his wish for rainwater to nourish his fields is diminished by the fact that rain will ultimately spoil his grocery produce and drive down his prices. On the other hand, a lack of rainwater, while beneficial to the supermarkets, would ultimately be detrimental to his fields.

Thus, satisfying this individual's wishes would inherently mean sacrificing the other. This, the Ben Ish Chai writes, is what the verse quoted above means to convey. G-d is blessing the devout individual that He will fulfill all his wishes and desires, even when it seems paradoxical, self-contradictory, and impossible.

Perhaps we can take this understanding and explore its ramifications a few steps deeper.

What makes this explanation so powerful is that the Ben Ish Chai is speaking to a struggle that exists within virtually every human being. We often find ourselves divided between competing desires, responsibilities, and dreams. We want to succeed professionally, but we also want to be present for our families. We want to pursue our ambitions, but we also want peace of mind. We want financial security, but we want the time and freedom to enjoy our lives. We want to be there for others, yet we also desperately need time for ourselves. Sometimes, life seems to force us to choose: if I devote myself to one area, something else must inevitably suffer. We therefore become accustomed to thinking in terms of trade-offs — *I can have this, but only if I sacrifice that.*

Perhaps the blessing of "you will be blessed in the city, and you will be blessed in the field" is teaching us to challenge that assumption. The Torah is not merely promising that everything will go our way; it is teaching us that Hashem is not constrained by the limitations that constrain us. What appears to us to be mutually exclusive does not necessarily have to be so. We look at our lives from the inside, seeing only the competing pieces in front of us. Hashem, however, sees the entire picture. He can bring about a reality in which the very things we feared would conflict somehow complement one another.

This perspective can also change the way we experience disappointment. How often do we convince ourselves that because one door closed, something else must now be lost as well? We may think, *If this opportunity doesn't work out, my future is ruined. If this relationship doesn't happen, I won't find happiness. If I can't achieve this goal in the way I envisioned, I must settle for less.* But the blessing of the Ben Ish Chai reminds us that we are not the ones who determine what combinations of blessings are possible. What looks like a contradiction from our limited perspective may be part of a larger plan that we simply cannot yet see.

And perhaps this is why the Torah specifically chooses the words "in the city" and "in the field." These represent two different worlds, two completely different sets of circumstances. The blessing is not that we will be spared from having different needs; it is that Hashem can bless us within all of them. There are seasons when we feel like we are thriving in one area of life while struggling terribly in another. The challenge is not to assume that the imbalance is permanent. We can continue doing our part — working, praying, making responsible decisions, and pursuing what is meaningful to us — while leaving room for Hashem to write a story that we could not have written for ourselves.

Ultimately, perhaps the deepest message of this blessing is one of trust. We do not need to have every piece of our lives figured out before we can believe that they can fit together. We do not need to know how our dreams, responsibilities, relationships, and spiritual aspirations will coexist. Our job is to live faithfully in the "city" and faithfully in the "field" — to do what is right in whatever circumstance we find ourselves — and trust that the One who created both can bless us in both.

"Some battles are won by not becoming bitter."