



## FROM THE DESK OF RABBI MOSHE HAUER

OU EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT



# The Ultimate Blessing

For several summers prior to coming to the OU, I would take a break from my normal rabbinic responsibilities to spend ten days at Sinai Retreats, where for a significant portion of each day I had the privilege to teach Torah to a group of intelligent young professionals who had not previously had that opportunity. We studied and discussed core Torah concepts and ideas about the G-d we believe in, the mission of the nation we are a part of, the challenges and opportunities of life, and the Torah that we dedicate ourselves to study and practice. The opportunity to spend hours day after day in an immersive Torah environment sharing the incredible wisdom and strength of the Torah that we study and observe every day and the meaning and purpose that it gives our lives renewed my own appreciation for the Torah that we live and learn each day. *Ashreinu mah tov chelkinu*, we are indeed very fortunate.

Many understand this appreciation of Torah to be the meaning of the opening phrases of our Parsha. “See, this day I set before you blessing and curse: blessing, that you hear the commandments of Hashem your God that I place before you today....” Rather than spell out external rewards and

consequences for our observance of Torah, here we are zeroing in on the ultimate blessing, the Torah itself. As the Rambam noted in many places (see for example introduction to Rambam’s commentary to Perek Chelek and Hilchot Teshuva Chapter 10), our appreciation of and connection to Torah ultimately depends on our level of appreciation of its inherent value. In the succinct words of Pirkei Avot, *s’char mitzvah mitzvah*, the ultimate reward of doing a Mitzvah is the Mitzvah itself.

Ramban very simply and beautifully underscores the value of seeing the inherent benefits of Torah in explaining this verse in last week’s Parsha (10:12-13): “And now, O Israel, what does Hashem your God demand of you? Only this: to revere Hashem your G-d, to walk in all His paths, to love Him, and to serve Hashem your G-d with all your heart and soul, keeping the L-RD’s commandments and laws, which I enjoin upon you today, for your good.”

Ramban notes - as the Talmud had previously - how odd it seems that this phrase can begin with an apparent minimization of Hashem’s demands of us when in fact the list of expectations is so long and imposing. Yet, noted the Ramban, the key lies in seeing how the entire statement is anchored in its closing phrase, *l’tov lach*, “for your good.” The Torah is big and broad and its obligations many, but once we can recognize and taste the incredible benefit it provides

us in our own lives, its observance moves immediately from burden to privilege. It is not a burden when we appreciate its incredible benefits.

*Ashreinu mah tov chelkeinu*, we are indeed very fortunate. Each of us can benefit greatly from taking every opportunity to learn Torah in a way that helps us transcend our own slide into routine that allows us to lose sight of the gift of Torah life and forget its privilege. Sharing the richness of Torah refreshes our own enthusiasm for it as we bring its light and power both to those outside our community who have never seen it as well as to those inside our family and community who have seen it but have either forgotten or never truly experienced its delicious taste.

Torah itself is the ultimate blessing. ■

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