

during times of prosperity is required. This seems paradoxical or counterintuitive at first glance. But Abarbanel reminds us that prosperity produces challenges of its own. If people do not begrudge their neighbors' success, then peace will ensue.

Finally, Be'er Basadeh (R. Meir Binyamin Menahem Danon, 18th–19th century, Sarajevo) notes both the redundancy of the verse as well as its choice of words. According to him, if “peace” were meant to be taken literally, God would have promised to grant peace “among you’ or ‘between you and your enemies’ rather than ‘peace in the Land.’” Rather, it means that the land and air and waters of a land must be good in order to provide the people with the health necessary to enjoy its yield. Health plays the role that internal and external safety do for Or Hahayyim.

This is an entirely different take on Rashi’s comment “if there is no peace (*shalom*), there is nothing.” Without the peace (*shalom*) of good health, all wealth is worthless; partaking of the blessings of plenty becomes meaningless, perhaps even impossible.

To review, the following explanations for the phrase “I will give peace” were offered:

- Local peace;
- world peace;
- peace and harmony among neighbors/countrymen;
- emotional peace of mind;
- intellectual peace of mind;
- economic peace—a lack of jealousy and strife during times of prosperity;
- health—physical peace resulting from healthy air, water, and climate.

Ultimately, these interpretations perhaps raise more questions than they resolve. But they do give us the opportunity to consider the nature of peace in our own lives. Our sense is that peace may mean different things to us—at different times.

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בהר-בחוקתי תש"ף



The Nature of Peace

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The description of peace and prosperity in this week’s Torah portion seems particularly fitting for our current situation.

Lev. 26 begins by stating that “If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments and do them . . . the Land will give her produce [v. 4] . . . you shall eat your bread until you have enough and you shall dwell in your land safely [v.5]. **And I will give peace (*shalom*) in the Land** [v. 6] . . . and you will eat old grain long stored and you will have to clear out the old to make room for the new [v. 10].

What is the nature of this peace (*shalom*) that God is promising? As it turns out, several textual difficulties in the passage, and the commentators’ ensuing efforts to explain them, offer us a complex and powerful lens through which to reconceptualize “peace.”

Rashi, (R. Shelomo Yitzhaki, France, 1040–1105) commenting on the verse, states:

Perhaps you will say “Here is food, and here is drink, but if there is no peace, there is nothing.” In answer, the verse says, after all this “I will give peace in the Land.” Here we see that peace is as weighty as everything else combined.

It is left to the commentaries of the following generations (and to us) to read the Torah text very closely in order to find textual support for Rashi’s interpretation and expand upon his lesson.

Our analysis will be based on the responses of six commentaries and supercommentaries (the more than 200 commentaries dedicated to elucidating, defending, and taking issue with Rashi's comments). They will all be responding explicitly or implicitly to our question concerning the nature of the peace that God gives for obeying commandments. This study will provide us with the opportunity to enter the world of Rashi's supercommentaries.

In the eyes of the Mizrahi (R. Eliyahu Mizrahi, 1455–1526, Constantinople), Rashi's reading is based on the strange order of the verses. Since the promises begin with agricultural rewards (v. 5), mention peace (vv. 6–9), and return to agriculture (v. 10), we can infer that peace is equivalent to the promises of plenty that precede and follow it.

The Mizrahi, therefore, concludes that the text is not really out of order because **peace is integral to and actually a feature of plenty**—for without peace, what's the value of the blessing of plenty?! It is this apparent interruption that prompts the reader to consider the significance of peace during times of plenty.

The Gur Aryeh (The Maharal, R. Judah Loew ben Betzalel, 1520–1609, Prague) agrees that Rashi's assertion is based on the strange order of the verses. "Peace is also [considered] a blessing of plenty," he writes, "for if there is plenty and one cannot eat in peace [i.e. with **peace of mind** (*menuhah*)] then the plenty is not worth anything." Whereas the Mizrahi employs an objective standard—the absence of war—the Gur Aryeh understands peace subjectively as a lack of anxiety.

Divrei David (R. David Halevi Segal, 1586–1667, Ukraine, Poland) offers a creative explanation for the order of the verses. According to him, Rashi believes that "I will give peace" serves as a response to an implied question rather than just as another one in a list of blessings. In other words, God anticipated that as God was enumerating the agricultural blessings, the Israelites would begin asking themselves, *Will there be peace enough for me to enjoy these promises?* and would be distracted and consequently unable to focus on God's words. God, therefore, offers a brief aside—*Don't worry, you'll have peace!*—to ensure that the Israelites continue to pay attention. In addition to apprising them of the

blessing of literal peace, God is granting the listeners peace of mind. Not the emotional peace of mind of Gur Aryeh, but rather an **intellectual peace of mind**.

Other commentators focus on the verse's redundancy rather than its placement. Or Hahayyim (R. Hayyim ben Attar, 1696–1743, Morocco, Jerusalem) asks, "Why did the Torah have to mention this [I will give peace in the Land] after having already stated 'you shall dwell safely' (v.5)?" He offers two possible interpretations. "Perhaps it [peace in the Land] is referring to the people of [the Land of] Israel themselves, [meaning] that there would be no discord among them, that God would plant within them **peace and friendship**." According to this interpretation, "dwelling safely in your land" (v. 5) means protection from **external** threats and worse, while "giving peace in your land" (v.6) means freedom from **internal** strife and discord among fellow inhabitants of the land.

He offers a second interpretation whereby a distinction can be made between **local peace** and **world peace**. Local peace is not enough, unless complemented by world peace since "those dwelling safely will also be frightened by the sound of war and that's why [the phrase] 'and I will give peace in the Land' concludes 'and you will lie down and **none** will make you afraid.'"

According to Abarbanel (R. (Don) Isaac Abarbanel, 1473–1508, Portugal, Spain, Italy), the repetition is a response to the fact that an unequal harvest often engenders conflict:

The text states "I will give peace in the Land" meaning He will give peace among them [the inhabitants]." Ephraim will not be jealous of Judah's [prosperity] and Judah will not begrudge Ephraim, so much so that even in the fields and the vineyards "they will lie down and not be afraid."

Abarbanel's explanation of the redundancy is similar to Or Hahayyim's first interpretation that "I will give peace in the Land" means that there will be **peace among the people** of the Land but he expands upon it based upon his understanding of human nature: in times of plenty, increased income will often be cause enough for discord and jealousy among the people of the Land. Therefore, a special blessing for **peace and harmony**