

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 22

Shemini, Sicha 2

The Finale:

The entire work of the Mishnah concludes with a discussion of honeycombs: At what point is the honey considered a liquid and therefore susceptible to ritual impurity? Beis Shammai says, from when the person actively plans to remove the honey from the honeycomb. Beis Hillel says, once the person breaks up the honeycomb.

The Mishnah then concludes with a seemingly unrelated teaching:

"Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: In the World to Come G-d will make each righteous person inherit three hundred and ten worlds, for it is written: "That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance (in Hebrew, yesh, which has the numerical value of 310) and that I may fill their treasuries" (Mishlei 8:21) (Oktzin 3:11-12)

The Question:

Commentaries explain that the Mishnah's conclusion refers to the rewards a person can expect when they have reached the

summit of Torah study and observance represented by completing the entire Mishnah.

But by the time a person has reached the conclusion of the entire six orders of the Mishnah, and has attained the level of a "righteous person," shouldn't they have moved beyond serving G-d for the sake of a reward? Furthermore, the verse refers to this person as one "who loves Me," and love, as Rambam tells us, means serving G-d altruistically, because of the value of truth itself and not for any personal benefit. As a much earlier Mishnah said, "be not as a servant who serves in order to receive reward." The Mishnah must not be addressing an acolyte just learning to serve G-d, it must contain a deeper message about the ultimate motivations for Divine service.

Secondly, this theme of Divine service must also be connected to the preceding Mishnah about honeycombs, for every juxtaposition is significant in the Torah.

The Explanation:

An inheritance is different from a gift or a salary, because an heir occupies the very

place of the inheritor. The heir receives the assets because he, in essence, has become the inheritor. In a conventional gift, the receiver and giver stand apart, occupying two contrasting roles.

By describing the reward as an “inheritance” (G-d will make each righteous person inherit...) the Mishnah alludes to a level of Divine service where the person has fused with G-d to the point that their selfhood is totally identified with G-d’s Being. They no longer experience subjective delight, they only are sensitive to, and respond to, G-d’s delight.

This is the theme taken up by the preceding Mishnah about the honeycomb. The Midrash identifies the bee as a metaphor for altruistic Divine service. Just as the bee, whatever it produces is for its owner, so, too, whatever good deeds the Jewish people do, they produce for their Father in Heaven.”

The subject of the dispute between Shamaï and Hillel is when is the honey considered a viable liquid. Shamaï’s legal philosophy defines realities by their potential state, while Hillel defines realities by their actual state. Shamaï therefore sees the honey as viable once the person has thought to remove it, even before it has been removed. Hillel only sees the honey as a liquid once it has actually been removed.

In spiritual terms, this argument is about the very purpose of the soul’s descent to this world: is the soul’s purpose solely to fulfill the Divine desire to have a dwelling place in this world? Or is the spiritual advancement gained by the soul’s overcoming the challenges of this world also part of the purpose of the soul’s descent? Are we here for G-d, or for us?

Shamaï defines the soul by its potential, and so any advantage it could have gained from working in this world is already attributed to it, because it possesses it in potential. The desire for the world to become a home for G-d, however, is a desire for an actual transformation, not an abstract desire for a world with spiritual potential. Thus, the soul does not come to this world for its own advancement, because it possesses that already. Rather, it comes here solely for the sake of G-d’s desire for a home.

For Hillel, the soul does not gain its growth in potential, it must come to this world to actualize it. Therefore, the soul comes to fulfill G-d’s desire, but also for its own benefit.

Thus the final Mishnah clarifies that even according to Hillel, who sees the soul’s descent as benefitting itself, still, the ultimate purpose of the soul is to “inherit” G-d’s reward, meaning, to serve G-d for the sake of fulfilling His desire for a dwelling place in this world. Any personal benefit is ancillary to that overwhelming objective.
