

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 15

Lech Lecha, Sicha 4

The Context:

The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 39:8) says that as Avraham was traveling through the Land of Israel, he saw people engaged in manual, agricultural labor. He said, "If only I could have a potion of this land." In response, the Torah narrates G-d's concurrence: "And G-d appeared to Avram, and He said, 'To your seed I will give this land...'" (*Bereishis* 12:7)

Concerning the value of work, the Talmud relates:

Rabbi Elazar says: Humankind was created for labor, as it says: "Man is born for toil." (*Iyov* 5:7) I do not know whether he was created for the toil of the mouth (speech), or whether he was created for the toil of labor. When the verse says, "For his mouth presses upon him" (*Mishlei* 16:26), you must say that he was created for the toil of

the mouth. And still I do not know whether it is for the toil of Torah or for the toil of conversation. When the verse says, "This Torah scroll shall not depart from your mouth" (*Yehoshua* 1:8), you must say that he was created for the toil of Torah. (*Sanhedrin* 99b)

The Questions:

- 1) When the land would be granted to Avraham's descendants, they would displace those very laborers that impressed him. Why, then, is G-d's promise to give the land to the Jewish people linked to a positive quality of the inhabitants?
- 2) What is the meaning of the Talmud's investigation into the highest form of labor? Why would the Sages assume that man was created for labor and speech, and not immediately conclude that Torah is the highest pursuit?

The Explanation:

Human beings are innately driven to create and produce. This is because G-d desires the highest possible good for His creations, and the highest objective attainable is for a person to transcend their own limitations and become a “partner with G-d in the work of Creation.” Therefore, we have this deep desire to contribute something novel to this world.

There are three stages in becoming a truly novel creator.

- 1) Toil of labor — through physical toil within the guidelines of the Torah, we partner with G-d in improving His material creation. But action is not the exclusive sphere of human activity. Animals also can change landscapes.
- 2) Toil of speech — communication is a uniquely human activity. When we apply our unique human traits of intelligence and collaboration to our physical labor, we introduce innovations that are beyond what the material world itself can offer. But even our intelligence and ability to communicate is part of being human, and so is not truly transcendent.
- 3) Toil of Torah — Torah is Divine wisdom that transcends this world. When we toil in Torah to the point that it is absorbed in us, then we achieve the greatest novelty — the

fusion of the Creator and His creation.

The Spiritual Dimension:

In Divine service, these three levels can be expressed differently:

- 1) Toil of labor — engaging in physical labor with the faith that G-d will ensure his success and provide for his needs. With this faith, a person is still tethered to the limitations of this world, as he is connecting to a dimension of G-d that is vested within Creation.
- 2) Toil of speech — prayer. This elevates a person and his earthly experience from the material realm to the realm of the spirit. But this is still his own human effort, and so, it is not truly transcendent.
- 3) Toil of Torah — Torah is Divine wisdom, and so it allows a person to achieve an authentic novelty — to truly leave the limitations of this world.

This is why Avraham wanted to live in the land of Israel when he saw the inhabitants laboring to cultivate the earth — this demonstrated that the foundation for true creativity and transcendence were being laid. When the Jewish people would take possession of it, they could achieve the ultimate act of transformation — imbuing it with the study of Torah.