



לקוטי שיחות
PROJECT
LIKKUTEI
SICHOS

Sicha Summary

Chelek 19 | Shoftim | Sichah 4

The Context:

Parshas Shoftim includes some laws concerning the acceptability of witnesses in a court. (*Devarim* 19:15) There are two general types of witnesses:

- 1) **Clarifying Witnesses** provide clarity where there is a dispute about the facts. For example, they testify that a loan did indeed take place. The loan is legally binding without the witnesses; the borrower has an obligation to pay, even if there were no witnesses to the loan, but clarifying witnesses buttress and support the claims made in court.
- 2) **Attesting witnesses** must be present when a particular legal procedure occurs in order for it to be considered legally valid. For example, witnesses must be present at a wedding ceremony or divorce proceeding for those to be valid. If a man betrothed a woman without witnesses, no legal bond has been formed.

The Distinctions:

There is a further distinction between these two types of witnesses. The clarifying witnesses only become relevant when they appear before a court of law; it is then that they truly become witnesses. Therefore, the court has an obligation to perform its due diligence and interrogate the witnesses to ascertain their reliability.

But there is no obligation to interrogate attesting witnesses. Since the Torah made the attesting witnesses part of the legal action itself — in the case of marriage, for example — they do not need to undergo questioning to become a witness, for they assume the status of witness just by observing the ceremony.

The Spiritual Analogue:

“Testimony” is only needed to ascertain that which is unknowable by other means. If something is known, or eventually will become known, there is little need for witnesses. We only need witnesses because we do not know what really took place behind closed doors between the lender and borrower. The spiritual analogues of these two types of witnesses are the two types of witnesses that attest to the absolute transcendence of God’s Essence. No testimony is required in order to prove the existence of the immanent Divine power that sustains Creation; it is enough for us to contemplate the order and operation of nature to deduce that such a power exists. No testimony is even required to substantiate the existence of the transcendent Divine power that brings reality into being; just as the mind accepts the reality of immanent Divinity, it understands that that Divinity cannot be the fullest expression of God’s potential. Intellect itself concludes that there must be an aspect of Divinity that transcends our intellect, that lies beyond our ken.

What does require testimony is the idea that God’s Essence is totally abstract, that it is beyond not only our ability to understand but also our ability to conceive. The veracity of this idea must be established by “witnesses” because this is not logically imperative.

There are two types of testimony that support this idea: attesting and clarifying. The Torah refers to “Heaven and Earth” as God’s clarifying witnesses. (*Devarim* 30:19) Heaven and Earth have infinite characteristics. The heavenly bodies exist “eternally,” that is, they do not exhibit any discernible change throughout the generations, and although the individual

creatures on Earth do not live forever, their species persist “forever,” that is, again, without any discernible change throughout the generations. Thus, Heaven and Earth testify that there is a (relatively) infinite power embedded within Creation — an aspect of G-d that is utterly beyond our conception.

The Torah’s attesting witnesses to the inconceivable nature of G-d’s Essence are the Jewish people. Whereas Heaven and Earth only testify to G-d’s infinity, the Jewish people actualize it, so to speak. By studying the Torah and performing G-d’s *mitzvos*, the Jewish people introduce the ineffability of G-d’s Essence into the physical world.

The crucial difference between these two testimonies is that while the testimony of Heaven and Earth do indeed allow the world to appreciate G-d’s infinity, such testimony does not necessarily imply that the universe cannot exist apart from G-d. In contrast, the attestation of G-d’s infinity expressed by our study of the Torah and fulfillment of the commandments implies explicitly that G-d’s existence is the only true existence, that all other forms of existence are contingent upon Him existing, and that “nothing exists besides Him.”

This aligns with the legal distinction between these two forms of testimony outlined earlier: Clarifying witnesses only become relevant later on, when their testimony is needed. Heaven and Earth do not immediately testify to G-d’s unity with the world. It takes time to discern G-d’s infinity from within Creation, and this will only truly be possible with the radical revelation of G-dliness in the Messianic era. Attesting witnesses, however, become witnesses immediately. Our Torah and *mitzvos* immediately affect change, drawing down G-d’s essential self into Creation. It is only that this change will not be noticeable until the Messianic era. But the testimony completes the act nonetheless.

These two types of witness are reflected in the different ways we can approach our Divine mission in life. Most aspects of this mission make perfect sense, and therefore, a cursory reflection on the nature of human life, at most, is required to motivate us to dedicate ourselves to this mission enthusiastically. Furthermore, even the occasional need for self-sacrifice can for the most part be well-understood logically, since logic can admit that it is sometimes necessary to override logic, resorting to supra-logical means to accomplish logical ends. But the highest form of dedication to our Divine mission is unlimited, unconditional self-sacrifice that ignores logic altogether. Such self-sacrifice can only stem from the sense of self-identification with God that is wholly beyond the ability of the intellect to conceive.