

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 15

Vayetze, Sicha 4

The Context:

The Torah describes at length how Yaakov amassed his wealth by breeding Lavan's sheep. Eventually, Yaakov "became exceedingly wealthy, and he had prolific amounts of sheep, as well as maidservants and manservants, camels and donkeys." (Bereishis 30:43)

Rashi explains that Yaakov would sell his surplus sheep and purchase "maidservants and manservants, camels and donkeys."

Yet, when Yaakov sent messengers to Eisav to inform him about his success, he said, "I have acquired oxen and donkeys, flocks, manservants, and maidservants," and only mentioned his flocks of sheep — the main engine of his wealth — after the oxen and donkeys.

These three developments — a) Yaakov acquiring his wealth primarily from sheep; b) that he then exchanged sheep for other possessions; and, c) Yaakov only mentioned sheep after oxen and donkeys in his message to Eisav — all have parallels in a person's spiritual development and divine service.

The Explanation:

The Midrash offers two metaphors for the relationship between the Jewish people and G-d: A parent and his child, and a flock of sheep and its shepherd. What does each of these metaphors contribute to our understanding of this relationship?

A child maintains his own identity in relation to his father. He relies on him, is devoted to him, but remains a distinct being. This represents a devotion to G-d that is developed using our own abilities and talents. We are G-d's "children," asserting our own selfhood and strengths in our relationship with G-d.

A sheep is a meek and timid animal, alluding to our humility and the lack of our own self-importance in our relationship with G-d. In the presence of G-d's Essence, our accomplishments are not noticed, and they do not draw us close to Him. It is our fundamental "sheep-like" devotion that connects us with the Essence of G-d.

In general terms, studying Torah is alluded to by the metaphor of the "child," because a person must engage his unique intelligence and assert his own individuality in studying Torah. In contrast, leaving the study hall to elevate the world at G-d's behest is alluded to by the metaphor of the "sheep," transforming the world according to G-d's will out of a sense of duty, and not as a form of self-expression.

In life, a Jew needs to cultivate both elements. But the expression of individuality — developing his sense of self — must be built on a foundation of humility. Only then will the full force of his personality be directed toward G-dly ends, because it is steered by the "sheep's" unerring devotion to G-d.

This is why Yaakov became wealthy from sheep during his stay with Lavan. Far from the insulating tents of Torah, engaged with

the material world, Yaakov had to be suffused with humility to uplift his surroundings. But once he amassed the wealth of humility, he had to use it to acquire other forms of wealth, "oxen and donkeys," strength and assertiveness. That development, however, had to be purchased with, and founded upon, humility.

Then, when he confronted Eisav, he mentioned his oxen before mentioning his sheep, because he had to show Eisav that he possessed strength and individuality, for that is the language Eisav spoke. But Yaakov also made sure to mention that his developed self was undergirded by "sheep" — by a deep, selfless devotion to G-d that would never waver.

The Lesson:

We cannot remain cloistered in our ivory towers of our own spiritual development and Torah study; we must go out into the world with selflessness, and dedicate ourselves to uplifting and educating our fellow Jews. If we go wherever Divine providence sends us without protest, and we apply ourselves to our work, we will amass spiritual and material abundance.
