



לקוטי שיחות
PROJECT
LIKKUTEI
SICHOS

Rethinking Reward

Sicha Summary

Chelek 19 | Tetzeh | Sichah 1

The Talmud:

At the conclusion of tractate *Chullin*, the *Talmud* details Rabbi Yaakov's position that "there is no reward for performance of *mitzvos* in this world." Rabbi Yaakov came to this conclusion after witnessing a tragic episode: A man instructed his son to climb to the top of a building and bring him fledglings. He climbed to the top of the building, sent away the mother bird, and took the offspring, but as he descended, he fell and died. The Torah explicitly promises long life for the fulfillment of the *mitzvos* of honoring parents and sending away a mother bird, yet this boy died while fulfilling both! (*Devarim* 5:16, 22:7) Obviously, the reward promised for *mitzvos* is not seen in this world. (*Chullin* 142a)

The Unattributed Mishnah:

The first *mishnah* in tractate *Peah* seemingly disagrees: "These are the things for which a person **enjoys the fruits in this world** while the principal remains for him in the World to Come: Honoring father and mother..." (*Peah* 1:1) Clearly, this *mishnah* maintains that reward for some *mitzvos* **is** seen in this world.

The Rambam:

Rambam rules that "The good that is hidden for the righteous is the life of the World to Come." He then cites Rabbi Yaakov's hermeneutical exposition supporting this position. When the Torah says regarding sending away the mother bird, "So that it will be good for you and you will live long," it actually refers to life "in the world that is entirely good..." and "in the world that is entirely long." (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 9:1)

The Question:

An unattributed *mishnah* is generally authoritative. Why did Rambam rule in accordance with the solitary opinion of Rabbi Yaakov and not like the anonymous *mishnah* in *Peah*?

The Preface to the Explanation:

The final *mishnah* of *Chullin* says: “(1st clause) A person may not take a mother bird with the offspring even [if he takes the mother] to purify a *metzora*. (2nd clause) And if regarding an easy *mitzvah* [sending away the mother bird], which entails a loss of no more than an issar [a small coin], the Torah says, “so that it will be good for you, and you will live long,” how much more so is this true regarding fulfillment of the Torah’s difficult *mitzvos*!” (*Chullin* 142a)

What is the connection between these two clauses?

The first clause clarifies that sending away the mother bird is not a utilitarian *mitzvah* concerned with compassion for the mother bird. For if it were, we would give precedence to alleviating the pain of the *metzora* (who must isolate until his purification ceremony) over the bird’s pain and disregard the prohibition of taking the mother with her fledglings. Thus, sending away the mother bird is a *mitzvah* between a person and G-d and is not based on compassion for the mother bird.

By continuing with a *kal vachomer* about the reward for this *mitzvah*, the *mishnah* implies that the reward given for this “spiritual” *mitzvah* is a spiritual reward, the World to Come.

Whereas for *mitzvos* between a person and his fellow that are focused on mutual benefit, the reward is seen in this world.

The Explanation:

Rambam agrees with this *mishnah* — that the reward for *mitzvos* between a person and G-d is in the World to Come, and with the *mishnah* in *Peah* —

that there is reward in this world for *mitzvos* between a person and his fellow. Rabbi Yaakov, however, maintains that there is no reward for **any** *mitzvos* in this world — even those between a person and his fellow.

The Caveat:

This debate only concerns compensatory “reward” for *mitzvos* — compensation in response to observance. But there is no disagreement that the material rewards promised by the Torah are literally given in this world. These promises — of security, peace, and wealth — are prerequisites for our Divine service. They enable us to serve G-d without toil and burden. Without them, we cannot fulfill our mission in this world to the best of our abilities.

The Lesson:

The theme of tractate *Chullin* is the sublimation of the mundane to the holy. To “slaughter” an animal means to draw the material reality upward so that it is absorbed in a spiritual reality.

The end of the tractate returns to this theme: When a person heeds G-d’s command by not taking the mother bird together with its fledglings, even when his natural compassion for a fellow human being dictates that he should use the birds for a *metzora*’s purification, he subdues his natural, “animal-like” instinct, and incorporates it into his Divine soul, which is solely concerned with fulfilling G-d’s will.