

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 23

Shavuos, Sicha 1

The Law:

Rambam writes in his Mishneh Torah:

“It is a positive commandment for each and every Jewish man to write a Torah scroll for himself, as the verse says: “And now, write down this song for yourselves,” (Devarim 31:19) i.e., write down the [entire] Torah which contains this song.... If a person writes the scroll by hand, it is considered as if he received it on Mount Sinai. If he does not know how to write himself, [he should have] others write it for him.

The Question:

Why do Jewish people no longer fulfill this obligation of writing, or commissioning, their own Torah scroll?

The Rosh offers the following explanation: In earlier generations, people studied from written scrolls, and therefore the commandment was to write a scroll from which you can study. But in the Rosh’s generation, where people studied from written manuscripts, the commandment is

to write books of Tanach, Talmud, and their commentaries, and to study from them. (*Hilchos Kitanos, Laws of Sefer Torah*)

But this is unsatisfactory: In our generation, printing has taken the palace of handwritten manuscripts. It follows that the modern fulfillment of this command would be to commission the printing of books, or to be involved in the process. This would be equivalent to the Rosh’s standard of writing the manuscripts. Yet, we do not find that anyone makes an effort to do so; common practice is to simply purchase books. How is this the fulfillment of the command to “write a Torah scroll”?

The Explanation:

The objective of the mitzvah to write a Torah scroll is, as the verse continues, “and teach it to the Children of Israel.” “When I bring them to the land which I have sworn to their forefathers.... it will not be forgotten from the mouth of their offspring.” (*Devarim 31:19-21*)

The Rosh therefore concludes that the mitzvah is not the physical act of writing the scroll, but the action of procuring materials that can be studied so that the Torah remains at the forefront of the people’s consciousness. At the time of the giving of

the Torah, however, the only acceptable way to study was to read from a written Torah scroll with all its specifications, for there was a prohibition against writing the Oral law. That is why the mitzvah is originally described as writing a scroll, because that was the only way to fulfill it.

But now, that prohibition has been suspended. Therefore, any action that a person does to procure material that can be used for Torah study is a fulfillment of "writing a Torah scroll." Buying a book to be studied so that Torah "will not be forgotten from the mouth of their offspring" is a sufficient action to be considered the fulfillment of this mitzvah.
