

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 15

Vayishlach, Sicha 4

The Context:

Our Sages conveyed to us a tradition that Shimon and Levi were thirteen years old when they avenged Dinah by killing the male inhabitants of Shechem. (Bereishis Rabbah 80:10) In describing this incident, the Torah refers to Shimon and Levi as “men” for the first time — “Shimon and Levi, Dinah's brothers — each man (ish) took his sword...” (Bereishis 34:25) Based on this, the Sages derived that a Jewish boy reaches manhood and becomes obligated to perform mitzvos at the age of thirteen. (Rashi to Nazir 29b)

The Question:

The Chabad Rebbeim had the custom of reciting a Chassidic discourse on the occasion of their sons' Bar Mitzvahs that opened with the verse, “Let us make humankind in our image.” (Bereishis 1:26)

The Hebrew word used for humankind, adam, refers to a more advanced spiritual maturity than does the word for “man” used in Shimon and Levi's story — ish.

If attaining the more basic level of maturity of ish is sufficient to be considered a man, why did the Rebbeim teach a discourse on the topic of the loftier level of adam on the occasion of their sons' Bar Mitzvahs?

The Preface to the Explanation:

A divergent view maintains that the age of Bar Mitzvah — thirteen — is not derived from a verse, but rather, it is a tradition handed down from Moshe at Sinai. (She'eilos U'Teshuvos HaRosh, 16)

There is a practical difference between the way the age of Bar Mitzvah is derived in the case of the gentile. Does a gentile become obligated in the Noahide mitzvos at age thirteen? If we derive the age of Bar Mitzvah from the verse of Shimon and Levi, then it is based on reason, observation, and human nature — thirteen is the age when

the Torah considers a boy mature enough to take responsibility. The same natural maturity would apply to a gentile as well. But if the age of Bar Mitzvah is derived from Sinai, then it is a Divine decree without reference to the natural world, and it would apply only to Jews, but not to gentiles.

Spiritually speaking, these two sources for the age of Bar Mitzvah allude to two paths of Divine service.

According to the opinion that the age of thirteen is derived from a narrative about children reaching maturity and taking responsibility for the wellbeing of their sister, it follows that the starting point of Divine service is a rational, mature appreciation of G-d and His mitzvos.

According to the opinion that the age of thirteen is a Divine decree from Sinai, it follows that the starting point of Divine service is submission to the Divine will.

On closer examination, however, it appears that even according to the opinion that the beginning of Divine service is based on mature appreciation of the mitzvos, the beginning of our Divine service is also founded on suprarational dedication. For Shimon and Levi “take their swords,” acting in a primal, suprarational way to avenge their sister’s honor.

Thus, even though the substance of Divine service is rational, the origin is still the pure devotion of the soul to G-d.

The Explanation:

This is why the Rebbeim expounded on the verse “Let us make humankind.” The word adam is an anagram of the word meod, meaning “exceedingly great.” Thus, the word adam refers to the full intellectual and spiritual maturity of a Bar Mitzvah boy, and to the need to go beyond, to exceed, the limits of rationality, in the service of G-d.
