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If Not For This Day

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1.

IF NOT FOR THIS DAY

One of the sayings of our Rabbis which demonstrates the great quality of *Matan Torah*¹ appears in tractate *Pesachim*:²

On the day of Shavuos, Rav Yosef would say: “Prepare for me a third-born calf,”³ saying, “If not for the influence of this day,⁴ how many Yosefs are there in the marketplace!?”⁵

Among the many questions that this statement invites: What did Rav Yosef mean by the use of the expression, “**this day**”? By making this statement, Rav Yosef meant that he distinguished himself from other people because he studied **Torah** (as Rashi explains). Why does he say this obliquely (“if not for this day”) and not clearly, “if not for the Torah,”⁶ or something to that effect?

Furthermore: Rav Yosef’s intention was to emphasize the virtue of Torah study. Yet Torah study is not connected specifically to “this day” — the day of the **giving** of the Torah. For even before *Matan Torah* (on the 6th of Sivan), the Jewish people learned Torah. As our Rabbis say:⁷

Since the days of our ancestors, they {the Jewish people} were not without a *yeshivah*.⁸ When they lived in Egypt, they had a *yeshivah*.... Avraham was an elder and sat {learning} in a *yeshivah*....

So why does Rav Yosef connect the virtue of Torah study with “this day”?

¹ {The Giving of the Torah.}

² *Pesachim* 68b.

³ {I.e., the third calved by its mother. Alternative translations: “in its third year”; or “third-grown,” i.e., one that has reached a third of its full growth. According to all translations, such a calf was regarded as being especially choice.}

⁴ {Lit., “if this day had not caused it.”}

⁵ {I.e., I have distinguished myself from all others in the marketplace because I have learned Torah, which was given on this day.}

⁶ Similar to Rav Nachman’s statement, *Kiddushin* 33a.

⁷ *Yoma* 28b; see *Tanchuma* at the end of *parshas Vayigash*; Rashi’s commentary on *Bereishis* 46:28.

⁸ {Lit., “sitting,” connoting the study-hall.}

Additionally, we need to clarify: What does the term “the influence {of this day}” add? It would have sufficed for Rav Yosef to have said, “if not for this day”!

2.

MAYBE HE DID NOT MEAN TORAH

Seemingly, we could suggest that by saying, “this day,” Rav Yosef did not refer to the advantage of the day being the day of *Matan Torah*, but rather to “this day” {on which Hashem said}: “You will be a treasure to Me from among all the peoples,”⁹ the day on which Hashem chose the Jewish people from all the nations and tongues. As a result of this choice, Rav Yosef distinguished himself from the “many Yosefs... in the marketplace.” Therefore, he does not use the wording, “if not for Torah,” but specifically, “**this day**.” And he adds the words, “the influence of,” to emphasize that he wasn’t referring to the giving of the Torah but to something else engendered by this day.

However, it is difficult to suggest that this is the only explanation of his statement: For Rashi, who is the foremost of the Torah commentators whose interpretations are based on *pshat*,¹⁰ explains this matter explicitly:¹¹ “Since I studied Torah.” Additionally, it is clear from the context of the preceding¹² and subsequent¹³ talmudic passages that the issue at hand is the superiority of Torah and Torah study. Moreover, and more importantly, according to this explanation, this virtue {of Torah-study} applies to all Jewish people (in

⁹ *Shemos* 19:5.

¹⁰ {The plain meaning of Scripture. Rashi says in his commentary to *Bereishis* 3:8: “I have come only to explain the plain meaning of Scripture.” Although there are many levels and depths of interpretation on the Torah, Rashi adopts a straightforward approach.}

¹¹ {Rashi’s commentary on *Pesachim* 68b.}

¹² “All opinions agree with regard to Shavuot, that we require that it be also ‘for you.’ {I.e., part of the day is spent eating and drinking (*Pesachim* 68b).} What is the reason? It is the day on which the Torah was given.” And Rashi explains, “to demonstrate that it is pleasant and acceptable to the Jewish people the Torah was given on this day.”

¹³ “Every thirty days Rav Sheshes would review his studies that he had learned over the previous month, and he would say....”

comparison to all the nations), and Rav Yosef's assertion implies that he was referring to a unique virtue of his (in comparison with other Jews).

3.

MORE NUANCES

Additional nuances in Rav Yosef's statement:

a) Why did he ask, "how many **Yosefs** are there," and not just, "how many people"? Why is the name **Yosef** relevant in this context (of discussing Rav Yosef's virtues)? And Rashi emphasizes further, "There are a number of people in the marketplace whose names are 'Yosef.'"

b) What does Rashi intend to add by saying "in the marketplace," as opposed to just saying "how many Yosefs are there"?

We cannot answer these questions by saying that Rav Yosef had wanted to emphasize the difference between himself and the "many Yosefs" frequenting the "marketplace" and not the *Beis Midrash*,¹⁴ where Rav Yosef studied. For this point would have been evident even without using the word "marketplace": If not for (*Matan*) Torah, there would be no *Beis Midrash*. **All places** would have been the opposite of a *Beis Midrash* — "a marketplace."

4.

GAVRAH AND CHEFTZAH

The explanation:

[As mentioned above {in Section 1}, our Rabbis point out that Torah was learned even before *Matan Torah*. Similarly, they said regarding *mitzvos*

¹⁴ {The study-hall.}

observance,¹⁵ “Avraham fulfilled the entire Torah before it was given.”] Understood simply, then, the difference between Torah study and fulfilling *mitzvos* before *Matan Torah* and after *Matan Torah* is as follows: Before *Matan Torah*, *mitzvos* were fulfilled voluntarily, as “one who is not commanded {to do a *mitzvah*} and {still} performs it. After *Matan Torah*, it became mandatory (for the Jewish people), in the manner of, “one who is commanded and performs it.”

The advantage of “one who is commanded and performs it” (after *Matan Torah*) is not only regarding the person who performs the *mitzvah* (that he receives a greater reward,¹⁶ or the like). But also (and primarily), there is an advantage with respect to the object with which the *mitzvah* is performed.

Before *Matan Torah*, a person fulfilled *mitzvos* using only his abilities and on his initiative, as opposed to being commanded by the Creator. Consequently, a person’s (*mitzvah*) action could not cause the essence and quality of the object with which he fulfilled the *mitzvah* to transform from its natural state, into a *mitzvah*-object. Any change (and effect) was limited only to the person since he was the one who had performed the action.

After *Matan Torah*, however, when Hashem gave the positive and negative *mitzvos*, a new reality emerged. Now the *mitzvah*-act could also affect the object with which the *mitzvah* was performed. As a result of the Creator’s commandments to humanity, a person now had the ability to transform the object with which he did the *mitzvah* (or the sin, Heaven forbid).

When a Jew fulfills a positive *mitzvah*, the doer is affected, as well as the substance of the object with which the *mitzvah* was performed. The object becomes a *mitzvah*-object, etc. And similarly regarding a negative *mitzvah*: When a person transgresses, Heaven forbid, the sin not only affects the **person**, but it also affects the object, i.e., the object changes and becomes repulsive.

¹⁵ *Yoma*, *ibid*; *Kiddushin* 82a; Rashi, *Bereishis* 26:5 (about Avraham); *ibid* 26:12, 27:3, 27:9 (about Yitzchak); *ibid* 32:5 (about Yaakov); *ibid* 19:3, and Rashi *ibid* (about Lot).

¹⁶ See *Kiddushin* 31a; *Bava Kamma* 38a, 87a; and many other places.

AVRAHAM'S SINGLE *MITZVAH* OBJECT

On this basis, we can also understand — as elucidated in other places¹⁷ — the incident in which Avraham wanted Eliezer to take an oath holding a *mitzvah*-object.¹⁸ Avraham said to Eliezer,¹⁹ “Please — place your hand under my thigh. At first glance, this seems to be an immodest request. Seemingly, since Avraham had fulfilled the entire Torah, he should have had many *mitzvah*-objects that he could have asked Eliezer to hold while taking an oath.

The explanation is, however, as discussed: Although Avraham fulfilled *mitzvos*, he did not do so in response to the Creator’s command, but on his own initiative. Therefore, he could not transform the {physical} objects with which he performed those *mitzvos* into *mitzvah*-objects. The *mitzvah* of *bris milah* which Hashem commanded him to perform was, therefore, an exception. For this reason, the object with which this command of *milah* was observed became a *mitzvah*-object.

Although Hashem commanded Avraham,²⁰ “you, and your descendants after you, throughout their generations,” *Rambam* says,²¹ “We do not circumcise ourselves because Avraham had circumcised himself and the members of his household. Rather, we do so because Hashem instructed us through Moshe Rabbeinu.” For a {physical} object becomes holy (even with respect to the *mitzvah* of circumcision) in a complete sense specifically after *Matan Torah*. One of the reasons: Hashem’s commandment to Avraham, received by Avraham prophetically, was a specific *mitzvah* to a specific person. As such, it was not at all similar to the Hashem’s commandments at *Matan Torah*,²² through Moshe, when He gave all 613 *mitzvos* to all Jews.²³

¹⁷ *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 1, p. 38; vol. 3, p. 760.

¹⁸ *Shavuos* 38b; *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Choshen Mishpat*,” ch. 87, sec. 13-15.

¹⁹ *Bereishis* 24:2.

²⁰ *Bereishis* 17:9.

²¹ *Rambam’s Commentary on Mishnah, Chullin*, ch. 7, end; see *Sanhedrin* 59b, and *Tzafnas Paaneiach*, loc. cit.

²² See at length *Likkutei Sichos*, vol 19, pp. 177, 182 ff., et al.

²³ See below, sec. 11, for a straightforward explanation of this distinction.

6.

RAV YOSEF

This is the meaning of Rav Yosef's statement: "If not for the influence of this day, how many "Yosefs are there in the marketplace": "If not for the influence of this day" of *Matan Torah*, people would still learn Torah and fulfill *mitzvos*, as explained. The general point of Torah and *mitzvos*, as alluded to by the name "Yosef" {lit. "addition"}, is to introduce holiness to worldly affairs {as something supplemental}. However, all these contributions of Yosef, in Torah and *mitzvos*, before *Matan Torah* leaves the **world** as a "marketplace" — the world **remains** as a marketplace, a public domain, unchanged, exactly as it was before these *mitzvos* were performed.

The reason is that a *mitzvah* {performed before *Matan Torah*} affected only the person and not the physical world. It could not transform ordinary objects into *mitzvah*-objects, as discussed.

Specifically, as a result of "this day," when Hashem commanded the Jewish people to keep Torah and *mitzvos*, could there be "Yosef" — an addition (and change) — causing the world to no longer remain a marketplace. The addition accrued, after *Matan Torah*, through Torah study and the fulfillment of *mitzvos* transform not only the person (leaving the "marketplace" in its same prior state) but rather, the "marketplace" is transformed into a *mitzvah*-object, into a holy place, etc.

7.

I WAS ELEVATED

On this basis, we can also appreciate why Rashi adds,²⁴ "(for I studied Torah) **and I was elevated.**" How does Rashi infer from Rav Yosef's statement that Rav Yosef also meant that he was elevated? The simple meaning of his

²⁴ {Rashi's commentary on *Pesachim* 68b.}

statement was that because he learned Torah, he had distinguished himself from all others in the marketplace who did not learn Torah.

However, based on the above explanation, it is clear {that his statement is to be understood differently}: Just as a result of “this day,” objects used in the performance of *mitzvos* were transformed (although before *Matan Torah*, *mitzvos* were also performed), the same applies to Torah study. Although before *Matan Torah* people understood Torah wisdom and acquired Torah {knowledge}, this did not transform the “object” — the person learning Torah. In contrast, after *Matan Torah*, by learning Torah, the object, i.e., a person who learns is transformed — “**I was elevated**” — the person who learns becomes a superior sort of “object.”

8.

THE INFLUENCE OF THIS DAY

In light of the above, we can also appreciate the {nuanced} wording, “the **influence** of (this day).”²⁵

The influence of this day — the day of *Matan Torah* — expresses an additional idea.

Before *Matan Torah*, an **object**, i.e., physical matter, could not be delineated as a *mitzvah*-object or as a forbidden entity. Rather, a person was commanded either to do something or to refrain from doing something. In contrast, after *Matan Torah* (even before a person performs a *mitzvah* or a forbidden activity, Heaven forbid), the world itself (and objects) possess the status of a *mitzvah* or a prohibition.

We find something **similar** {even} before *Matan Torah* itself.

²⁵ {Lit., “(if this day had not) **induced it.**” See Section 11 where this nuance is explained more fully.}

One of the explanations as to why Avraham did not fulfill the *mitzvah* of circumcision before he was commanded (even though he fulfilled the entire Torah): Since the *mitzvah* of circumcision did not yet exist, therefore — within the realm of Torah — the {category of negativity associated with the} foreskin also did not exist. Thus, the possibility of circumcising the foreskin did not exist. Had Avraham circumcised himself {before *Matan Torah*}, the act would have been considered merely the cutting of flesh.

The same holds true regarding eating *matzah*, and so forth. Before *Matan Torah*, the {halachic} category of *matzah* did not exist; and so, too, regarding several *mitzvah-related* concepts. Why then do we find that Avraham (and his offspring)²⁶ ate *matzah* and fulfilled all other *mitzvos*?

The answer: Even prior to *Matan Torah*, the category {and concept} of eating, as a *mitzvah*, already existed. Furthermore, there was a {"halachic"} difference between eating different foods; {we find eating to be a *mitzvah*} such as in the case of "a morsel of bread"²⁷ and "a calf"²⁸ (when Avraham performed the *mitzvah* of welcoming guests) and in general, {the *mitzvah*} of "doing *tzedakah*"²⁹ (including providing people with clothing and shelter). [Furthermore, when fulfilling other *mitzvos*, Avraham did not preclude the possibility of fulfilling these *mitzvos* {again in the future} in an ideal fashion. In contrast, regarding the *mitzvah* of circumcision: Had Avraham circumcised himself before he was commanded by Hashem, before the negativity associated with the foreskin existed, he would have lost the possibility of performing the *mitzvah* of **circumcising the foreskin** by Hashem's command {because he would no longer have had a foreskin}.]

The same applies after *Matan Torah*:

²⁶ See *Tosfos*, s.v., "ella" on *Rosh HaShanah* 11a; Rashi's commentary on *Bereishis* 19:3; *Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer*, ch. 32, quoted in Rashi's commentary on *Bereishis* 27:9; *Targum Yonasan ben Uziel*, loc. cit.; *Tafnas Paaneach's* commentary on *Bereishis* 18:6, 27:3 ff.; et al.

²⁷ {*Bereishis* 18:5.}

²⁸ {*Bereishis* 18:8.}

²⁹ {*Bereishis* 18:9.}

Just as Torah prohibitions not only obligate a person but also affect the prohibited object itself, making it repugnant, the same dynamic applies regarding positive *mitzvos*. Even before a person performs a *mitzvah*, just by dint of the very commandment, the object with which he performs the *mitzvah* already is conferred with a newfound susceptibility to holiness. In contrast, before *Matan Torah*, this was not the case.

Nonetheless, the object only actually becomes a holy-object, understandably, when a person fulfills the commandment — when a person, practically, carries out the *mitzvah* of *tefillin*, using the *tefillin*; or the *mitzvah* of taking the four species, using an *esrog*, etc., and the like.

9.

FROM ROSH CHODESH

On this basis, we can clarify a statement made by the *Mechilta*, which at first glance seems unusual.

Regarding the verse,³⁰ “You shall tell your son on that day, saying, ‘It is on account of this that Hashem did for me when I left Egypt’” — the obligation to recount the story of the exodus from Egypt — the *Mechilta* says:³¹

One may think that {recounting the Exodus} starts from Rosh Chodesh. The Torah, therefore, says, “on that day.” “On that day,” however, could mean that while it is yet daytime; the Torah, therefore, says, “It is on account of this.” The expression, “on account of this,” can only be said when *matzah* and *maror* are placed before you.

The commentators³² discuss why we would assume that the obligation that “you shall tell your son” (recounting the story of the exodus from Egypt) begins

³⁰ *Shemos* 13:8.

³¹ The wording here is as recited in the *Haggadah Shel Pesach*. In the *Mechilta*, the wording is slightly different.

³² See *Sefer Ha'orah* to Rashi, p. 105; *Ritva* on *Haggadah Shel Pesach*; *Shibulei Haleket*, *Seder Pesach*, (218); *Abudarham*; et al.

from Rosh Chodesh. The reason: Just as Moshe spoke about (and gave instructions about) the laws of *korban pesach* and the *mitzvah* to eat it, “and *matzos*, with bitter herbs, shall they eat it”³³ (which brought about the redemption from Egypt) on Rosh Chodesh, we would assume that the Jewish people recounting this — “you shall tell your son” (the narrative of the Exodus from Egypt) — should begin “from Rosh Chodesh.” But the verse teaches us that we need to recount the Exodus “on that day...” and at a time “when *matzah* and *maror*....”

We need to clarify: According to a simple understanding of the *Mechilta*’s wording, the conclusion that the obligation to recount the story of the Exodus from Egypt only applies “when *matzah* and *maror* are placed before you” is not based on any new insight into of the nature of this obligation or its substance. Rather, even according to the supposition of the *Mechilta*, we understand the verse, “You shall **tell** your son on that day, saying, ‘**It is on account of this that Hashem did for me when I left Egypt**’” to be teaching us that the narrative of the Exodus from Egypt is connected to, and must be recounted in conjunction with mentioning³⁴ (*korban pesach*), *matzah*, and *maror*. The particular diction of the verse only teaches us about the **time** that the *mitzvah* is to be performed, i.e., specifically, “**when** (the *korban pesach*) *matzah* and *maror* are **placed before you**.”

This is puzzling. What sort of connection do *korban pesach*, *matzah*, and *maror* — which only came into existence on the night of the fifteenth of Nissan — have with the first day of the month (or with “*on that day* — while it is yet daytime”)? {Surely, these items must share a thematic connection with the first day of the month since we had entertained the possibility that the obligation to recount the exodus narrative might begin then.}

10.

³³ *Shemos* 12:8.

³⁴ In accord with the teaching of *Rabban Gamliel* (end of *Pesachim* 116a, in the *mishnah*): “Anyone who did not mention these three items on Pesach has not fulfilled his obligation... *korban pesach*, *matzah*, and *maror*.”

Based on the earlier discussion, the explanation of these issues is as follows:

Since the commands to offer and eat the *korban pesach*, *matzah*, and *maror* were given by Hashem on Rosh Chodesh, already at that time, the commandment triggered the reality of *mitzvah*-objects called *pesach*, *matzah*, and *maror*. In contrast, when the forefathers had performed these *mitzvos* (or had the Jewish people performed these *mitzvos* before Rosh Chodesh), the reality of these *mitzvah*-objects still would not exist.

[Furthermore: Some authorities³⁵ maintain that the obligation to study and lecture about the laws of *Pesach*, etc., begins two weeks before *Pesach*. It emerges that already on Rosh Chodesh, the reality of the *mitzvah*-objects, *Pesach*, *matzah*, and *maror* is initiated as a result of the laws of Torah and its commandments.]

Consequently, we might have thought that the obligation to fulfill the *mitzvah* to “tell your son” — talking about and discussing *pesach*, *matzah*, *maror*, and the exodus from Egypt (which resulted with the input of these items) — begins already on Rosh Chodesh, since Torah’s commandments have already established their existence.

The *Mechilta*’s second supposition is that since the verse says, “on that day,” we derive that the existence of these *mitzvah*-objects, as created on Rosh Chodesh, is insufficient; however, “on that day,” does have this effect. Then {“on that day”}, the class of a *korban pesach* object (which was of primary importance in bringing the redemption) comes into existence. Its reality would be true not only by dint of the Torah’s command but also by dint of the time {the eve of *Pesach*} and the obligation now placed on the person. For at **this** time {“on that day”}, the person is already actually obligated to offer a *korban pesach*.

But the *Mechilta* concludes that the *mitzvah* can be fulfilled only when *matzah* and *maror* are **placed before you** (expounding: “the expression, ‘on

³⁵ *Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, Tosefta Megillah, ch. 3, sec. 2; Pesachim 6a ff.*

account of this,' can only be said at the time when..."). When may a person **mention** the *mitzvos* of (*pesach*) *matzah*, and *maror*, and fulfill the *mitzvah* of recounting the story of the exodus from Egypt, which is connected to these items? Only when he actually has the obligation of *matzah* and *maror*, at night,³⁶ when he is involved in carrying out the *mitzvah* and the *mitzvah*-status of the object is effectuated; but not beforehand.

[This applies not only to *matzah* and *maror* but also to the *korban pesach*. Although the *korban pesach* was offered in the afternoon and it already became a holy-offering object (a *korban pesach*), since the *korban pesach* is “brought, to begin with, only for eating,”³⁷ it emerges that only at night does the object of the *korban pesach* reach its consummate state as a *mitzvah*, when a person becomes obligated to eat it together with *matzah* and *maror*.]

11.

CAUSE AND EFFECT

Therefore, Rav Yosef said, “if not for the **influence** of this day” {“if this day had not *induced* it.”}: The simple meaning of the word “induce” is to bring something about indirectly.

Similarly, in our case: As discussed, Torah **study** and *mitzvah* **observance**, in a literal sense, changes and affects the object {i.e., the person} (“I was elevated”) in an actual sense. “This day” **induced** that **Torah study and *mitzvah* observance** were able to change the “object.”

This happened in two ways:

³⁶ See *Responsa of Terumas HaDeshen*, ch. 137; *Alter Rebbe's Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 473, par. 3: “When *matzah* and *maror* are placed before you for the sake of the obligation.”

³⁷ *Pesachim* 76b.

- a) The ability for a corporeal object to transition into a category of a *mitzvah*- (and sin-) object became a reality. It could become an object that was a fitting tool to use to fulfill a *mitzvah*.

- b) The “object” — the Jewish people {their identity} — also changed; they completed their conversion (and entered under the wings of the *Shechinah*)³⁸ and, “a convert who just converted is like a child who was just born.”³⁹ Meaning, the Jewish people, with their actual bodies, became a “holy nation.”⁴⁰

As a result, a Jew has the ability and strength that when he takes hold of a physical object and uses it to fulfill Hashem’s command, he actually brings this object to the state of being a *mitzvah*- (or holy-) object — the Yosef — connoting *addition*, as mentioned; from a “marketplace” {i.e., something mundane} it becomes a holy place, a holy object. The same is true regarding a Jew himself. When a Jew in fact studies Torah, he triggers a change and elevation in himself (“and I was elevated”) in addition to his intrinsic holiness.

We still need to clarify:

Why had no one before Rav Yosef pronounced this quality of *Matan Torah*? (This question does not apply to the *Amoraim*⁴¹ who lived after Rav Yosef, for Rav Yosef had already publicized it.) Many *Amoraim* lived before Rav Yosef; and before their era, there were all the generations of *Tannaim*.⁴² Yet we find no one who underscored this idea — “if not for this day”!

³⁸ {Hashem’s presence.} See *Yevamos* 46b; *Krisos* 9a; *Rambam, Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Issurei Biah*,” ch. 13, par. 1; *Rashi* on *Shemos*, 24:6.

³⁹ *Yevamos* 22a.

⁴⁰ *Shemos* 19:6; as stated many times (*Devarim* 7:6, 14:2) “for you are a holy nation.”

⁴¹ {Sages of the *Gemara*.}

⁴² {Sages of the *Mishnah*.}

12.

RAV YOSEF WAS BLIND

The explanation: Regarding the effect of “this day” — that the conception of *mitzvos* (both positive and negative) was introduced even into the {very fabric of the} objects themselves — we can ask the following question: Does the effect on an object occur only when it is used by “one who is commanded {to do a *mitzvah*} and performs it”? Meaning, is it the command placed upon the person to fulfill the *mitzvah* (or to refrain from performing the sin) that triggers the holiness and *mitzvah quality* that imbues an object; and therefore, this would not be accomplished by someone who was not commanded?

Alternatively, at *Matan Torah*, every Jew became intrinsically holy, and moreover, the **conception** of a holy object (and similarly, a forbidden object) was introduced to the **world**. Therefore, the *mitzvah* status can impact an object even if the object was used by someone who was not commanded to perform the *mitzvah* but who still performs it?

Women, for example, are exempt from positive, time-bound *mitzvos*,⁴³ but they may perform several of these *mitzvos*.⁴⁴ This begs the question: Are these *mitzvos* just {spiritually insular} human acts, or do they also affect the object?

This has *halachic* consequences in several areas, among them:

Regarding the law⁴⁵ that an *esrog* is “set aside for the entire day,”⁴⁶ and a person may not eat the *esrog* (or do anything similar with it) throughout all seven days of Sukkos. The question arises: Does the same law concerning it being “set aside” apply to an *esrog* owned by a woman {considering that women

⁴³ *Kiddushin* 29a; *Rambam, Mishneh Torah, “Hilchos Avodah Zarah,”* ch. 12, sec. 3; *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch* (as well as Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*), *Orach Chaim*, sec. 17, par. 2 (1).

⁴⁴ This is the accepted position in *Halachah* — women are permitted to perform all *mitzvos*, viz., *Tosafos*, s.v. “*dilma*” on *Eruvin* 96a; *Tosafos*, s.v. “*ha*,” on *Rosh HaShanah* 33a; *Mishneh Torah, “Hilchos Tzitzis,”* ch. 3, par. 9; *Rosh* and *Ran* on *Rosh HaShanah* 33a; *Mechaber* in *Shulchan Aruch, “Orach Chaim,”* sec. 589, par. 6.

⁴⁵ *Sukkah* 46b; *Mishneh Torah, “Hilchos Lulav,”* ch. 7, at the end; *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim*, ch. 665, par. 1; note Rashi commenting on the *Gemara*, *ibid*, s.v. “*tinokos davka*.”

⁴⁶ {Meaning, its status as a *mitzvah*-object applies for the entire day, and it cannot be used for mundane purposes, even after it has been used to fulfill the *mitzvah*.}

are not obligated in this *mitzvah*} because the *mitzvah* also affects the object of the *esrog*, or not?

A similar question arises regarding a blind person. According to Rabbi Yehudah, the blind are exempt from fulfilling all biblical *mitzvos*.⁴⁷ Does a *mitzvah* performed by a blind person affect the object, since he falls into the category of “one who is not commanded and performs it”?

We find in the *Gemara* as follows:⁴⁸

Rav Yosef {who was blind} said: “At first, I would say: If someone would {authoritatively} declare that the *Halachah* accords with Rabbi Yehudah, who maintains that a blind person is exempt from *mitzvos*, then I would host a festive day for the Sages. What is the reason? I am not commanded and {nevertheless} I perform *mitzvos*.⁴⁹ But now that I heard the teaching of Rabbi Chanina — Rabbi Chanina says: ‘One who is commanded {to perform *mitzvos*} and performs {them} is greater than one who is not commanded and performs’ — if someone would declare that the *Halachah* does not accord with Rabbi Yehudah, then I will host a festive day for the Sages. What is the reason? Since I am commanded, I receive a greater reward.”

This teaching indicates that:

- (a) Rav Yosef was unsure if the *Halachah* accords with the Sages, who maintained that a blind person is obligated to perform all of the *mitzvos*; or with Rabbi Yehudah, who maintained that a blind person is exempt.
- (b) The simple reading of Rav Yosef’s words, “whoever will declare that the *Halachah* accords with Rabbi Yehudah... I would host... I am not commanded and {nevertheless} I perform *mitzvos*,” implies that Rav Yosef maintained that according to Rabbi Yehudah, he was completely exempt

⁴⁷ *Bava Kamma* 87a.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ {Rav Yosef was originally of the opinion that one who is exempt from performing *mitzvos*, but does them nonetheless, receives a greater reward than one who is obligated.}

from performing *mitzvos*, even rabbinically. (This explains the extent of his **great** rejoicing if the *Halachah* would accord with Rabbi Yehudah.)

On this basis, we can appreciate why Rav Yosef said specifically, “If not for the influence of this day, how many ‘Yosef’s are there in the marketplace,” and the novelty of this teaching.

“This day” triggered the Jewish people’s bodies into becoming inherently holy, and the category of a {holy- or *mitzvah*-} object was established by Hashem’s command. As a result, even when a blind person, such as Rav Yosef, studies Torah, the Torah elevates him — “And I was elevated” — the “object” is modified. So, too, when he fulfills *mitzvos*, although not commanded to do so, his actions also affect the object, since, after *Matan Torah*, this act is a *mitzvah*-act.

13.

THE QUESTION STILL STANDS

But this answer is not altogether smooth: Since at the end of the day, when a Jew causes an object to become a *mitzvah*-object, his ability to do so is empowered by Hashem’s commands, it would make sense that a person who is commanded to perform {*mitzvos*} and does so, causes a greater and stronger impact on the objects {in terms of changing them into a *mitzvah*-objects} by studying Torah and performing *mitzvos*, than one who is not commanded and performs them.⁵⁰ But Rav Yosef’s statement implies that he extolled and esteemed his Torah learning (and *mitzvah* observance) in terms of the {change to the} object. His statement was said in a way that did not suggest that he thought he **could also** learn Torah and perform *mitzvos* (although **not** optimally).

Additionally, we have not yet fully answered the above-mentioned question (from Section 11): Even if Rav Yosef was the one to declare, “If not for the

⁵⁰ See Responsa of *Tzemach Tzedek*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 3, par. 10, “It is not similar to the taking of a *lulav* by a woman by which **no complete mitzvah** is fulfilled thereby.”

influence of this day,” because he was blind, we can still ask further: Rav Yosef was not the first blind *Tanna* or *Amora*. (We find that Bava ben Buta was also blind.)⁵¹ So why don’t we find that some *Tanna* or earlier *Amora* (who was blind) declared, “If not for this day....”? (Albeit, we could answer (unconvincingly) that they all had concurred with the Sages who maintained that a blind person is obligated to perform all *mitzvos*.)

14.

RAV YOSEF WAS THE OWNER OF THE WHEAT

The explanation is as follows:

Rav Yosef was referred to as “Sinai.”⁵² “Rav Yosef would cite, concerning himself, the verse:⁵³ ‘And much produce comes by the strength of the ox.’”⁵⁴ “The *Mishnah* and *Beraisos*⁵⁵ were arranged before him as {as clearly as} they were when given at Mount Sinai.”⁵⁶ Therefore, “They sent a message {from Babylonia} to there {to Israel}: *Sinai* is preferable,⁵⁷ as the Master⁵⁸ said: ‘**Everyone needs** the owner of wheat {i.e., one who is expert in the sources}.’” Thus, Rav Yosef was appointed as the head of the *yeshivah*, etc.

Therefore, according to the opinion that maintains that a blind person is exempt from *mitzvos* (and Rav Yosef was unsure if the *Halachah* follows this opinion, as mentioned), Rav Yosef said, “if not for the influence of this day”:

Rav Yosef {as we said} was “one who is not commanded to perform {*mitzvos*} but {nonetheless} does so.” Accordingly, it makes sense that he was unable (intrinsically) to effect the transition of objects **into** the category of

⁵¹ *Bava Basra* 4a.

⁵² {Rav Yosef had amassed an encyclopedic knowledge of tannaitic sources.} *Berachos* 64a; *Horayos* 14a.

⁵³ {*Mishlei* 14:4.}

⁵⁴ *Sanhedrin* 42a; see *Tosafos*, *ibid.*, s.v., “*ve’rav tevuos*.”

⁵⁵ {Teachings of the *Tannaim* that were not included in the *Mishnah*.}

⁵⁶ {I.e., he could recall them verbatim.} *Rashi* in *Horayos* 14a.

⁵⁷ {A *Sinai*, who is able to recall the entire breadth of tannaitic teaching, is preferable to a scholar who possesses analytical acuity.}

⁵⁸ {In the Hebrew original, “*Mar*”; the title by which this sage was known.}

mitzvah-objects to the same degree as someone who was “commanded and performs it.” But, since he was a “Sinai,” {we apply to him the adage} “**everyone** requires the owner of wheat.” Meaning, everyone needed to benefit from Rav Yosef’s Torah knowledge; and everyone conducted themselves according to his *halachic* rulings and directives. Even the people who were **commanded**, and whose *mitzvah*-acts completely changed the physical objects {needed him}. Through all this, he became further “elevated,” and there was a complete transformation of the object also with respect to Rav Yosef. [In contrast, we do not find Bava ben Buta (and other *Tannaim* and *Amoraim* who came before Rav Yosef) referred to as the “Sinai” of his generation, as a “provider of wheat” {in terms of everyone relying on his Torah knowledge}.⁵⁹]

For this reason, Rav Yosef said specifically, “If not for the influence of this day, how many ‘Yosef’s are there in the marketplace?” The influence of this day specifically — which resulted in physical objects becoming able to attain the status of *mitzvah*- (or sin-) objects — brought Rav Yosef to be “elevated,” reaching the pinnacle of an object’s consummate transformation (because he was the “Sinai” of his generation, even though he was not commanded to perform *mitzvos*.)

15.

FUSING THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL

In the context of this discussion, we can see how the inner dimensions of Torah and the revealed dimensions of Torah are literally “**one** Torah”:

The aforementioned explanation, according to the revealed dimension of Torah, harmonizes with the following explanation offered in *Chassidus*:⁶⁰ The patriarchs’ *avodah*⁶¹ resulted in sublime effusions and unifications **only** in the **higher realms**. At *Matan Torah*, after the decree {separating the “higher” and lower” realms was} rescinded, and the dynamic of “the higher realms should descend to the lower realms, etc.,⁶² was established, people were given the ability to draw G-dliness even **down below** into (the “object” of) physical things.

⁵⁹ Even though he was a judge (see *Seder Hadoros*, under the entry for his name).

⁶⁰ See *Torah Or, parshas Yisro*, p. 68a ff.

⁶¹ {Divine service.}

⁶² *Shemos Rabbah*, ch. 12, sec. 3; *Midrash Tanchuma, parshas Vaera*, sec. 15.

In this process of eliciting G-dliness, there are gradations. In broad strokes: there is the level {of G-dliness} imbued into a physical object with which one **can** perform a *mitzvah*; a more sublime level {of G-dliness} is drawn into an object that a person prepares and designates to be used for a *mitzvah*; and an even more sublime level of G-dliness is elicited when a Jew actually fulfills the *mitzvah*,⁶³ as elucidated in detail in the teachings of *Chassidus*.⁶⁴

— Based on talks delivered on *Acharon Shel Pesach* and the second day of *Shavuos*, 5736 (1976)

⁶³ Whereas a non-Jew who fulfills Torah and mitzvos elicits nothing; see *Torah Or*, on our *parshah*, (68b) and on “*Shemos*,” 53d.

⁶⁴ See *Torah Or*, p. 90b ff.; *Shaarei Orah*, s.v., “*yavi'u levush malchus*,” ch. 5 ff.; ch. 73, and in the summaries there; see *Toras Shalom*, p. 4; *Hemshech 5672*, ch. 179; *Sefer Hamaamarim 5709*, p. 148, fn.; see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 19, p. 357 ff.