



לקוטי שיחות
PROJECT
LIKKUTEI
SICHOS

Sicha Summary

Chelek 15 | Yisro | Sichah 3

The Talmud:

On Shavuot, Rav Yosef would say: “Prepare for me a third-born calf.” He said: “If not for the influence of this day, how many Yosefs are there in the marketplace?” (*Pesachim* 68b)

The Question:

Seemingly, Rav Yosef was referring to the Giving of the Torah, which elevated the Jewish people. If so, why did he use the vague expression, “the influence of this day...” rather than simply saying, “If not for the Torah that was given on this day?”

The Explanation:

Essentially, what the Giving of the Torah accomplished was that for the first time, G-d commanded the Jewish people to perform *mitzvos*. Earlier generations of Jews observed *mitzvos*, but did so on their own accord, out of their own spiritual fervor, and not by G-d’s command. When human beings pursue spiritual goals of their own volition, they are limited by their own human capacity. The *mitzvos* of the Forefathers, therefore, could not transform and affect the material world, for how could human-initiated action bridge the spiritual and material? By commanding the observance of *mitzvos*, however, G-d invested human action with the ability to affect the material world. From then on, every material item with which a *mitzvah* was performed had the potential to be illuminated with Divine light through this *mitzvah* act.

This is the deeper meaning of Rav Yosef’s statement: “If not for the influence of this day, how many Yosefs are there in the market?”

Torah study existed prior to the Giving of the Torah. What was truly transformational was the “day” of the Giving of the Torah itself, when G-d commanded the Jewish people to observe *mitzvos*. This Divine command enabled Jews to begin fusing the material with the spiritual.

Rav Yosef said that if not for this ability, “how many Yosefs would there be in the market.” The word “Yosef” means “to add, to proliferate.” Without a Divine command, the potential for meaningful spiritual accomplishments would still exist, creating beautiful “additions” to humanity and the world. But the physical realm would not be transformed. The world would remain a “marketplace,” a place of competition and multiplicity. The spiritual contributions — “Yosef” — would be present, but the world would still be an unchanged “marketplace.” But because on Shavuos, G-d *did* command us to fulfill *mitzvos*, our *mitzvah*-acts have the ability to transform the world around us.

The Author:

Why was Rav Yosef the particular Sage who voiced this joy at the novel accomplishment of the Giving of the Torah? Why didn't a Sage from an earlier generation express this idea before Rav Yosef?

Rav Yosef was blind. There is a talmudic dispute as to whether or not the blind are obligated in *mitzvos*. The question becomes: If someone is not commanded to perform a *mitzvah*, does their action have the capacity to infuse the material with spirituality? Rav Yosef maintained that the Giving of the Torah fundamentally changed the fabric of Creation, enabling it to be elevated by a *mitzvah* performed by anyone, even someone not commanded by G-d. Furthermore, Rav Yosef himself was known as a “Sinai,” which refers to his comprehensive knowledge of all of Torah's laws. Anyone who needed to know how to perform a *mitzvah* could turn to Rav Yosef for instruction. Thus, Rav Yosef played an integral role in the *mitzvah* performance of those, unlike Rav Yosef, who G-d unquestionably commanded; by extension, Rav Yosef certainly affected the material realm.

Thus, Rav Yosef extolled the day of the Giving of the Torah because it gave even him — whose obligation to perform *mitzvos* was in doubt — the opportunity to change the physical world through a) his own *mitzvah* observance in a universe altered by G-d's revelation and commands; and b) his instruction to those who were, unlike Rav Yosef, without doubt obligated to perform *mitzvos*.