



לקוטי שיחות
PROJECT
LIKKUTEI
SICHOS

Graduating the Literal

Sicha Summary

Chelek 15 | Lech-Lecha | Sichah 2

The Context:

The Sages teach that the Patriarchs observed Torah and *mitzvos* in some fashion, even before it was given at Sinai (See *Kiddushin* 82a).

What differentiates their pre-Sinaitic observance from our observance after the Torah was given?

Chassidus explains that prior to Sinai, the Divine essence of Torah was inaccessible to human beings. The Patriarchs observed *mitzvos* because of their commitment to G-d, and due to their human limitations, they could only connect with the dimension of Torah that was relative to human experience. The personal refinement they drew from the Torah was also limited according to their abilities.

When G-d gave the Torah to the Jewish people, however, He gave the essence of the Torah, which transcends the natural world. When Jews now observe a *mitzvah* or study Torah, they connect with the dimension of Torah that is essentially beyond human capacity.

The Question:

Torah is a guide for every Jew. Thus, everything written in the Torah must provide some practical guidance for the Jew today. If *mitzvah* observance and Torah study now is infinitely deeper than that of the Patriarchs who lived before Sinai, why are their journeys, narratives, *mitzvos*, and struggles recorded in the Torah? Seemingly, the narratives of their lives are categorically different from the post Sinai Jew's life, bearing little relevance to the observance of Torah today.

The Explanation:

Even though G-d gave the Jewish people the gift of His Essence ensconced within the Torah, one does not necessarily appreciate the intimate connection he has with His Essence when he studies Torah or performs *mitzvos*. Without personal work and refinement, this deeper dimension of G-dliness within the Torah and *mitzvos* remains obscured, hidden from perception. To tangibly experience this dimension of G-dliness, a person must make an effort to remove the obstacles of his own ego and sensitize himself to the Divine.

Thus, the lives of the Patriarchs are an enduring lesson for a Jew today, because they illuminate the first step of the divine service: Working with one's own abilities to perceive G-d in everything he encounters, in every *mitzvah* he does, and through Torah study.

Once a person has made a concerted effort like the forefathers did, he will be able to receive and *appreciate* the gift of Torah — the Essence of G-d that, naturally speaking, is unrelatable, for it is beyond the scope of human comprehension.

Gradual Study:

This progression — from limited perception of G-dliness to a broader perception — is mirrored in the education of a child. When a child first encounters the anthropomorphisms of G-d in the Torah, “the hand of G-d,” “the voice of G-d,” he or she understands them literally. Even though this understanding is untrue, for G-d has no body, shape, or likeness, it is true in a limited sense: For the child understands that the strength of a hand is not that of the physical flesh itself, but it is an expression of an unseen power that resides in the hand. Similarly, when the Torah describes G-d’s “outstretched arm,” the child understands the Torah to be referring to G-d’s immense power, not simply brute physical strength.

But as a child matures, he or she progresses from a simple, materialistic understanding of these metaphors to their deeper, more subtle mystical meanings.

Like a person who progresses from a limited, human perspective of G-d to the appreciation of a Power beyond — G-d's Essence, — so does the child move from the literal to the mystical.

Gradual Revelation:

This process of the gradual revelation of the Divine is embedded in the very creation of the world. First, G-d reveals a constricted form of His light to Creation. As the world assimilates this revelation, G-d gradually discloses deeper and more intimate dimensions of Himself, until His Essence is present and tangible in the created world.

A person mimics this process when he graduates from a literal, surface level understanding of Torah and the world, to an appreciation of the mystical, sensing G-d's Essence within Torah and the world.