

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 23

Chukas, Sicha 1

The Talmud:

Tractate Megillah concludes with a discussion about the proper way to handle a Torah scroll:

Rabbi Parnach said that Rabbi Yochanan said: Anyone who holds onto an uncovered Torah scroll will be punished by being buried uncovered. The Gemara asks: Can it enter your mind to say that he will actually be buried uncovered? Rather, say that he will be buried metaphorically uncovered, i.e., without the merit of having performed mitzvot.

The Gemara again asks: Can it enter your mind to say that he will be buried without the merit of having performed mitzvot? Why should he forfeit the merit of all the mitzvot that he performed during his lifetime? Rather, Abaye said: He will be buried uncovered, without the merit of that mitzva. (Megillah 32a)

But which mitzvah's reward does the person forfeit? Tosfos records two opinions: The

simplest explanation is the person receives no reward for the mitzvah of holding the scroll. But Tosfos asks that this is obvious, if he holds the scroll without a mantle, he isn't fulfilling the mitzvah in the first place? The second opinion maintains that he forfeits the reward of other mitzvos he performed while holding directly onto the parchment, such as reading the Torah, rolling it, or fixing mistakes in the text.

The Explanation:

The Talmud offered and rejected two possible interpretations of Rabbi Yochanan's statement before settling on Abaye's explanation. What is the logic of each of these explanations?

There are three ways of understanding the relationship between the Torah scroll and its mantle:

1. The scroll does not need the mantle, it is there purely to allow the person to hold onto the scroll.
2. The honor of the scroll demands that it be dressed in a mantle. In this understanding, the mantle is not for the sake of the person, it augments the honor of the scroll itself.

3. The mantle is not just an external garment that enhances the scroll, it is part of the scroll itself, similar to the empty margins of the parchment.

The three attempts to explain the meaning of the punishment for holding a bare Torah scroll correspond to these three understandings of the mantle:

1. If the mantle is external to the scroll, and only serves the needs of the holder, then the punishment would be to be buried without clothing, for clothing is external to the person, and only necessary for his interactions with other people.
2. The talmud rejects this, leading to the deeper understanding of the mantle as part of the scroll's honor. If the mantle expresses the sanctity of the scroll itself, then a commensurate punishment to disrobing it of that honor would be to forfeit one's mitzvos, which are the "garment" to a person's soul.
3. But if the mantle is an essential part of the scroll, then why should the person forfeit other mitzvos unconnected to the scroll? Instead, the punishment would be to forfeit mitzvos connected to the Torah scroll itself.

Understanding Tosfos:

The two opinions in Tosfos as to what mitzvah is forfeited can be understood as follows: According to the first opinion, that the person does not fulfill the mitzvah of holding the scroll, the novelty here is that we do not separate the mitzvah from the concomitant transgression as we do in other instances. For example, if someone were to

tear their clothes in mourning on Shabbos, they have violated Shabbos, but they still fulfilled the obligation of tearing the clothes as a mourner. In this case, however, Abeye is introducing a novel perspective — the mantle is part of the scroll itself — and therefore, the person does not fulfill the mitzvah of holding the scroll, because he is not really holding the complete scroll.

Tosfos' issue with this is that this does not mirror the Talmud's previous suggestions, where a person was to forfeit something that they had already gained. Either the right to a dignified burial, or the reward of previous mitzvos. In the current understanding, the person does not "lose" anything, they just do not "gain" the mitzvah of holding the scroll. Therefore, Tosfos offers an alternative explanation, that the person loses the reward he received from the mitzvos of reading from the scroll. (Alternatively, this represents a deeper understanding of the mantle as connected to the full expression of the Torah scroll, affecting not just the scroll itself, but anything the scroll is used for.)

Tosfos' Conclusion:

Tosfos concludes his commentary, "but one who holds the scroll with its mantle receives the reward promised by the verse, "length of days is in his right hand, and in his left, wealth and honor." The sages explain that the "right hand" of Torah study alludes to altruistic study for the sake of the Torah itself, and the "left hand" alludes to utilitarian study, for some other purpose. Because the verse promises reward for this study, however, this obviously doesn't refer

to selfish study, but to study motivated by a desire to perform mitzvos.

This kind of study can be seen as the Torah's "mantle" which is part of the scroll, yet also

a separate entity from it. Therefore one who holds the Torah with its mantle, that is, studies with intent to do, as well as for the sake of the Torah itself, receives both rewards of long life, and wealth and honor.
