

Sicha Summary, Likkutei Sichos Vol. 26, Yisro 2

Obligation and Subservience

The Ten Commandments begin with the verse,[1] "I am G-d your L-rd who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the place of slavery." In commenting on the words, "who brought you out of the land of Egypt," Rashi notes:[2] "Taking you out of Egypt is sufficient reason for you to be subservient to Me."

What difficulty does Rashi seek to resolve with his remark?

Some commentators[3] on Rashi explain that the difficulty lies in the verse's stating "I am G-d your L-rd who brought you out of the land of Egypt" rather than "I am G-d your L-rd who created heaven and earth." Rashi thus explains, they say, that the Exodus was mentioned rather than creation since it was because G-d brought the Jews out of slavery that they became His servants and He became their G-d.

This explanation, however, is somewhat lacking: In the simple context of the verse there is absolutely no reason why it should conclude with the statement "who created heaven and earth," inasmuch as the latter part of the verse gives the reason for G-d becoming "your L-rd" - the G-d of the Jewish people.

This being so, it stands to reason that the explanation should be germane to the relationship between G-d and the Jews rather than to that between G-d and the universe.

And so the explanation of why the Exodus is given as the reason for G-d becoming the G-d of the Jewish people is obvious - G-d's liberation of the Jews from slavery is what made it possible for Him to give us His Torah and mitzvos on Sinai.

Moreover, the fact that G-d took the Jews out of Egypt in order for them to serve Him was already mentioned several times in the Torah:[4] in none of those places did Rashi find it necessary to explain that this "is sufficient reason for you to be subservient to Me." What difficulty is there in this particular verse?

The difficulty which Rashi addresses is related to this very issue: Since the Jews were already well aware that the ultimate goal of the Exodus was the receipt of the Torah and submission to G-d, what was the need to mention yet again that G-d's declaration: "I am G-d your L-rd" is the consequence of His being the One "who brought you out of the land of Egypt"?

Rashi therefore explains that "who brought you out of the land of Egypt" is neither a reason nor an explanation for "I am G-d your L-rd.," Rather, it is a wholly distinct matter - "Taking you out of Egypt is sufficient reason for you to be subservient to Me."

"I am G-d your L-rd" implies the acceptance of G-d's reign.[5] The Jews accepted G-d as their king and ruler, and thereby obligated themselves to obey all His commands. G-d then added an additional matter - merely accepting G-d as king does not suffice; Jews must be wholly subservient to Him.

Accepting a king's dominion does not preclude the possibility of a private life; it only means doing what the king commands and avoiding those things which the king prohibits. However, being "subservient to Me" means a Jew has no personal freedom; all his actions and possessions are subservient to G-d.

Performing Torah and mitzvos is unlike heeding the commands of a flesh-and-blood king, since it is done in a state of complete subservience. Every moment of a Jew's life involves some aspect of Torah and mitzvos.

Based on Likkutei Sichos Vol. XXVI pp. 124-128.

1. Shmos 20:2.

2. Ibid.

3. See Gur Aryei and Devek Tov ibid.

4. Shmos 3:12, 6:6-7, 19:4-6.

5. See Mechiltah, Shmos 20:3; Rashi, Vayikra 18:2; Ramban, Shmos 20:2.