



לקוטי שיחות
PROJECT
LIKKUTEI
SICHOS

Sicha Summary

Chelek 17 | Pirkei Avos | R' Chananya

The Epilogue:

After reading the weekly chapter of Pirkei Avos in the weeks between Pesach and Rosh Hashanah, there is a widespread custom to recite the following Talmudic teaching:

Rabbi Chananiah ben Akashiah said: “The Holy One, blessed is He, wanted to make the people of Israel meritorious; therefore, He gave them Torah and *mitzvos* in an abundant measure, as it says (*Yeshayahu* 42:21): ‘G-d desired, for the sake of [Israel's] righteousness, to make the Torah great and glorious.’” (*Makkos* 23b)

Why must G-d giving Torah and *mitzvos* in an abundant measure be justified?

The Basic Explanation:

Rabbi Chananiah addresses the seemingly unnecessary distinctions between individual *mitzvos*. Why couldn't G-d have commanded several foundational *mitzvos* and included the 613 *mitzvos* as details or subcategories of those fundamental commands? Why the voluminous diversity of *mitzvos*?

According to Rambam's interpretation, Rabbi Chananiah's answer to this question is that if G-d would only have given several *mitzvos*, each composed of dozens of details, it would be very difficult to fulfill even one *mitzvah* properly. Because G-d “wished to make the people of Israel meritorious” — to reward them for proper observance of *mitzvos* — “He

gave them Torah and *mitzvos* in an abundant measure.” (*Peirush HaMishnayos*, end of *Makkos*)

The Deeper Dimension:

The deeper meaning of the abundance of *mitzvos* is this: If the objective of *mitzvos* is to reveal the unity of G-d within Creation, why are there so many different types of, and ideas behind, *mitzvos* — from the general distinction between positive and negative *mitzvos*, to the very particular distinctions between the intent, focus, and rationale of each *mitzvah*?

Rabbi Chananiah answered that G-d “wished to make the people of Israel meritorious.” The Hebrew word for meritorious, *lezakos*, can also mean “to refine.” The objective of *mitzvos* is to reveal the unity of G-d within each person’s domain. Each *mitzvah* refines a person in a different way; each influences a different part of his mind, heart, or body, and brings him closer to realizing the Divine reality within every facet of his being. “Therefore, He gave them Torah and *mitzvos* in an abundant measure,” for each *mitzvah* refines a person in a unique way.

But this does not mean that the entire purpose of the abundance of *mitzvos* is for the sake of the human being. G-d, too, desires this for His own sake, for through the meticulous refinement of the human being, G-d’s unity is revealed in the lowest of possible worlds, fulfilling His deep seated desire to have a home in this world. And when this desire is met, G-d’s essential self becomes fully manifest within Torah as it exists within Creation, making “the Torah great and glorious” with Divine light that, if it were not for the refinement of human beings, it would never have received.

This is also why this talmudic passage is read in connection with *Pirkei Avos*. *Bartenura* explains that the pedagogic goal of this tractate is to teach a person that he must take moral and ethical instruction from Torah, even though there are other, secular sources for moral wisdom. This passage explains why this is necessary: Because the objective of Torah and *mitzvos* is to refine every element within a person, as well as within the interpersonal realm, Torah must empower a person to refine even the

mundane world of human interactions. If he were to receive his moral instruction from secular sources, he would know how to behave, but this would not imbue his behavior with sanctity; only instruction flowing from Torah and *mitzvos* can truly refine a person's character.