



לקוטי שיחות
PROJECT
LIKKUTEI
SICHOS

Sicha Summary

Chelek 16 | Vayakhel | Sichah 2

The Talmud:

Tractate *Chagigah* concludes with this passage:

The fire of Gehenna has no power over Torah scholars. This can be derived by an *a fortiori* inference from the salamander [*salamandra*], {a creature created out of fire and immune to its effects, and whose blood is fireproof}: If a salamander, which is merely a product of fire, and nevertheless when one anoints his body with its blood, fire has no power over him, all the more so should fire not have any power over Torah scholars, whose entire bodies are fire, as it is written: “Surely My words are as fire, says G-d.” (*Yirmiyahu* 23:29) Reish Lakish said: The fire of Gehenna has no power over the sinners of Israel either. This can be derived by an *a fortiori* inference from the Golden Altar: If the Golden Altar, which has on it a coating that is no more than the thickness of a gold dinar, and which had incense burning on it for many years and yet fire had no power over it, as the gold miraculously remained undamaged, all the more so should immunity from fire be granted to the sinners of Israel, who are filled with good deeds as a pomegranate is full of seeds.... (*Chagigah* 27a)

The Question:

Why was it necessary for the Talmud to bring two separate derivations proving the invulnerability of Torah scholars and sinners of Israel? And why was the Torah scholar’s invulnerability derived from a salamander, an impure animal?

The Explanation:

Torah and *mitzvos* have different effects on the individual. When a person studies Torah, he is united with Divine wisdom. By engaging his intellect in understanding Torah, the Torah occupies and permeates his mind. When a person does a *mitzvah*, by contrast, the *mitzvah* does not enter him; its effect surrounds him, and it creates an aura of sanctity.

Therefore, the Torah scholar's protection from punishment is derived from an animal whose "body is fire," because the Torah scholar's body is fire by virtue of being united with the Torah, which is Divine fire. A deeper point: Fire is the most effective method for purification. (*Sanhedrin* 39a) Yet, the salamander is an impure animal created by fire, and at the same time, its blood is impervious to fire. This is the perfect metaphor for the Torah scholar in Gehenna. On the one hand, he has fallen into a world dominated with negativity and so is susceptible to sin and impurity. That is why he finds himself in Gehenna. On the other hand, his body is "fire" and is impervious to Gehenna's fire because Torah study permeates his very being.

And the protection of the sinners of Israel, who are, nevertheless, filled with *mitzvos*, is derived from the Altar which was coated with gold, because the spiritual effect of *mitzvos* surrounds and encircles the person, like the coating of the Altar.

This also explains why the Talmud refers to them as "Torah scholars" and not "sinners of Israel." The student of Torah is unified with the Torah to the extent that Torah is his identity. You cannot separate the Torah from the scholar. Therefore, even though he is presently in Gehenna, he remains a "Torah scholar." The performer of *mitzvos*, on the other hand, remains distinct from his actions; his *mitzvos* merely "surround" him.

The Mishkan:

The *Midrash* differentiates between the general structure of the *Mishkan*, which is a home for G-d, and the Ark, which is a home for G-d's Torah. (*Yalkut Shimoni* 368) This distinction can be understood based on the

above discussion. The *Mishkan* is where *mitzvos* took place, such as the sacrifices, the incense, the kindling of the *menorah*. Therefore, it is a place where G-d is at home; there is contact between G-d and the material reality. Torah, however, requires a separate home because G-d's connection with Torah is more intimate: He and the Torah are one essence.

This is also why both Torah and *mitzvos* are necessary to transform this world into a home for G-d. A home for G-d in the lower realms requires two elements: 1) The influence of G-d must be felt in the lowest of possible realities; and 2) it must be G-d's Essential Self that is present, not a diminished ray of His *light*.

Mitzvos permeate the material world and create awareness of G-d in the lowest of realities. But it is Torah that draws down G-d Himself, without any diminution, into the mind of the Jew and then the world.