

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 15

Vayetze, Sicha 3

The Verses:

Yaakov left his home in Be'er Sheva and traveled to Charan, the home of his devious uncle, Laban. On his way, he encountered G-d and made a vow before continuing his journey:

20. "Yaakov uttered a vow, saying, "If G-d will be with me, and He will guard me on this way, upon which I am going, and He will give me bread to eat and a garment to wear;

21. And if I return in peace to my father's house, and G-d will be my G-d.

22. Then this stone, which I have placed as a monument, shall be a house of G-d, and everything that You give me, I will surely tithe to You. (Bereishis 28:20-22)

The Question:

There are four elements in Yaakov's speech: two are conditions of the vow that G-d must uphold, and two are promises that Yaakov will fulfill if those conditions are met.

According to Ramban, the conditions are 1) If G-d will be with me... and He will give me

bread to eat and a garment to wear; and 2) And if I return in peace to my father's house.

Yaakov's two vows are 1) G-d will be my G-d; and 2) this stone, which I have placed as a monument, shall be a house of G-d, and everything that You give me, I will surely tithe to You.

Rashi understands the phrase "and G-d will be my G-d" as part of the conditions, that Yaakov's children will be complete and faithful to G-d as he was.

Clearly, Yaakov was not selfishly promising to follow G-d only if he would be rewarded. The objective of his journey was to fulfill the vow, the conditions were merely the tools he needed in order to fulfill it.

What is the significance of these four elements in Yaakov's spiritual journey?

The Explanation:

Yaakov's journey from his parental home to Laban's Charan represents the journey of the soul from the spiritual environment of heaven to the material prison of earth. The objective of this journey is to gain spiritual advances in three areas:

The soul's connection to G-d is deepened and enriched by engaging with the darkness of the world and emerging unscathed. Like

the penitent who grows closer to G-d because of his encounter with sin, the soul draws closer to G-d by remaining committed to Him even in the darkness of this world.

By observing Torah and mitzvos, the soul “proliferates” spiritually.

By living as a Jew within this world, the soul elevates the material world and transforms it into a home for G-d. As a result, the soul reaches even deeper levels of intimacy with G-d.

Ranking these accomplishments in terms of novelty, it is the third, creating a home for G-d, that is most striking. For as long as the soul is engaged in mitzvos, or even in transforming mundane experiences into moments of spiritual connection, it is still in the very nature of the soul to seek out connection with G-d. But when the soul connects the material reality, whose nature is to be separate and divorced from G-d, to G-d, then the infinite reach of G-d is exposed — that even the foreign, material reality can be filled with G-dliness.

In order to accomplish this, the soul must reach a place of total transcendence from its own spiritual desires and become selflessly dedicated to G-d. Then, the soul can affect this realization of transcendence within the world itself, bringing the essence of G-d within the world.

It follows that the soul reaches its apex through its engagement with the world.

Now we can understand the four elements of Yaakov’s vow. The two conditions are aligned with his two promises:

1. “He will give me bread to eat and a garment to wear.” This alludes to the soul’s performance of Torah (food) and mitzvos (clothes).

2. “And if I return in peace to my father's house.” This alludes to the soul revealing G-dliness within its mundane interactions. This is the theme of “return,” of repentance, of finding G-dliness in a place of darkness.

These two acts of service elicit two “rewards.”

1. “G-d will be my G-d,” this is the spiritual advance the soul experiences as a result of its performance of Torah and mitzvos.
2. “This stone, which I have placed as a monument, shall be a house of G-d,” the actual transformation of the material world, the stone, into a home for G-d.

Rashi and Ramban:

Ramban incorporates the inner, mystical reading of the text. Therefore, he appreciates that the soul’s advance is part of the “reward.” That is why he understands the phrase, “and G-d will be my G-d” as part of the vow, the culmination of the soul’s work.

Rashi, however, reads the text with a simple, straightforward perspective. In this view, the soul’s only objective is to simply be dedicated to G-d; any notion of reward, even spiritual, is absent. Thus, Rashi reads the phrase, “and G-d will be my G-d,” as part of the service of soul, the conditions, and the only reward that is important is “this stone... shall be a house for G-d,” the realization of G-d’s will to have a home in this world.
