

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 21

Shemos, Sicha 3

The Context:

The first time the Torah refers to the Jewish people as G-d's children is when G-d instructs Moshe, "say to Pharaoh, 'So said G-d, "My firstborn son is Israel.'" (*Shemos* 4:22)

Rashi understands the modifier "firstborn" as an expression of greatness and accomplishment.

In general, the metaphor of a child is used to highlight the simplicity and faith of the Jewish people, as in the verse, "for when Israel was young, I loved him." A small child elicits a more expansive and limitless love from a parent than that of a mature child.

Why, then, when the Torah introduces this metaphor for the first time, does it use an expression referring to the "greatness" of the Jewish people, and not their simplicity?

The Explanation:

In general, a parent has an essential love for their child, not because of their accomplishments, but simply because they are of one essence. When a child is young, this love is fully expressed. The child innocently trusts, relies on, and obeys the parent, because it innately feels that they are one with the parent. This elicits the parent's fundamental, unconditional love.

But as the child matures and develops intellectual and emotional depth, these accomplishments obscure the fundamental connection they share. The parent begins to love the child for their achievements, and the innate love recedes to the background.

This is why the general metaphor of a parent's love is specifically for a small child, because that is when the love is most acute and powerful.

But when it comes to the Jewish people, our spiritual and national accomplishments and maturity are not in contradiction to our "smallness," our innocence, humility, and obedience, but rather, they grow out of our childlike humility.

Our obedience to G-d mandates that we express our love and commitment to G-d in every faculty we possess. So we develop a complex intellectual and emotional relationship with G-d not because our ego desires it, but because our childlike sincerity demands it.

The Conclusion of Berachos

This offers some insight into the conclusion of tractate Berachos, which ends with the statement that Torah scholars do not enjoy rest in the world to come for they are always progressing in their comprehension of the Divine. The theme of Berachos is obedience to G-d and humility, as expressed in the Shema and in all the blessings we make. The conclusion of the tractate alludes to the fact that our intellectual achievements sprout from our childlike submission to G-d.

This continuum from childhood to mature comprehension is also apparent in the very nature of children. Children persistently ask

“why” and are rarely satisfied with an answer; they also are full of energy and move constantly — both of the traits are critical for advanced study, the curiosity to know, and the restlessness to always grow.

This idea is also expressed in the final statement of the tractate: “Torah scholars increase peace in the world, as it is said: “And all your children [*banayich*] shall be learned of G-d, and great shall be the peace of your children” (Yeshayahu 54:13). Do not read your children [*banayich*], but your builders [*bonayich*].” The first half of the verse provides the justification for the Talmud’s alternate reading of the second half: Because “all your children are learned of G-d,” that is, our learnedness is rooted in childlike faith, therefore, when the second half of the verse says “great shall be the peace of your children” we can read that as saying that “builders — i.e. Torah scholars” are those that bring peace to the world, because the word “children” holds within it the potential for intellectual advancement.
