

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 20

Miketz, Sicha 2

The Context:

When Yosef saw Binyamin arriving with the rest of his brothers, he instructed his aide “to slaughter an animal and to prepare, for the men will eat with me at lunch.” (Bereishis 43:16) The Midrash comments that the word “prepare” is used also regarding Shabbos, “And it shall be on the sixth day that when they prepare what they will bring, it will be double of what they gather every day.” (Shemos 16:5) Based on this the Midrash concludes, “Yosef kept the Shabbos before it was given.” (Bereishis Rabbah, 92)

The Questions:

1. The forefathers and the twelve tribes studied Torah and observed the mitzvos prior to their being given at Sinai. What was unique about Yosef’s observance that the Midrash found fit to single it out?
2. The Midrash’s allusion to Yosef’s observance is discursive, it is derived

from the fact that Yosef prepared on Friday for a Shabbos meal. Why didn’t the Torah allude to Yosef’s observance through an explicit reference to his resting from labor on Shabbos itself?

The Explanation:

Unlike other mitzvos, Shabbos existed as a concept within the world even prior to its command. The concept of an esrog as a sacred object could only materialize once G-d commands a Jew to take the esrog. But Shabbos existed within time as the day on which G-d rested from creation. From the very beginning, then, Shabbos was set apart as a sacred time. However, until it was given to the Jewish people to observe, no human being’s rest could partake of, or be connected to, G-d’s rest. This is why the Midrash speaks of Yosef keeping Shabbos “before it was given,” because Shabbos existed as a Divine property, but still had not been “given” to the human domain. Once G-d removed the barriers between Heaven and earth at the Giving of the Torah (and shortly before it, at Mara), then the Jewish people’s rest would have the effect of sanctifying time itself.

The rest of the tribes lived as itinerant shepherds, removed from the parameters of the real world. Therefore, their Shabbos rest was disconnected from the world. Yosef, however, lived in the depths of the world, in the heart of Egypt's depravity, and still maintained his relationship with G-d. His Shabbos rest, therefore, could penetrate the real world, having a similar effect that Shabbos observance would have after the Giving of the Torah.

This is why Yosef's observance is alluded to in his Friday preparations: On Shabbos itself, there is no manifest activity that alters the world, there is only passive refraining from work. But the preparations of Friday are an active intervention in the world that is

caused by the anticipation of Shabbos. It is in these preparations where the effect Shabbos has on the world is apparent.

The Lesson:

Even after the Giving of the Torah, there are distinctions in how our Shabbos rest can approximate G-d's rest. There is the basic legal observance of the command to not perform creative labor. But then there is a deeper form of rest, similar to G-d's resting from creative speech, which is refraining from any speech relating to the mundane world. When we focus ourselves on meditative prayer and Torah study instead of frivolous speech on Shabbos, then we are partaking of G-d's rest.
