

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 20

Breishis, Sicha 1

The Rashi:

In his first comment on the Torah, Rashi explains why G-d opened the Torah with the account of creation, and not the seemingly more salient account of the Jewish people's obligations.

In the beginning — Rabbi Yitzchak said: The Torah should have begun with the first mitzvah given to the Jewish people... For what reason did G-d commence with "In the beginning?" ...For if the nations of the world should say to Israel, "You are robbers, for you conquered by force the lands of the seven nations [of Canaan]," they will reply, "The entire earth belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He; He created it (this we learn from the story of the Creation) and gave it to whomever He deemed proper. When He wished, He gave it to them, and when He wished, He took it away from them and gave it to us."

The Question:

Rashi's formulation of the question implies that he understands the importance of the creation narrative, but not its placement. Why does the Torah begin with this story, it could have been placed anywhere. The mitzvos, however, are the central purpose of the book and should have come first.

Rashi's answer, however, does not seem to satisfy the question. Granted, the narrative is important for establishing the Jewish people's ownership of the land, but is that so critical that it leads the book? The Torah could have made the same point by including the narrative later on.

The Explanation:

The conversation between the nations and the Jewish people alludes to a spiritual confrontation about the roles we play in the world. The "land of the nations" alludes to those spheres of activities which are not expressly sacred, the myriad mundane practices of living in a material world — engaging in politics, business, law, etc. The nations of the world claim that the Jewish people should concern themselves with spiritual pursuits, but taking the material

world and attempting to make it holy is an infringement on the nation's possessions. "You are robbers, for you conquered by force the lands of the nations."

The truth is, however, that this is the very purpose of the Jewish people, to take the material world, and transform it into a "land of Israel."

Now, within this world there are two categories of potentially elevated material: permitted activities, which can be elevated through using them in a manner prescribed by the Torah, and with an intention to use them for sacred ends. Forbidden materials, however, cannot be directly elevated, only through repentance out of love that redeems their negative energy for positive purposes.

This ability is derived from a place within G-d that transcends the boundaries of the Torah, that allows for return even when the limitations of Torah have been transgressed. This is the ultimate display of the reality that "all comes from G-d." When we recognize that every item of G-d's creation has potential to be elevated.

Because this notion precedes the Torah, therefore the Torah begins with this declaration — that the material world was given to the Jewish people so they can transform even those parts which are thought to be foreign to the Torah and its expectations. By beginning with this narrative, the Torah alludes to the fact that this power is "before" the Torah itself.
