

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 19

Iggeres Hateshuva, Perek 1

The Context:

The kabalists prescribed a certain number of fasts to atone for specific sins. The question arises what one is to do when he has committed a given sin several times. In the third chapter of Iggeres Hateshuva, the Alter Rebbe cites two conflicting opinions: One opinion maintains “that he must fast the number of fasts appropriate to that sin according to the number of transgressions.” Another opinion maintains that one set of the prescribed number of fasts is sufficient. The Alter Rebbe offers a compromise, “to undertake three times the number of fasts prescribed for that particular sin.”

As an example throughout this discussion, the Alter Rebbe uses the sin of wasteful emission of seed whose prescribed number of fasts is eighty-four. Thus, according to the first opinion, “if someone commits this sin ten or twenty times, say, he must fast ten or twenty times eighty-four.”

And according to the final decision, one is to “undertake three times the number of fasts prescribed for that particular sin, i.e., 252 fasts (three times eighty-four) for wasteful emission.”

The Question:

Why does the Alter Rebbe need to offer an example for this discussion? His point is understood without the specific example of wasteful emission and its eighty-four fasts?

Variations of Corruption:

A sin causes spiritual damage in three areas: 1) it undermines the soul’s general relationship with G-d, 2) it damages the specific “limb” of the soul associated with that sin, 3) that damage weakens the health of the other “limbs” of the soul as well.

Each specific limb and aspect of the soul, however, contains these three divisions. 1) The limb of the soul has its own essence, 2) the other limbs of the soul are implicated and included within it, 3) this limb is found within all other limbs of the soul as well.

A single sin corrupts the essence of the specific limb associated with that sin. Performing that sin again won't cause further damage to that part of the soul, for it has already been compromised. But the damage caused to other elements of the soul through that sin is gradual. The more one commits the sin, the more the damage spreads to the soul's other limbs.

This explains the difference of opinion regarding the number of fasts: The opinion that obligates only one set of fasts maintains that you only have to address the damage done to that specific limb of the soul. This is done though fully excising the damage through one set of fasts.

The opinion that obligates the prescribed number of fasts according to the number of transgressions maintains that one must address the damage done to the soul as a whole. The more the damage spreads, the more fasts are required to repair that extensive harm.

The accepted compromise recommends fasting the full amount for the first sin — since that is the most severe as it corrupts the limb itself completely — and only partial fasts for the subsequent sins — because the damage wrought to the rest of the soul is less serious than that done to the location of sin itself.

The Explanation:

The sin of wasteful emission of seed encapsulates this understanding of the effects of sin, and is therefore used as an example throughout this discussion: Rambam writes that the seed is the very life force of the body because it is expressive of the essence of life and the soul. Wasting the seed, therefore, causes a depletion of life force in the entire body. Therefore, the multilayered damage sin causes is evident in this sin — it corrupts the limb associated with the sin itself, and it simultaneously depletes the entire body, alluding to the spiritual damage caused to the entire soul.
