

SICHA SUMMARY

Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 27

Shemini, Sicha 3

The Context:

In the laws concerning food and drink contracting ritual impurity Rambam codified three conditions for a food to be susceptible to impurity:

1. Only foods that are designated for human consumption are susceptible to ritual impurity.
2. No foods are susceptible to ritual impurity unless they were first dampened with one of the seven liquids. This dampening is referred to as *hechsher*. These concepts are derived from Vayikra 11:38 which states: “When water will be placed on a seed...” (*Tum’as Ochalin 1:1*)
3. All foods that grow from the earth are not susceptible to ritual impurity until they are uprooted from the ground. As long as they are connected to the earth -even by a small root, as long as they can sustain themselves from it — they are not susceptible to impurity. (*Ibid, 2:1*)

Every halacha from Torah contains an ethical, moral, or spiritual direction beyond its pragmatic implementation in reality. What is the message of the conditions that need to be met for food to become susceptible to ritual impurity?

The Explanation:

Negativity and impurity are essentially lifeless forces. They are not desired by G-d for their own sake, but are a means to an end. They therefore do not receive attentive care or vitality from G-d, only the bare necessities from the Divine creative force. In search of plenty, these forces seek to siphon off energy from the realm of holiness where G-d’s abundance and care is focused. Wherever there is holiness, impurity lurks nearby, attempting to subvert the holy activity and divert its Divine energy to itself.

“Food designated for human consumption” alludes to all activities, deeds, and pursuits that nourish the “human” within us, that is, the unique Divine soul that is the essence of the human being. The first prerequisite for a “food” to attract impurity is for it to be human food, that is, holy, Divine-focused action. It is specifically in those sacred areas of our life where we must be wary of the presence of negativity.

But this “food” must come into contact with “liquid” for it to truly become susceptible to impurity. Water is a distributor of energy; it breaks down the food and enables it to be absorbed into the bloodstream, it flows from high places to nourish the low, it binds and adheres separate objects together. In other words, “water” alludes to the ability to share our own “food,” our spiritual inspiration, with others outside ourselves; to proliferate our holiness.

As long as our holy activity concerns only ourselves, there is no abundance to attract the negativity. After all, what reverberations will come from one’s own private spiritual preoccupations? It is only when we bring our “food” into contact with “liquid” and begin distributing our spiritual accomplishments with the world around us that arouses the forces of impurity to come seek our Divine energy.

This invites a bewilderment: the world is hostile enough to spirituality as it is. Why did G-d implement a second layer of difficulty, allowing the negative forces to specifically challenge us when we do actually achieve something spiritually?

In response to this, we have the third condition for impurity: “All foods that grow

from the earth are not susceptible to ritual impurity until they are uprooted from the ground.” The earth, the origin of the food, alludes to the origin and essence of our Divine soul, the irreducible Divine core of who we are. This essence can never be corrupted, it is divorced from any relation to the notion of purity/impurity. As long as our “food” remains tethered to the earth even minimally, meaning, as long as the faith of our Divine core influences and is apparent in our spiritual activity, the negativity is unable to influence us. Only when we, G-d forbid, sever our connection with our essence, when we engage in holy pursuits for our own purposes, and not as a consequence of our innate connection with G-d, do we become vulnerable to impurity’s misdirection.

The Lesson:

All directions in Divine service begin in our study of Torah. In this context, our Torah study cannot be limited to the legal dimension of query, challenge, and resolution, but must also incorporate the study of the inner dimension of Torah which purifies and cleanses our perceptions of reality, and allows us to recognize the Divinity within the “body” of the Torah’s laws and narratives as well.
