

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 16

Vaera, Sicha 5

The Dispute:

Regarding the number of plagues G-d brought on Egypt there is a talmudic dispute: Rabbi Eliezer maintains that each plague consisted of four plagues, Rabbi Akiva says that each plague consisted of five plagues. (Hagadah. Mechiltah, Beshalach 14:31)

The Question:

What is the meaning of this dispute? What difference is there to the amount of plagues included within each plague?

The Explanation:

The objective of the plague was not to simply punish but to cleanse the evil of Egypt from the world. Every material object is composed of the four elements; then there is the undefinable essence which is the “fifth” element that undergirds all matter. The dispute between the sages is how deep did the evil of Egypt penetrate.

Did it only contaminate the basic structure of reality, the four elements? Or did it necessitate a fifth plague to cleanse even the essence of matter itself?

Legal Reflections:

This dispute is reflected in a legal dispute as well: The sages maintain that it is possible to fulfill the mitzvah of destroying chametz by “crumbling it and throwing it to the wind or into the ocean.” Rabbi Yehuda disagrees: the only way to truly destroy chametz is to burn it. The sages’ position aligns with Rabbi Eliezer — the prohibition of chametz only applies to its form, not to its essence. Thus, by disintegrating it, its form has been lost, just as the plagues only needed to penetrate the form of matter, not the essence. Rabbi Yehuda’s position aligns with Rabbi Akiva — the prohibition of chametz applies to its very essence, and so it must be reduced to ashes to be considered destroyed, just as the plagues needed to penetrate the essence of matter, the fifth dimension.

The Lesson:

Leaving Egypt means breaking the limitations on one's divine service. Rabbi Eliezer says that there are four barriers to transcend: 1) the challenges to positive action, 2) the challenges to expressive

emotion 3) the challenge to intellectual connection, and 4) the challenge to defy rationality and display self-sacrifice.

Rabbi Akiva, who descended from converts, adds a fifth dimension — to redeem the essence of the soul from captivity.
