

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 24

Ki Tetze, Sicha 1

The Eulogy:

When Rabbi Moshe Cordovero (Ramak), the famed kabbalist of Safed, passed away in 1570, the Arizal eulogized him with a creative reading of the verse, “If a man commits a sin for which he is sentenced to death, and he is put to death, you shall hang him from a tree.” (Devarim 21:22)

The word for “sin” means “lack.” Thus the verse can be read, “if a man lacks a justification for his sentence of death,” meaning, his life was pure and free from sin, “you shall hang him on a tree,” attribute (“hang”) the cause of death to the “tree of knowledge” which Adam and Eve ate from and brought death to the world. In other words, when a person, such as Ramak, lives a life devoid of any indiscretion, attribute their death to the fact that death is a decree

of G-d since the sin of the fruit of the tree of knowledge.

The Precedent:

Seemingly, this is simply a restatement of the talmudic statement that “four people died due to the serpent’s counsel.” Meaning that there were four people who were free from sin and only died because of the sin caused by the serpent which brought death to the world.

But a closer reading reveals that the Arizal is actually contributing a new layer of insight to the nature of sin and death.

The Contrast:

The serpent was the immediate cause of Adam and Eve’s sin; it actually counseled them to transgress G-d’s command. The tree, on the other hand, was neutral, and even represented the spiritual ideal of Divine knowledge. G-d so-to-speak engineered Adam’s eventual sin by placing this forbidden tree in the center of the garden.

The tree thus represents G-d's primordial decision to make death part of this world without any contribution from human action. The serpent, on the other hand, represents a trace of human imperfection that is planted within us because of the serpent.

When the Talmud attributes the cause of death to the serpent, it is referring to individuals who were free from sin but who had an imperceptible trace of ego that was imprinted on the human soul because of the serpent's enticements.

But the Arizal is referring to the inner essence of the Jewish soul which can never be compromised by the serpent. When this inner core is revealed, the only cause of

death is G-d's "tree," the decree that there should be death in this world.

The Arizal said this concerning the Ramak because it was their shared work of revealing the inner essence of Torah that, in turn, reveals the inner core of the soul which cannot be tarnished by the serpent.

This teaching was revealed to us, even though we cannot approach the levels of insight and righteousness of the Arizal and Ramak, because we can also study the inner essence of the Torah and reveal the essence of our souls that is beyond blemish and imperfection. When we do this, we will be able to influence and shape our conscious experiences as well to be aligned with the purity of our essence.
