

BETWEEN 'RECTIFICATION OF EVIL' AND 'PLAIN NONSENSE'  
THE STRICT REQUIREMENT OF 'A CLEAN BODY' AS A CASE STUDY  
OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HASIDISM AND HALAKHAH

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This article deals with the obligation to maintain a clean body (the requirement to clear one's bowels before prayer and the related prohibition against delaying bowel movements) as a case study on the tension between Halakhah, Kabbalah, and Hasidism. It surveys the development of the prohibition in Hasidism throughout the ages, from its beginning until our times.

A change occurred in the understanding of the concept, both at the level of discourse as well as at the substantive level. At the level of discourse, in early Hasidism the discussion focuses on the kabbalistic justification for the commandment, whereas in later hasidic sources it revolves around its halakhic parameters and associated hygienic and rational considerations. On the substantive level, Hasidism moved from the drastic and extreme demand for a clean body (to the point that the Ba'al Shem Tov ruled that one must always keep himself diarrheal) to demanding only the minimum halakhic requirement and sometimes even in its lenient interpretation.

This shift indicates a historic change in the attitudes of the Hasidic movement towards the Halakhah and to deviations from it. It also reflects the growing awareness of the hasidic leadership of the dangerous consequences of customs that were adopted or 'invented' by early Hasidism and the tensions that arose in certain situations between hasidic leaders, who wished to revive pre-hasidic halakhic norms, and some of their followers, who sought to uphold the customs of their *rebbe*s, the founders of Hasidism.