

## Questions for Reflection on Jacob of Serugh's *Mimro* 24

### Section 3. Fasting Is Care for the Soul (19–36)

Jacob describes food and its digestion in the body in graphic terms. How does he describe it? What point is he trying to make about food by describing it in this way? \*

### Section 4. The Will Adjudicates between Body and Soul (37–64)

1. In this section, Jacob describes the human person as having both physical and spiritual needs, which he designates respectively as needs of the body and needs of the soul. Based on your own experience, can you name some of these physical and spiritual needs? Do you find these needs to be compatible with one another? Can they be satisfied at the same time, or do you find that you have to choose between them? \*\*
2. Jacob implies that there can be some imbalance in the way we satisfy our physical and spiritual needs. In other words, we are often tempted to satisfy our physical needs at the expense of our spiritual needs. Do you agree with this assessment? In your experience, why do people fall for this temptation? \*
3. In sections 4 and 7, Jacob sees the will as the human faculty which determines whether or when the body or the soul is cared for. In simpler terms, it is up to the person to decide whether to cater to their physical or spiritual needs. "If you so desire, you could easily eat, or you could easily fast," Jacob says (131). In your own experience, is the will always this free in making that decision? Or are there other factors that affect or influence the will or limit its freedom? \*\*\*
4. It is important to note that, for Jacob, the body and the soul are not enemies at war with one another, even though they have different, and sometimes competing, needs. He calls them "partners" and "brothers." Does this positive view of the relationship between your body and soul make a difference in how you see yourself as an embodied human being? Does it make a difference in how you understand fasting? \*\*\*

### Section 5. The Body Ought to Help the Soul in Her Acts of Justice (65–76)

Jacob asserts that the soul's "food" is to perform acts of justice and urges the body to help the soul in her fast. Can you think of concrete ways the body can help the soul in her endeavors? Does this supportive role of the body show its importance for a successful fast, in particular, and for your spiritual life, in general? \*\*

## Section 6. The Soul Is the Body's Teacher (77–116)

1. Jacob casts the soul in the role of the body's teacher. In your opinion, can this teacher-student relationship between soul and body be reconciled with Jacob's earlier view of the soul and body as partners or siblings? Or does it imply that the body and the soul are not in an equal partnership? \*\*
2. Does this view of the soul as the body's teacher ring true for you? In other words, do you experience your body at times as rebellious or lazy and, therefore, could benefit from some discipline? What role can fasting play in disciplining your body? On the other hand, do you ever experience some type of rebellion or lack of discipline in your soul? \*\*

## Section 8. Fashioning Justice Out of Small Deeds (143–180)

Jacob urges his readers to “fashion justice” out of small just deeds, instead of simply waiting for the opportunity to perform grand and heroic gestures. To explain his idea, he uses the striking metaphor of the bee. He says that, just like the bee makes a lot of honey out of small quantities of nectar extracted from a multitude of flowers, the person who fasts ought to acquire the virtue of justice out of performing small acts of justice. How can you *concretely* apply this advice to your own moral and spiritual life? What small opportunities to do good can you seize? \*

## Section 10. Fasting Will Be Rewarded on the Great Day (207–258)

As in section 4 of *mimro* 23, Jacob links fasting not only with this life, but with the Second Coming of the Lord. He uses the joyful imagery of a wedding feast to describe that day and describes “Fasting, vigils, and prayers along with almsgiving” as “gifts” one ought to offer to Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom (223–224). In what sense, do you think, can “Fasting, vigils, and prayers along with almsgiving” be considered suitable gifts to the Lord? According to Jacob, what important role do these gifts play in one's presence before the Lord? \*\*

## Section 11. Let Everyone Fast According to Their Station (259–306)

Jacob invites everyone to fast: clergy and laity, young and old, widows and orphans, etc. According to Jacob, how does fasting benefit each of these social groups? \*

## Section 12. The Power of Communal Fasting (307–328)

Jacob emphasizes the power of communal fasting. What images does he use to express this idea? Do you agree with him that the fast of a whole community or church is more powerful than the fast of an individual alone? Have you ever fasted by yourself, outside of the common Church fasts? Can you compare the two experiences of communal and individual fasting? \*

### **Section 13. The Fasting Church Desires to Eat Her Bridegroom (329–348)**

1. Jacob writes, quite shockingly, that the Church-bride desires “to eat” of her Bridegroom (330). To be sure, this is an allusion to receiving Christ in the Eucharist. What emotional reaction, if any, does this metaphor elicit in you? Do you find it helpful in understanding the relationship between fasting and the Eucharist? \*
2. In this section, Jacob uses the metaphor of the relationship between husband and wife to describe the relationship between Christ and the Church. In this perspective, fasting is more than simply a discipline: it is an effect of love. The Church-bride desires her bridegroom with such fervor that she has lost all appetite for food and drink (337-338). In your opinion, how does this “relational” view of fasting enrich the concept of fasting as deprivation or discipline? \*\*