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Bo: How Much Knowledge of G-d is Enough?

Understanding and knowing G-d takes a lot of effort. Most people only know G-d on a superficial level and content themselves with that. G-d could have taken the Children of Israel out without the ten plagues. It would seem, therefore, that the ten plagues had some other purpose. Indeed, the real purpose was 'וידעתם כי אני ה' *You shall know that I am the L-rd* (Shemoth 10:2). This requires knowledge of G-d and recognizing His power.

We are commanded to strive to always reach this goal of knowing G-d. One of the ways to achieve it is by being stringent in the recitation of blessings. The Rambam explains that the Hakhamim instituted many blessings which are not for the performance of a commandment or for receiving some benefit, but were instituted as praise and gratitude and requests. From this we see that the true goal of the blessings is to know and recognize the Creator.

There are two types of recognizing G-d, one is called *Yedi'ah* (knowledge) and the other is *Habanah* (understanding). *Yedi'ah* is a deep absolute knowledge of G-d, whereas *Habanah* is a more superficial one. Since the *Pasuq* (verse) uses the term *Yedi'ah* (you shall know), and did not use the term *Habanah*, we learn that the reason for the ten plagues was because G-d does not want us to have a superficial knowledge of him, but we must strive to have a thorough one.

(See Dibrei Mordekhai,
Parashath Bo)



מדרש בן איש חי
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5780 פרשת בא

Our Weapons of War

There is a parable of a king who had many servants. Among them, was a group who were strong and courageous and would make powerful warriors. The others were much weaker and would not be fit for such an undertaking. The king separated these two groups and gave the powerful ones bows and arrows and other weapons of war and taught them the skills of how to succeed in battle.

What did the servants do? They took their weapons and roamed the city streets and markets, marauding, injuring and killing innocent people who had the misfortune of being at the receiving end of their weapons. When the king heard of this he brought them all to judgment. He said to them, "Before I separated you from the others, you were equal in all respects. The only advantage that you had, was that I gave you weapons and taught you the art of war. By doing this damage you have made yourselves inferior to the others".

We should learn from this that G-d separated man from the animals. He gave us a tongue that can shoot arrows, which are the study of the Torah and our prayers, which serve as weapons against our enemies. If, however, a person uses his G-d given gift, which is his tongue, for inappropriate speech, such as Lashon Hara' (gossip), he is effectively shooting arrows in the King's city, against those whom He loves and against all that is holy.

G-d's purpose in separating us from the animals was so that we would raise ourselves to a much higher level, but not to become inferior to them. It behooves us to remember this at all times, and use our speech for holy and appropriate purposes.

(See Qol Sasson, Lashon Hara')

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Making Coffee Without Coloring on Shabbath

We mentioned previously that for Ashkenazim, in accordance with the Mishnah Berurah, there is no issue of coloring water or other drinks on Shabbath. The situation for Sephardim, however, is more complicated as mentioned in Ben Ish Hai, where he states that one must not pour red wine into white. (See *A Torah Minute*, Vol. 2, "Complications with coloring drinks on Shabbath")

The question then arises as to how a Sephardi can prepare a cup of instant coffee on Shabbath in accordance with this ruling. In the famous work of Responsa, Rab Pe'alim, it says that in order to avoid coloring the water, one must place, before Shabbath, some coffee into the water that one is boiling, so that the water will be colored from 'Ereb Shabbath.

He states that on Shabbath, the water is poured into a *Finjan* (a small metal pot that coffee is prepared in, commonly found in Israel and Middle Eastern countries), which is a Keli Sheni, to which one adds the additional coffee according to one's taste. As such, even when making coffee in a cup, the cup into which the mixture of water and coffee is poured is considered a Keli Sheni and one can then add further coffee into the already colored water.

(See Rab Pe'alim 3rd H'eleq, Siman 11. Kaf HaChayyim 318, Oth 65)

Yihud If the Husband Is in Town

There are those who say that if a woman's husband is in town (Ba'alah Ba'ir), even though he is not physically present at that time in the house, we are not concerned about Yihud (a man and woman being on their own together), since the husband could enter at any time. (Obviously this assumes that various rules, such as the door not being locked so that people can enter at will, and so on, are followed). Nevertheless, according to the opinion of Rashi and others, it is prohibited, and the only difference is that the prescribed punishment of lashes for the two of them does not apply.

However, if the two of them are very familiar or close with each other, such as if they grew up together, then even according to those who follow the lenient opinion, Yihud is forbidden. Additionally, if the husband is jealous and does not wish her to be with someone, everyone agrees that she is forbidden to be secluded with him, even if her husband is in town.

In view of the sensitive nature of this subject, and the devastation it can cause when it goes wrong, Heaven forbid, it behooves us to be extra cautious in matters of Yihud.

(See 'Od Yoseph Hai, Parashath Shoftim, Oth 6. Qiddushin 81a with Rashi "Ba'alah Ba'ir")

Women's Corner - by Rabbanith Ruth Menashe 'a"n

Blossoming like a palm tree

The preparation of a selection of fruits for Tu Bishvat, which are so unique in their flavor, shape and color, should be accompanied by a deeper understanding of the meaning of this special day. It says: "For the man is the tree of the field". How are we likened to trees?

Hakham Sasson Mordekha Moshe gives the following explanation in Debar Be'itto. There are fruit trees and non fruit-bearing trees. The fruit tree symbolizes a righteous person who produces "fruit" (meaning his good deeds), whereas, non fruit-bearing trees symbolize people who do not produce "fruit" (good deeds).

Upon closer examination of the fruit trees, we notice that some fruits are used for eating, some for the manufacture of medicine, while others are known for their sweet and pleasant aroma. The different types of fruits are likened to the different types of people.

(To be continued)

