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By the Hakham

Rabbi Ya'aqob Menashe, 'a"h

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Waera: How Wheat and Spelt Caused Pharaoh to Harden his Heart

וְהַחֲטָה וְהַכְסֵּמַת לֹא נָכוּ כִּי אֶפִּילֹת הָיָה
"The wheat and the spelt were not smitten, because they ripened later" (Shemoth, 9:32). The flax and barley were smitten by the plague of the hail because they had already grown and ripened and were destroyed by the hail. The wheat and the spelt, however, were softer since they had not yet ripened and were able to withstand the hardness of the hail.

Midrash Tanhuma, however, does not explain the word "Afiloth" (אֶפִּילֹת) as meaning "late to ripen", but says that it comes from the root "Pele" (פֶּלֶא - wonders). This means that wonders were done for the wheat and the spelt, based on the fact that they were not smitten. According to this explanation, the Ohr Haḥayyim says that the fact that they were not struck is something above nature - in other words, a miracle.

In the eyes of Pharaoh, however, it was not a sign of G-d's wonders, but a sign that the G-d of Israel does not have control over everything, as was witnessed by the inability to strike the wheat and the spelt. This was a reason for him to harden his heart and refuse to let the Children of Israel go. And so it always is with the wicked, if they do not wish to see something, they never will, no matter how obvious it is.

(See Ohr Haḥayyim, Waera)



מדרש בן איש חי
Midrash BEN ISH HAI

5782 פֶּרֶשַׁת וְאֵרָא

If Hakham Silman Muṣaffi, 'a"h, Almost Transgressed...

We recently mentioned that one may not read by the light of an oil lamp on Shabbath (unless certain conditions are met, out of fear that one may come to tilt the lamp in order to improve the light - see *Reading on Shabbath by a Lamp With a Dimmer Switch*). One should not say to oneself that one is absolutely certain that one will not stumble in this area.

There is a story about the holy sage, Hakham Silman Muṣaffi, 'a"h. He used to love studying Torah and dedicated every Friday night at home, to the study of the Ṭur and Shulḥan 'Arukh. In order to be able to read at night, he placed a kerosene lamp inside a glass box which had a lock. The key was held by his mother who sat and watched over him to ensure that he did not touch the lamp. In addition, he placed a sign there which read, "Shabbath Qodesh" (the holy Sabbath). This way he was absolutely permitted to read by the light of this lamp.

One Friday night, he was reading some small faded text and, no doubt because he was so engrossed in his learning, forgot that it was Shabbath. He wanted to tilt the lamp, but found that it was locked. He remembered that his mother had the key she but was dozing off and he did not wish to disturb her. He fiddled with the lock to try and open it, and while he was thinking of other ways to open it, he suddenly saw the sign, "Shabbath Qodesh". He cried out, "Oh what did I do?", and his mother awoke in fright.

From that day, he accepted upon himself not to sit next to a lamp, even if it was locked with a sign on it. If such a holy man nearly stumbled, how much more careful must the average person be?

(See 'Olam Shel Ṣaddiq, Ribbi Salman Muṣaffi, 'a"h, Be-ahabatha Tisgeh)

For the 'Ilui Neshamah of
Rabbi Ya'aqob Menashe, 'a"h.
יעקב אליהו עבדאללה פרג' חיים בן רחל, ע"ה

The Power of Answering: "Amen, Yehei Shemeh Rabba"

Whenever the Jewish people go to Synagogues and Batei Midrash (houses of learning) and answer, "Amen Yehei Shemeh Rabbah Mebarakh" (Amen, may His great Name be blessed, in answer to the Qaddish), the Holy One blessed be He, shakes His head and says, "Happy is the King who is praised in this way in His house, what is there for the Father who banished his sons, and woe to the children who were banished from their Father's table."

Whoever answers, "Amen Yehei Shemeh Rabbah Mebarakh" with all his strength, any bad decree against him is torn up. Rashi explains that 'with all his strength' means 'with full concentration'. We see from this the importance of listening intently to the Qaddish, without any distractions, or talking when one hears it being recited, Heaven forbid, and answering correctly.

(See Berakhoth 3a. Shabbath 199b, with Rashi)

When Can the Tallith Gadol be Removed?

It says in 'Od Yosef Hai, Halakhoth, that Rabbenu Hayyim Wittal, z"l, writes in Sha'ar Hakawwanoth, that the Tefillin of the head have to be removed while standing and when they have been placed in their pouch, one must sit and remove the Tefillin of the arm, just like one wore them while seated. (This is the custom that Sephardim follow, whereas Ashkenazim stand for both the Tefillin of the head and arm). After they have been placed in their pouch, the Tallith Gadol is removed.

Rabbenu Hayyim Wittal, z"l, says further that sometimes during the hot weather, his master Rabbenu the Ari, z"l, would remove his Tallith Gadol from his head and have it rest on his shoulders, right after removing his Tefillin from his head. He would then remove the Tefillin of the arm and the Tallith Gadol, as mentioned above. The Ben Ish Hai comments, that from this we learn that as long as one is wearing the Tefillin of the head, the Tallith Gadol must also be on one's head.

(See 'Od Yosef Hai, Parashath Bereshith, Oth 6)

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

Character Traits - Is it Possible to Change Them?

(continued from last week)

[When the students showed the man] their Rabbi's imprints, he told them that this man has a bad temper, and that he is a liar and a cheat. This completely changed their opinion of the visitor! They all knew their Hakham to be an righteous, upright individual.

The students told their Hakham what had transpired. To their amazement and total disbelief, the scholar told them that the visitor was indeed correct! His palm lines revealed his true nature. However, with intense work, he was able to overcome his inclination and break through his desires.

The Ben Ish Hai gives us priceless advice. Yes! - if one wants, he can change his bad habits. But the secret to a smooth and easy change is to start at a young age. The earlier we start, the easier it is. Change at a later stage in life requires hard and intense work.

The Ben Ish Hai adds that as mothers and future mothers, we must invest in the upbringing of our children from a young age. We must be aware of their strengths and their shortcomings and take an active approach. We should guide and teach them to adopt good habits and pleasantly work on their character traits.