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Digest
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סימן רל"ח סעיף א'-ב'

Halacha Highlight

Learning Tanach at night

Shulchan Aruch Siman 238 Seif 1

צריך לזהר בלמוד הלילה

One must be careful with regards to his Torah study at night

Shulchan Aruch (סע' א') writes that one must be more cautious with his Torah study at night than his Torah study during the day and one who neglects Torah study at night will be severely punished. Mishnah Berurah (סק"א) cites many sources in Chazal that teach this lesson. One example is the Gemara in Eruvin (65a) that states that night was created for Torah study. The Gemara in Menachos (110a) relates that Torah scholars who study Torah at night are considered as though they served in the Bais HaMikdash. Furthermore, Rambam, cited by Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah, notes that one who wishes to merit the crown of Torah must be certain not to waste one night from Torah study by occupying himself with eating, drinking, talking, etc.

Sha'ar HaTziyun (סק"א) citing Be'er Heiteiv (סק"ב) writes that one should not read Tanach at night. Pri Megadim disagrees and implies that it is permitted for one to read Tanach at night. Sha'ar HaTziyun then suggests that even according to the stringent opinion there is no prohibition against reading Tanach at night; it is just that l'chatchila it is preferable for one to study Tanach during the day. The source for this concept is the Midrash that relates that Hashem studied with Moshe Rabbeinu scripture during the day and Mishnah at night. Kaf HaChaim (סי' רל"ז אות ט') writes that the custom is to permit the recitation of Tehillim after chatzos. Eshel Avrohom (בוטשאטש סע' א') disagrees and writes that there is no issue to recite Tehillim at night. He then adds that perhaps this is true only when it is recited by a minyan. Although Arizal was very stringent regarding this matter, his stringency does not apply on the nights of Shabbos, Yom Tov or Yom Kippur. Some authorities add Chol HaMoed to that list and others add Thursday night and Motzai Shabbos since they contain elements of Shabbos (פסקי תשובות אות ג').

Overview

Siman 238 Seif 1:

One must be more careful to study Torah at night than during the day and one who wastes the night is subject to severe punishment.

- Many statements of Chazal emphasize the importance and necessity of studying Torah at night. Shulchan Aruch in the name of Rambam writes that one who wishes to merit the crown of Torah must not waste a single night, sleeping, eating, drinking, talking, etc at the expense of his Torah study. (M.B. 1)
- The Gemara in Sanhedrin (92a) relates that any house that does not produce sounds of Torah study will be consumed by a fire. Magen Avrohom writes that there is no set amount of time a person should sleep in a night and it depends upon a person's strength but one should certainly not sleep too much. (M.B. 2)

Siman 238 Seif 2:

If one has a set amount of time to study Torah each night and during the day he was busy and could not complete his course of study, he must make it up immediately that night.

- In other words even during the summer when the days are short one must stay awake at night to complete his schedule and he should not make it up the next day since that day has its own schedule of Torah study. (M.B. 4)
- This commitment constitutes a vow and Shulchan Aruch rules that one who adopts a proper behavior and has in mind to continue following this practice forever has accepted a vow; therefore, it is appropriate to stipulate that one is not accepting this as a vow in case one faces a circumstance in which one cannot follow that practice. (M.B. 5)