HALAKHA

Once one has started, he no longer stops. — Rav Sheshet said: Once one has started to mention rain, he no longer stops, i.e., he continues the mention of rain consistently until the summer. And, so too, Rav Sheshet said: Once one has started to mention rain, he no longer stops. In other words, once one has begun to mention rain in his prayers in the additional prayer on the Eighth Day of Assembly, he continues to do so uninterrupted, even in the Diaspora.

Rava said an alternative suggestion: Once one has started to mention rain, he no longer stops. The Gemara adds: And even Rav retracted his previously stated opinion, as Rav Hananel said that Rav said: One counts twenty-one days from Rosh HaShana, just as one counts ten days from Rosh HaShana until Yom Kippur. And after the twenty-one days, one starts to mention rain, and once one has started, he no longer stops. The Gemara concludes: And the halakha is in accordance with the opinion that once one has started to mention rain, he no longer stops.

PERSONALITIES

Rav Hananel — Ananel. A Babylonian amorah of the second generation, Rav Hananel was a disciple of Rav, and most of his teachings are transmitted in the name of his great teacher. He was, apparently, one of Rav’s preeminent students; and Rav’s successor, Rav Huna, treated Rav Hananel with great respect. By profession, he was a scribe who wrote Torah scrolls. It is said of him that he could copy the entire Torah accurately by heart.

BACKGROUND

And the last rain is in Nisan — Birkat HaChama. According to weather observations, only a small amount of rain, one percent of the annual precipitation, falls in Erets Yisrael in May. Weather observations in the coastal plain, over a period of many years, reveal that the last rain usually falls no later than April 28, around the end of the month of Nisan.

Locust — Hametz. The term locust refers to a group of insects that are found worldwide. The common name generally refers to the group of short-horned grasshoppers that often increase greatly in numbers and migrate long distances in destructive swarms. The sporadic appearance and disappearance of locust has bewildered people throughout history and, even today, there are only theories available to explain this phenomenon. Locusts are edible insects and are considered a delicacy in some countries. There have been references to their consumption as food throughout history and some species are permitted for consumption according to Torah law.

Desert Locust, a species that is kosher according to some Yemenite traditions

MISHNA

Until when does one request rain? — Rabbi Yehuda says: We request rain until Passover has passed. Rabbi Meir says: Until the month of Nisan has ended, as it is stated: ‘And He causes to come down for you the rain, the first rain and the last rain, in the first month’ (Joel 2:22, 23). Since the verse states that it rains in Nisan, the first month, this indicates that the entire month is considered part of the rainy season.

GEMARA

Rav Nahman said to Rabbi Yitzḥak: Is the first rain in Nisan? The first rain is in Marheshvan, as we learned in a baraita: The first rain is in Marheshvan and the last rain is in Nisan. Rabbi Yitzḥak said to Rav Nahman that Rabbi Yohanan said as follows: This verse was fulfilled in the days of the prophet Joel, son of Petheuel, in a year concerning which it is written: ‘That which the palm-worm has left, the locust has eaten and that which the locust has left, the canker-worm has eaten; and that which the canker-worm has left, the caterpillar has eaten’ (Joel 1:4), when no crops remained. In that year, the month of Adar ended and still no rain had fallen. The rain of the first rainy season fell for them on the first of Nisan.

After the first rain fell, the prophet said to the Jews: Go out and sow. They said to him: One who has one kav of wheat or two kav of barley left, should he eat them and live off them for a while or sow them and die? Given the improbability of the crops’ growth under these circumstances, it appears wasteful to plant them rather than consume that which remains. The prophet said to them: Nevertheless, go out and sow. A miracle occurred for them and they discovered wheat and barley seeds that were hidden in the walls that were concealed in ant holes.

NOTES

Just as one counts ten days – The early commentators offer various explanations of this comparison. The Sifra Mekeubberet suggests that just as one counts the ten days from Rosh HaShana to Yom Kippur starting from the first day of Rosh HaShana without taking into account the possibility that Elul might consist of thirty days, in which case one should count only from the second day, so too, with regard to the request for rain, there is no need to entertain the concern that the number of days counted will change based on the length of the month (see also Gvurat Ariz).

Until when does one request rain – The Gemara discusses the date for the beginning of the request for rain, the tanna also mentions the date when this request ends (Meiri).

As it is stated, And He causes to come down for you the rain – These words, on the one hand, are considered the basis of the tanna’s authority, and on the other hand, they are considered the conclusion of the tanna’s rule. The commentators discuss the nature of this proof. One explanation is that the verse is not cited by Rabbi Meir but by the unattributed author of the mishna, and it is interpreted by each tanna in accordance with his respective line of reasoning. Although the verse speaks of the final rain falling in the first month of Nisan, it does not clearly state whether this occurs in the middle or at the end of the month (Meikhet Shlomo).
And with regard to that generation the verse says: “They who sow in tears shall reap with songs of joy. Though he goes on his way weeping, who bears the measure of seed, shall come home with joy, bearing his sheaves” (Psalms 126:6).

The Gemara asks: What is the meaning of the expression: “Though he goes on his way weeping, who bears the measure of seed”? Rabbi Yehuda said: An ox, when it plowed the furrow. And this is the meaning of the phrase: “He shall come home with songs of joy.”

The Gemara further asks: What is the meaning of the expression: “Bearing his sheaves”? Rav Hisda said, and some say this was taught in a baraita: the stalk of that crop was one span, i.e., the distance between the thumb and the little finger, while the ear itself was two spans, i.e., the ears were twice as long as the stalk, whereas usually the stalk is three or four times longer than the ear.

Incidental to the interpretation of these verses, the Gemara cites a series of verses, starting with the topic of hunger, that also involve questions that Rav Nahman posed to Rabbi Yitzhak.

Rav Nahman said to Rabbi Yitzhak: What is the meaning of that which is written: “For the Lord has called upon a famine and it shall also come upon the land seven years” (1 Kings 8:1)? Specifically, in those seven years, what did they eat?

Rabbi Yitzhak said to Rav Nahman that Rabbi Yoḥanan said as follows: in the first year they ate that which was in their houses; in the second year they ate that which was in their fields; in the third year they ate the meat of their remaining kosher animals; in the fourth year they ate the meat of their remaining non-kosher animals; in the fifth year they ate the meat of repugnant creatures and creeping animals, i.e., any insects they found; in the sixth year they ate the flesh of their sons and their daughters; and in the seventh year they ate the flesh of their own arms, to fulfill that which is stated: Each man shall eat the flesh of his own arm” (Isaiah 9:19).

And Rav Nahman said to Rabbi Yitzhak: What is the meaning of that which is written: “It is sacred in your midst, and I will not enter the city” (Hosea 11:9)? This verse is puzzling: Because it is sacred in your midst, will God not enter the city? Rabbi Yitzhak said to Rav Nahman that Rabbi Yoḥanan said the verse should be understood as follows: The Holy One, Blessed be He, said: I shall not enter Jerusalem above, in heaven, until I enter Jerusalem on earth down below at the time of the redemption, when it will be sacred in your midst.

The Gemara asks: And is there such a place as Jerusalem above?

The Gemara answers: Yes, as it is written: “Jerusalem built up, a city unified together” (Psalms 122:3). The term unified indicates that there are two cities of Jerusalem, a heavenly one and an earthly one, which are bound together.

Notes

In those seven years what did they eat – עַקְבֵּן חֲמִישִׁית יַחְדָּו: Although we find other instances of famine in the Bible, including the famous seven year famine in the time of Joseph, Rav Nahman singled out the famine that afflicted the people in the days of Jehoram, king of Israel, for his question with regard to what people ate during the period of scarcity. One explanation is that the Divine decree concerning this famine was carried out in its full severity and for its entire intended duration, in accordance with the verse: “For the Lord has called upon a famine and it shall also come upon the land seven years” (2 Kings 8:1; Maharsha).

I shall not enter Jerusalem above, etc. – אלה אינוך רְבִּי יִצְחָק: One interpretation of the concept of: Jerusalem above, is that Jerusalem and the Temple signify the refined matters of the intellect, as corresponding to the earthly Eretz Yisrael there are spiritual levels located in the lofty worlds (Rashi). With regard to the interpretation of the verse itself, some say that the verse should be read as an expression of wonder: Because your midst shall be sacred, shall I not enter the city? (Maharsha; see Sefat Emet). They further explain that the verse is meant as a source of comfort for the Jewish people in exile; that it is almost as if the Almighty Himself is also in exile, and He will not enter Jerusalem up high until the Jews are redeemed on earth (Iyyun Ya’akov).

Background

The stalk was one span, the ear two spans – יָרְדָה בָּרוּךְ: Normally the stalk and the ear of grain grow to the same length, which complicates the harvesting process. Consequently, in modern times, grain is cultivated with a shorter stalk, by means of various mechanisms. These strains of grain have ears that are longer than those of the taller strains.

Language

Young shoots (הazor) – מַאי: According to the Arukh and the ge’onim, the word is hazor, which means tender shoots, e.g., bright green stalks of grain.
Jerusalem Talmud as transgressions for which repentance is necessary. The phrase: “Equivalent to two” (Maharsha). Some early commentaries have twenty-six as the number of violations, also based on the list of offenses cited in Ezekiel (Rabbeinu Gershon; Shita Mekubetzet).

As for the significance of these twenty-four offenses, most commentaries explain that they are referring to the twenty-four offenses listed in the book of Ezekiel (chapter 22) as the sins of Jerusalem, as indicated in the midrash. Some Ge’onim suggest that the twenty-four transgressions can also be seen in the list of offenses mentioned in the eleventh chapter of Sanhedrin in the Jerusalem Talmud as transgressions for which repentance is particularly difficult (Rabbeinu Hananel; see also Rambam Sefer HaMadda, Hilkhot Teshuva, chapter 4). Rav Hai Gaon suggests that there is no particular significance to the number twenty-four in this context; rather, it merely signifies a large amount.

And Rav Nahman said to Rabbi Yitzḥak: What is the meaning of that which is written: “And with one they are brutish and foolish, the teaching of their vanity is a stock” (Jeremiah 2:13)? Rav Nahman said to Rabbi Yitzḥak: What is the meaning of that which is written: “And with one they are brutish and foolish, the teaching of their vanity is a stock” (Jeremiah 2:13)?

Not allbaraita in this regard to this verse: “Kittites, i.e., the people of the isles of Kittim, worship fire and the people of Kedar worship water, and even though they know that water extinguishes fire, nevertheless they have not exchanged their gods: “But My people has exchanged its glory for that which does not profit” (Jeremiah 2:10–11).

And Rav Nahman said to Rabbi Yitzḥak: What is the meaning of that which is written: “And it came to pass when Samuel was old” (1 Samuel 8:1)? And did Samuel really grow old so soon? But he was only fifty-two years old when he died, as the Master said in a baraita that deals with the Divine punishment of karet: One who dies at the age of fifty-two years is not considered to have suffered the premature death of karet, as this is the age of the death of Samuel of Rama. This shows that Samuel died at the relatively young age of fifty-two.
Rabbi Yitzbak said to Rav Nahman that Rabbi Yohanan said as follows: Old age sprung upon Samuel, which caused him to appear older than his actual age, as it is written: "I regret that I made Saul king" (1 Samuel 15:11). Samuel said before God: Master of the Universe, You have considered me the equivalent of Moses and Aaron, as it is written: "Moses and Aaron among His priests, and Samuel among those who call upon His Name" (Psalms 99:6). Just as with regard to Moses and Aaron, their handiwork was not annulled in their lifetimes, so too, let my handiwork not be annulled in my lifetime. I anointed Saul; please do not annul his reign.

The Holy One, Blessed be He, said: What shall I do? Shall Saul die now? Samuel will not allow it, as he has petitioned that Saul should not die. Shall Samuel die young, with Saul passing away immediately afterward? The people will murmur about him, and wonder what transgression Samuel committed that caused his early demise. Shall neither Saul nor Samuel die? The time of David’s reign has already arrived, and one kingdom does not overlap with another and subtract from the time allotted to it even by a hairbreadth [ninna].

Therefore, the Holy One, Blessed be He, said: I will spring old age upon him and everyone will think that Shmuel is elderly. This is the meaning of that which is written: "And Saul dwelled in Gibeah under the tamarisk tree in Rama" (1 Samuel 22:6). What does Gibeah have to do with Rama; how is it possible that Samuel was appointed king (Rabbi Yoshiya Pinto; Sha’arei Teshuva)?

The Gemara asks: And is one man set aside before another man? In other words, is Samuel’s life set aside simply because the time for David’s reign has arrived? The Gemara answers: Yes, as Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani said that Rabbi Yohanan said: What is the meaning of that which is written: "Therefore I have hewn by the prophets, I have slain them by the words of My mouth" (Hosea 6:5)? It is not stated: By their deeds, but rather: “By the words of My mouth,” i.e., God sometimes ends the life of an individual simply by virtue of His decree. Apparently, one man is indeed set aside before another man.

In continuation of Rav Nahman’s questions of Rabbi Yitzbak, the Gemara relates: Rav Nahman and Rabbi Yitzbak were sitting and eating together at a meal. Rav Nahman said to Rabbi Yitzbak: Let the Master say a matter, i.e., share a Torah idea with me. Rabbi Yitzbak said to Rav Nahman that Rabbi Yohanan said: One may not speak during a meal, lest the esophagus will precede the trachea. Food is meant to enter the trachea, and when one speaks his esophagus opes and the food might enter there. And therefore, one should not speak during a meal, as he might come into the danger of choking.

**BACKGROUND**

Lest the esophagus precede the trachea and he come into danger – מַﬠֲשֵׂה: Some commentators are puzzled by this interpretation, as the verse that mentions Samuel’s old age precedes Saul’s appointment as king (see Maharsha). Apparently, the idea is that God anticipated this situation in advance and caused old age to spring upon Samuel even before Saul was appointed king (Rabbi Yoshiya Pinto; Ramaz Shmur).

They will murmur about him – מַﬠֲשֵׂה: Some commentators explain that people will murmur about Divine justice when they observe the righteous Samuel dying at a young age (Shita Melubitzez).

**NOTES**

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**LANGUAGE**

Hairbreadth [ninna] – מַﬠֲשֵׂה: From the Greek νῆμα, nema, meaning thread.

**HALAKHA**

One may not speak during a meal – מַﬠֲשֵׂה: It is prohibited to converse during a meal, even if the topic is matters of Torah (Magein Araham). Some say that one may converse between courses (Arukh HaShulhan; Mishna Beru), whereas others prohibit even this (Verishu). In modern times, people are not stringent in this regard, as the stringency was apparently related to the practice of eating while reclining (Eliahu Rabbin; Shulhan Arukh, Orach Hayyim 291).

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They will murmur about him – מַﬠֲשֵׂה: Some commentators explain that people will murmur about Divine justice when they observe the righteous Samuel dying at a young age (Shita Melubitzez).
After they had eaten, Rabbi Yitzhak said to Rav Nahman that Rabbi Yoḥanan said as follows: Our patriarch Jacob did not die.² Rav Nahman asked him in surprise: And was it for naught that the eulogizers eulogized him and the embalmers embalmed him and the burners burned him? Rabbi Yitzhak replied to Rav Nahman: I am interpreting a verse,³ as it is stated: “Therefore do not fear, Jacob My servant, says the Lord, neither be dismayed, Israel, for I will save you from afar, and your seed from the land of their captivity” (Jeremiah 30:10). This verse juxtaposes Jacob to his seed: Just as his seed is alive when redeemed, so too, Jacob himself is alive.

Rabbi Yitzhak said: Anyone who says: Rahab Rahab, immediately experiences a seminal emission, due to the arousal of desire caused by Rahab's great beauty. Rav Nahman said to him: I say Rahab and it does not affect me. Rabbi Yitzhak said to Rav Nahman: When I said this I was specifically referring to a man who knew her and to one who recognized her.⁴ With regard to anyone who had met Rahab in person, the mere mention of her name would arouse his lust.

The Gemara relates: When they were taking leave of one another, Rav Nahman said to Rabbi Yitzhak: Master, give me a blessing. Rabbi Yitzhak said to him: I will tell you a parable. To what is this matter comparable? It is comparable to one who was walking through a desert and who was hungry, tired, and thirsty. And he found a tree whose fruits were sweet and whose shade was pleasant, and a stream of water flowed beneath it. He ate from the fruits of the tree, drank from the water in the stream, and sat in the shade of the tree.

And when he wished to leave, he said: Tree, tree, with what shall I bless you? If I say to you that your fruits should be sweet, your fruits are already sweet; if I say that your shade should be pleasant, your shade is already pleasant; if I say that a stream of water should flow beneath you, a stream of water already flows beneath you. Rather, I will bless you as follows: May it be God's will that all saplings which they plant from you

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² Many commentaries discuss this puzzling comment. Some explain that Jacob did not die in Egypt, but he merely fainted and all his senses ceased, and that in fact he died in Eretz Yisrael (see Rabbi Yoshiya Pinto and Ḥokhmat Manoa). Yet this does not seem to be the main import of this statement. It is more likely that Rabbi Yitzhak is providing a homiletic interpretation on the level of allusion and hidden ideas, which Rav Nahman initially understood as addressing the simple meaning of the text. Therefore, Rabbi Yitzhak cited a proof from another passage, to indicate that he did not mean to offer a straightforward assertion. Rav Nahman accepted this explanation, despite the fact that the basic claim contradicts explicit statements of the Torah.

³ As to the deeper meaning of Rabbi Yitzhak’s statement, some commentaries explain that because some of the children of the other patriarchs were not valid successors, i.e., Ishmael and Esau, it cannot be said that Abraham and Isaac continued to live after their death. By contrast, Jacob, whose children will continue along his path until the end of days, is perpetuated by them. Therefore, it is appropriate to say that he never died (Rashba; Asara Ma’amorot).

⁴ Alternatively, the normal progression of death, with the various stages of the descent of the soul and its defilement via the angel of death, only occurs to people whose life was characterized by a struggle with the evil impulse. Jacob, however, had an entirely pure soul, and therefore he did not die in that manner. Rather, his soul passed directly to the life of the World-to-Come (Otzar HaKavod). This is similar to the Rambam’s description of the death of our teacher Moses.

⁵ I am interpreting a verse — see Torah and the Maharsha in tractate Megillah, who suggest that the term: Who knew her, is referring to one who had sexual relations with her, as in the verse: “And no man had known her” (Genesis 24:6).

NOTES