Rabbi Menashe Setton (ca. 1810-1876)

Rabbi Menashe Setton (□□□□□ , also Sittehon or Sutton) was born in Aram Soba (Aleppo) Syria. He was a great Tora scholar, well versed in secular knowledge like astronomy, philosophy, mathematics and engineering. Although he was an ordained rabbi, Rabbi Setton supported himself through business initiatives. Following the tradition of Sephardic rabbis he was also an expert in Hebrew grammar (diqduq).

Rabbi Setton's most famous book is "kenesiya leshem shamayim", a "gathering for the sake of heaven". In this short book rabbi Setton argues fiercely against a prevalent superstitious ceremony called "Endulzado" (Spanish for "sweetening").

In the beginning of his book Rabbi Setton describes this practice: Whenever there was a sick member of the family, a women about to give birth, or someone whose loved ones were dying, etc. they would empty a house, remove all type of Tora books and Mezuzot and display in the floor all kinds of baked sweets, candies, honey, etc. The patient and the expert exorcist would stay and sleep for three consecutive nights in that house. All this time, it was forbidden for the patient to pronounce any word of Tora or Tefila. The exorcist, usually a female, would summon "demons" (shedim) to visit the house. The demons would come into the house freely, because the house was empty of anything "holy" which would drive them away. Once the exorcist felt that the demos were inside the house, she would offer the demons those sweets to appease them and ask them to cure the patient or release the patient from their curse.

Rabbi Setton first explains that this is a flagrant act of idol-worshiping, known in Hebrew as 'aboda zara, the most serious offense in the entire Tora. He also explained that these people learned this ceremony from the books of the

ancient “sabians”, an ancient pagan sect who worshiped angels and demons.

After describing this practice, rabbi Setton referred to the silence of the rabbis of the city. He said that the reason the rabbis did not denounce this practice was probably because they were not aware of what was going on behind those closed doors. Many of them thought that perhaps, people were just praying in an intense way, etc. Once the rabbis became aware of what was going on in those houses, ALL the rabbis “gathered together for the sake of heaven” (from here the name of the book) to ban and eradicated this pagan practice.

Rabbi Sutton was widely supported in his efforts by numerous other rabbis from his city (thirty six rabbis from Aleppo signed their approval of his book) as well as from rabbinic leaders in Jerusalem, Tiberias, Hebron, and Safed, from both the Sephardic and Ashkenazi communities.

Rabbi Menashe Setton died in Alexandria, Egypt in 1876

To download this enlightening book KENESIYA LESHEM SHAMAYIM click here

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