

Parshas Vayeishev

The Gemara Shabbos 22a, when discussing the Mitzvah and holiday of Chanukah and the height of the Menorah, quotes Rav Kahana, two seemingly unconnected ideas. The first is that at the height of 20 Amos, a menorah is posul because people cannot see it. Then the Gemara continues, what does it mean that the pit was empty and there was no water in it (from our Parsha 37:24)? Isn't it obvious that if the pit is empty, there is no water in it? Rather, it teaches us that water may not have been there, but serpents and scorpions (as Rashi quotes) were there.

What may be the connection between these concepts (the laws of Chanukah and the seemingly obvious lack of water in the 'empty' pit?¹)

The Rebbe in a Sichra from Chelek 20 on the Parsha asks the question and answers it primarily based on the adage that Torah and water are compared to one another (just as water flows, Torah does as well). In the absence of the Torah, there are scorpions and serpents. The Rebbe points out that the brothers didn't have Torah when they put Yosef in the pit and sold him into slavery.

Chanukah is connected to this, as it is stated in the Al Hanisim prayer that the kingdom of Yavan wanted to make us forget the Torah, and it was specifically through finding the morsel of oil, which is connected to Chochma, which is the level of Torah.

Furthermore, Torah, and its connection to water (flowing), matches what light does in

a dark place, which is the metaphor for what Chanukah represents, i.e., lighting the Menorah to fill the world with light. So, when the Gemara tells us in the same law of Rav Kahana about the height of the Menorah (which, if it is too high no one cranes their necks, and therefore doesn't see it, which negates the purpose of being mipharsim- displaying- the Menorah and its lights), and the pit being empty they are connected. Because in the dark pit of the world, we must live by and have Torah, and with it the light, will shine out, and in the absence of Torah (which also requires humility according to the Rebbe in the Sichra) snakes and scorpions will fill the void.

May the light of this year's Menorahs, and the flow of Torah explode outwards, for a swift salvation of Jews around the world, and in Israel, and a speedy recovery of the hostage victims.

Good Shabbos!

¹ The question from Rav Kahana about the posuk is completely seemingly misplaced in the sugya.