



## PARSHAS VAYEISHEV - R' SHOLOM SEGAL - "AN EMPTY PIT – A FULL FLASK"

In describing the pit into which the brothers cast Yosef, it is written:

*And the pit was empty; there was no water in it. (37:24)*

Chazal qualify that although the pit was void of water, it was home to snakes and scorpions. [See Shabbos 22a] In response to the obvious question that surely then, it was *not* empty, many explain that herein lies an allusion to a deeper message; it was precisely due to the emptiness of water – an allusion to Torah – that the impurities had place onto which to attach themselves. Yet, in the face of such a threat, Yosef managed to survive. Though one thrown into a waterless pit may well die of thirst, if equipped with a flask of water, he may still survive. So too, Yosef's upbringing between the knees of Ya'acov had more than fortified him for the challenges ahead.

The experience in the pit was a for-runner for what was yet to come. Yosef was to find himself ruler over the Mother of impurities and still managed to emerge unscathed. His ceaseless connection to the words of Torah [see B.R. 86:5 as explained by Rashi], twinned with his ability to segregate himself from his surroundings, allowed him to raise himself above their futilities.

This age-old key to survival is found once again in the Chanuka story. The lone jug of oil, a liquid associated with Torah, which remained untainted, was the container that was sealed and concealed beneath the ground. Though we must venture into the outside world and interact with the other nations, we must simultaneously remain cognisant that in order not to be negatively influenced, we are to remain within our own parameters. It is imperative to remain vigilant and stand staunch, not allowing any foreign material to penetrate the soul we so dearly protect.

As is well known, the Greeks attempted to abolish 3 commandments: circumcision, sanctification of the month and Shabbos. They were determined to thwart our closeness to Hashem and sought to break down the barriers between the Jews and the rest of the world. These 3 commandments, practiced, at least with all their particulars, only by the Jews, serve both to set us apart from the rest of the world and act as a covenant and sign to further and strengthen our bond of love with G-D.

The first letters of these three commandments – מילה שבת חדש – spells, 'משה', the Aramaic word for oil. As oil lies separate from and above water, so too, complying with the above 3 Mitzvos acts to divide us from and elevate us above the nations.

The Greeks sought to contaminate this "oil", as they raged through the Sanctuary in an attempt to desecrate all the oil they could lay their hands upon. They sought to extinguish the Light of the World by severing the Jewish people – the emissary – from the Source. In its place, they wanted to establish the darkness of the world of science and nature. How did the *Yidden* once again survive, in the face of such a threat?

Who was responsible for having established this unconditional love with Hashem? Undoubtedly, it was our Forefathers who forged this invaluable relationship, Avraham assuming the right-hand side of kindness, Yitzchak's opposing Din on the left and Ya'acov's fusion of these two diverse ideas, down the middle of the road.

The right-hand letter מ"ם of מילה [in the word משה] dates back to the pioneer of this Mitzvah; אברהם, the only one of the Forefathers with a מ"ם. The left-hand letter ח"ת of חדש [in משח], is attributed to יצחק, the only one with a ח"ת. Finally, the middle letter ש"ן of שבת [in משח], is rooted in ישראל, the only one with a ש"ן. [It is beyond the scope of our discussion to explain the connection of each Forefather to his Mitzvah.]

For the time being, we must realise that as we interact with the outside world, we are the ambassadors of Hashem's honour and must behave accordingly. However, it is imperative that at the same time, we understand that we *are* different, for the above mentioned reason; we are the princes of G-D. We must, therefore, distance ourselves spiritually from their ways of life, allowing for no compromise. Through this stance, there will be no obstruction to the light cast by the Menorah of Torah. In turn, it will continue to grow, until we are privy to witness the eternal light which will be fuelled by the משיח, in purity, when all foreign and idolatrous ideas will be wiped from the face of this earth, and the light of Torah and the Shechinah will be clear to all.