

The Glow of the Candles

The gemara (*Shabbat 22a*) records in the name of Rabi Tanchum, “*ner shel Chanukah shehinichah lemaalah miesrim amah pesulah*”, Chanukah lights that have been placed higher than twenty amot are invalid. Immediately following, the gemara tells us, also quoting Rabi Tanchum, the pit into which Yosef’s brothers threw him had no water in it, yet it did contain snakes and scorpions. What is the connection between these two statements made by Rabi Tanchum? Furthermore, how is this comment concerning Yosef and the pit relevant to this section which discusses the laws and customs of Chanukah?

The *Megaleh Amukos* teaches that the Greek exile served as an atonement for

the sale of Yosef. Rav Pinchas Friedman in *Shevilei Pinchas* expounds further. Yaakov Avinu spent 14 years in the yeshiva of *Shem Vaever* learning to live as Jew in galus before reaching Lavan’s home. He understood that Yosef would need these special lessons in the future and taught him ‘*torat hagalut*’ from the time he was three years old for 14 years. Thus, at the age of 17, Yosef was sent to seek the welfare of his brothers, in effect, initiating the beginning of his galus experience. We are told that Yosef Hatzadik was able to maintain his identity as a Jew because he constantly kept ‘the image of his father’ before him. This image symbolized the teachings he received from his father which served as a guide for his survival in a foreign land. Additionally, the brothers threw Yosef into a pit filled with snakes and scorpions yet he remained unharmed; unwittingly, they implemented a symbolic act (*see Ramban Bereisheet 12;6*), that ensured Yosef’s ability to endure through the ‘snakes



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and scorpions' of galus. Moreover, it was the forerunner of the Jews' perpetuity as a whole in the galus of Mitzrayim and subsequent *galuyot* as well.

Rav Avraham Schorr in *Halekach Vehalibuv* notes that the candles must be lower than 20 amot to generate the maximum advantage of the candles. Although at that height the candles may be physically visible it doesn't allow one the opportunity to introspect and reflect on their meaning. The meditative experience should enter the inner recesses of our souls, acting as a catalyst to finetune *middot* in need of improvement. Although the brothers looked deep into the pit to check that it was empty, they were not able to see inside the crevices that did indeed contain snakes and scorpions. Chanukah is a time to use the light; to contemplate the 'snakes' -- the passions in our lives and the 'scorpions' -- the coldness and indifference in our service of Hashem and make the appropriate adjustments.

The *Sefat Emet* points out that we light the *chanukiah* at the entrance of our homes. This symbolizes how Hashem opens up new possibilities for those who do *teshuvah* during Chanukah. On Chanukah we not only remember the rededication of the Beit Hamikdash of old, we can also rededicate ourselves to our relationship with Hashem. This auspicious time for *teshuvah* culminates on the eighth day of Chanukah, 'zot chanukah', the final day wherein our judgement that began on Rosh Hashanah is sealed. Let us keep the candles close, take advantage of their glow and remember the power of our identity. ■

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