



Parshat Vayeishev

מתוך "ליקוטי שמואל"

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What Was Yehudah Thinking? What Was Tamar Thinking?

Parshas Vayeishev

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

For a variety of reasons, Parshas Vayeshev is a difficult parsha to understand. One of the more difficult parts of the parsha is the story of Yehuda and Tamar. Tamar married two of Yehudah's sons and they both died. There was a form of *yibum* (levirate marriage) in those days, and Yehudah was saving his third son for subsequent marriage to Tamar, but was hesitant to allow that marriage to go forth. At any rate Tamar appears at the crossroads as a *zonah* (prostitute) and Yehudah, without realizing that it was his daughter-in-law, hires her services.

Yehudah has relations with this woman who he thought was a *zonah*, and she becomes pregnant from him. When Yehudah learns that his daughter-in-law is pregnant, he assumes she had been unfaithful to his third son and ordered her to be put to death. Tamar proves to Yehudah that she was pregnant from him, and he responds, "She is more righteous than I." (Bereshis 38:26) The Medrash asks, how is it that Yehudah, patriarch of one of the Twelve Tribes of G-d, could do such a thing? What prompted him

to have relations with a *zonah* that he happens to see at the crossroads? The Medrash answers that the *Ribono shel Olam* sent Yehudah "*Malach ha'me'muneh al ha'tayvah*" (an Angel appointed over the attribute of human sexual desire). In effect, Yehudah was almost forced into this unseemly act. He didn't want to do it, but somehow a spiritual entity "forced him" to do it.

The reason this *malach* was given such a mission was that it was part of the Divine Plan that the Davidic monarchy, and ultimately the *Moshiach* himself, would descend from this union.

So this Medrash explains Yehudah's action. It was not part of Yehudah's normal behavior to consort with *zonahs*. Fine. But what about Tamar? What was Tamar thinking? Did she not realize that her father-in-law Yehudah was a *tzadik*? How in the world did she expect that she could dress up as a *zonah* and entice him to have relations with her so that he might father a child through her?

I saw an interesting observation in the *sefer Avir Yaakov*: The observation is that a person needs to do what he needs to do! Somehow, she knew that she needed to bear a child from Yehudah's family. She saw that Yehudah was not letting her marry Shelah. If the only way for her to conceive from a member of this family was to dress up as a *zonah* and try to seduce Yehudah into a relationship, that is what she had to try, regardless of how far-fetched an idea this plan was.

This is a basic principle in *Avodas Hashem* (Divine Service). We cannot always pause to ask ourselves "What are the chances of this happening? What are the statistics? Is this going to succeed or is it not going to succeed?" It does not work like that. "Ours is not to reason why, ours is just to do and die" (Alfred Lord Tennyson, "Charge of the Light Brigade")

If every Rosh Yeshiva who came to America in the 1930's and 1940's would have thought "How is this going to happen?" then no

yeshiva would have ever been built. Ner Yisroel started with four *talmidim* (students). You do what you need to do, despite the fact that the odds of success may be slim, and you need to hope for the best. That is what Tamar was thinking.

Were You More Handsome Than Yosef?

There is a very beautiful and powerful Rambam (Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 5:10) that needs explanation. The Rambam writes: If a person sins, not because he is overcome by lust or passion, but he does it simply out of spite for the laws of the Torah, because “he doesn’t care,” he has made a *Chillul HaShem* (desecrated the Name of G-d). (In other words, besides punishment for whatever *aveira* (sin) he committed, he will also be punished for the *aveira* of *Chillul HaShem*.) The Torah uses this expression of *Chillul Hashemin* connection with taking a false oath. Similarly, anyone who abstains from an *aveira* or does a mitzvah, not for any ulterior motive, neither out of fear nor to seek honor, but simply for the sake of being in compliance with the will of the Creator, blessed be He, has made a *Kiddush HaShem* (sanctified the Name of G-d).

Who does the Rambam marshal as an example of someone who made a *Kiddush HaShem* by abstaining from *aveira*, not out of fear or to seek honor, but for the sake of being in compliance with the Divine Will? The Rambam marshals the example of Yosef abstaining from having relations with his master’s wife.

A dramatic passage in the Gemara (Yoma 35) states:

A poor person, a rich person, and a wicked person each came (to Heaven) to be judged. The poor person is asked: Why did you not occupy yourself with Torah? If he answers “I was poor and I was busy earning my living” they ask him “Were you poorer than Hillel

(about whom the Gemara relates his great dedication to learning and studying Torah despite his great poverty)?”

The rich person is asked: Why did you not occupy yourself with Torah? If he answers “I was rich and was occupied with my properties” they ask him “Were you richer than Rabbi Elazar ben Charsom (about whom the Gemara relates his great dedication to Torah study despite the great wealth he inherited from his father)?”

The wicked person is asked: Why did you not occupy yourself with Torah. If he answers “I was very handsome and was absorbed in my passions” they ask him “Were you more handsome than Yosef?” (The Gemara proceeds to discuss the great efforts Potiphar’s wife made to try to seduce Yosef, and Yosef’s steadfast refusal to listen to her arguments.)

The Gemara concludes that Hillel serves as the “prosecutor” of the poor, Rabbi Elazar ben Charsom serves as the “prosecutor” of the wealthy, and Yosef serves as the “prosecutor” of the wicked.

This is what the Rambam alludes to when he cites the righteous Yosef as the paradigm of *Kiddush Hashem*.

There are two problems with this Rambam.

Problem #1: The Gemara (Sotah 36b) says that Yosef was actually about to commit an act of adultery with Potiphar’s wife until the image of his father, Yaakov, appeared to him in the window, convincing him to back off. Now if we were tempted to do an *aveira* and we suddenly miraculously saw our father’s image in the window, we would also stop. Why then does the Gemara cite Yosef as the paradigm of someone who successfully withstood the temptation of his evil inclination?

It is possible that when the Gemara says that “the image of his father appeared to him in the window” the Gemara is alluding to this not being the first time that the image of Yaakov appeared to

Yosef. Yosef lived his life by always asking himself “What would my father do in this situation? What would my father say?” Since Yosef lived his life like that on a daily basis, the mention of “his father’s image appeared to him in the window” is not talking about a supernatural event. There was no miracle here. Yosef **always** saw his father peering at him through the window. He always asked himself “What would my father do?” If we lived our lives like that, we would also abstain from giving into sinful temptation.

Many times, I told the story of Mr. Harry K. Wolport. The old timers in Baltimore remember him. Harry K. Wolport was a businessman. He was a *talmid* of Rav Boruch Ber. He learned in Kamenetz and came to the United States of America in the early 1900’s. Every one of his Jewish acquaintances felt that they needed to keep their stores open on Shabbos to survive in business. He was tempted to keep his store open on Shabbos as well. But he said, “I cannot do this to Rav Boruch Ber!” Rav Boruch Ber used to appear to him in the window because Mr. Wolport kept that image in front of him. That is how he was able to withstand the temptation to open his store on Shabbos. When a person lives his life like that on a daily basis, such visages in the window are not supernatural.

Problem #2: Why does the Rambam chose the story of Yosef as **the** paradigm of stopping to do an aveirah “not out of trembling and not out of fear and not for the sake of honor”? Why Yosef? The Chiddushei HaRim says that if after 120 years, we go to Heaven and they ask us “Why didn’t you stop sinning like Yosef did?” we have a simple answer to that question: “I am not Yosef”. They don’t call me “Yissacher *haTzadik*” (the righteous one). They call me “Yissacher.” Yosef is given the attribute “*HaTzadik*”. “What do you want from me? I am not Yosef!”

“Why don’t you make a siyum every year on the entire body of Torah literature like Rav Chaim Kannievsky?” The answer is

obvious: "It is because I am **NOT** Rav Chaim Kanievsky." Rav Elyashiv used to learn in the Beis Medrash on Erev Pesach. Why don't **you** do that?" The answer is "It is because I am **NOT** Rav Elyashiv!" I am not Rav Elyashiv and I am not Rav Chaim Kanievsky and I am not Yosef *haTzadik*.

The Chiddushei HaRim answers: Yes, you are Yosef *HaTzadik*, because that is what Yosef *HaTzadik* did for *Klal Yisrael*. He gave us the spiritual strength to withstand temptation. That is why the Rambam marshals the act of abstention of Yosef *haTzadik*.

Just like Avraham Avinu gave us the spiritual ability to be a martyr for *Kiddush HaShem*. Rav Chaim of Volozhin explains that all the patriarchs put qualities of self-sacrifice and other spiritual powers into our spiritual DNA. Yosef gave us the ability to say "No."

That is one answer to this second problem. I was told that the Brisker Rav also gave an answer to this question of why the Rambam uses the example of "like the act of abstaining by the righteous Yosef."

The Brisker Rav says that when Potiphar's wife is trying to seduce Yosef, he gives her a list of reasons why it would be inappropriate for him to do that (Bereshis 39:8-9) "Look – my master concerns himself with nothing in the house, and all that he has, he placed in my custody. There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has denied me nothing but you, since you are his wife; how then can I perpetrate this great evil?" Finally, at the end of his list, Yosef adds "And I would be sinning before *Elokim*."

The Brisker Rav said Yosef's final remark is his key argument. Every other argument can be answered with an excuse. "He wasn't such a good boss; he made me work too hard; he wouldn't mind anyway; he is fooling around himself..." All these justifications can be offered. A person can rationalize everything. There is only one

thing that cannot be rationalized: “And I would be sinning before Elokim.”

The Brisker Rav says this is the meaning of this Rambam. When a person is faced with such temptation, he should remember Yosef *haTzadik*. Yosef *haTzadik* overcame his temptation by remembering “And I would be sinning before *Elokim*.” Any person who keeps that in mind, will not do an *aveira*.

Hashem’s Wink, Reuven’s Jealousy & Shira on Chanukah

Parshas Vayeishev
Chanukah

Detecting the Wink of the Ribono Shel Olam

In Parshas VaYeshev, the Torah teaches “Then they took him, and cast him into the pit; and the pit was empty, no water was in it. They sat down to eat food; they raised their eyes and they saw, behold! – a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead, and their camels were bearing spices, and balsam, and birthwort – on their way to bring them down to Egypt. Yehudah said to his brothers, ‘What gain will there be if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites – but let our hand not be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.’ And his brothers listened.” [Bereshis 37:24-27]

Chazal say that no slave ever escaped Egypt. Yehudah’s plan, therefore, seemed very reasonable to the brothers. Rather than cause Yosef’s death, they could merely eliminate him as a problem by selling him to the Arab traders who were heading down to Egypt.

Rashi raises the question – why was it important in this narration for the Torah to specify the load that the Arabs were carrying in their caravans (“spices, balsam, and birthwort” – all possessing a pleasant aroma)? Rashi answers that this shows the reward that comes to the righteous. Normally, he says, the Arabs would transport foul smelling petroleum and resin, but this time it happened that spices were the cargo, so that Yosef should not be harmed by a foul odor. (It is interesting to note – some things never change – even today the Arabs still sell oil!)

The question is, at this stage of the situation, does it really make a difference to Yosef whether the merchants were carrying sweet smelling spices or whether they were hauling pigs? Look what he has gone through! His brothers kidnapped him, they accused him, they tried and convicted him and then they threw him into a snake pit. In the end, they sell him into slavery. He is headed down to Egypt with little hope of returning home and seeing his father ever again. What kind of “reward” is this that the *Ribono shel Olam* is giving him that he should have spices to smell rather than oil while he is being transported as a prisoner far away from home? Would he even take notice at such a moment? Is this how the Almighty is “nice” to him? This seems irrelevant at this point. It seems meaningless! What does Rashi mean here?

I saw in a sefer called Nachal Eliyahu an answer in the name of Rav Mordechai Pogramansky, who was known as the “ilui of Telshe”. He suggested the following approach – and the underlying idea is certainly a correct concept:

There are two types of ways the *Ribono shel Olam* can punish a person. One way is that He can say “I have had it with you. You are on your own. Whatever happens to you, happens. I abandon my Divine Providence over your fate and leave you to the vagaries of statistics and *teva* (natural happenstance).”

Another type of punishment is when the *Ribono shel Olam* himself is meting out the punishment. He is the one giving the "*Patch*". It is much more reassuring when the person realizes that even though I am being punished, I know it is the *Ribono shel Olam* punishing me and I know that He is still thinking about me and He still cares about me. He feels that I need to go through the suffering I am now experiencing, for whatever reason it must be, but I am not just a statistic. I am very much in His Consciousness.

This is a fundamental idea (*yesod*) which we have mentioned on various occasions. We have cited a very famous observation of Rav Yonoson Eybeschutz [1690-1764] in his *Yearos Devash*. The Gemara [Brochos 7b] brings a famous drasha on the *pasuk* "A Psalm of David when he fled from Avshalom his son" [Tehillim 3:1]. This is one of the most tragic scenes in all of Tanach. Avshalom rebels against his own father – *Dovid Melech Yisrael!* Dovid must flee the capital from his own son Avshalom. When that happened, the *pasuk* says "A *Mizmor* (song of praise) to Dovid, when he fled from Avshalom his son." The Gemara asks: Is this a *Mizmor*? It should rather be an elegy (*Kinah l'Dovid*), a dirge!

The Gemara explains: Dovid was anxious about a major debt of his which had yet to be paid. The prophet told him he was going to be punished: "Thus sayeth Hashem: Behold I will raise against you evil from the midst of your own household..." [Shmuel II 12:11]. *Dovid HaMelech* did something wrong and he knew he was going to be punished. This was a price that he was going to need to pay. But he was anxious that the enemy from his household who would rise up against him might be an *Eved* or a *Mamzer* who would not have mercy upon him. Dovid was thus expecting that the coup against him would come from some kind of servant or army officer who would be ruthless and cruel to him. When he saw it was his own son, then he was happy.

The Yearos Devash explains: It is not natural for a son to rebel against his father, the king, who was so good to him. When Dovid saw that it was his own son who took up arms against him and was usurping the monarchy, he understood that the "*Patch*" was coming directly from the *Ribono shel Olam*. A "*Patch*" from the *Ribono shel Olam* means that He is still in charge, He still cares about me, He is still involved with me. That itself is a major consolation.

We once said that this is also the key to understanding a famous phrase from Perek 23 Pasuk 4 of Tehillim: "Your rod and your cane will comfort me." A cane, we understand, is an aid – it is a comfort and it helps. But a rod in Tanach is a tool for administering punishment. How could that be a comfort? It is the same idea.

Sometimes a "*Klop*" from the *Ribono shel Olam* is comforting. A person realizes that he still has a connection with *Hashem*.

We see this in life. Sometimes it is amazing to hear, but people go through terrible *tzores* and yet they still feel a connection to the *Ribono shel Olam*. They feel that the *Ribono shel Olam* is punishing them for whatever reason, but He still is in charge and He still cares for them.

That is the meaning here as well. For Yosef to be taken down to Mitzrayim by a bunch of Yishmaelim, who 99 out of 100 times carry smelly petroleum, and against all odds he finds himself riding in a caravan with sweet smelling spices – this was a source of comfort. "G-d still loves me." It is like a *Potch* with a wink and a smile. By smelling the sweet aroma, Yosef saw the Wink of the *Ribono shel Olam*. He saw His smile. This is not normal.

The Gemara [Nedarim 50] says that Rabbi Akiva and his wife, Rochel, were extremely poor. Rabbi Akiva's wife was the daughter of an extremely wealthy individual who cut her off from his fortune because he was upset that she was marrying an ignorant

shepherd. The couple was destitute. They did not have a bed. They slept on straw. Every morning, he needed to pick the straw out of his hair. One night, Eliyahu HaNavi came in the form of a poor person. He told Rabbi Akiva and Rochel that his wife was in labor and they did not have straw. He asked for some straw. Rabbi Akiva and Rochel gave their straw for this 'woman in labor' so that she should at least have a more comfortable bed on which to give birth. Rabbi Akiva turned to his wife and said, "You see, there are people who are poorer than us – they do not even have straw." The question needs to be asked: If Eliyahu HaNavi is coming to visit, why does he need to come as a pauper asking for straw? Why doesn't he come as a millionaire and say, "This is terrible that you need to sleep on straw. Here is a bag of gold that will solve your problem!"

The answer is that for whatever reason, the Ribono shel Olam wanted Rabbi Akiva to grow in Torah out of a state of poverty. He was the key link in the chain of Torah transmission through the ages. After all his original disciples died out between Pesach and Shavuot, he took five additional students who eventually became the foundational transmitters of the entire corpus of Talmudic literature. For whatever reason, it was part of the Divine Plan that Rabbi Akiva should learn *m'toch ha'dchak!* But He saw that at that moment, perhaps they were depressed about their poverty – how can we live like this? He therefore sent them a message: There are people worse off than you. That gave them the courage to continue. This is the "*Potch* with the smile; the *Potch* that comes with a wink."

This is what the Almighty did for Yosef as well, and this is what Rashi means "The reward of the righteous". Even when Tzadikim need to suffer, they still feel that the Hand of the *Ribono shel Olam* is together with them.

Reuven's Sackcloth and Fasting: Why Now?

The pasuk says, "Reuven returned to the pit – and behold! – Yosef was not in the pit! so he rent his garments." [Bereshis 36:29]. Rashi asks – where was Reuven when the entire event of picking Yosef out of the pit and selling him to the Arabs was transpiring? He explains that the brothers took turns taking care of their father, and it was Reuven's turn that day to serve Yaakov. He had gone home to his father, and consequently was not together with the rest of his brothers during that fateful sale.

Rashi then quotes a second interpretation: "He was sitting in sackcloth and fasting, in repentance for the event in Parshas VaYetzei, where he switched the beds in his father's tent and his father got angry at him." But make the calculation. How long ago was that? It happened shortly after Rochel died. She died when Yosef was approximately eight years old. Yosef is now seventeen. It happened nine years prior, almost ten years ago! All of a sudden, Reuven decides he needs to do *Teshuva* because he switched the beds? Why now?

I saw a beautiful interpretation in a sefer called Abir Yosef. We are all subject to *negiyus* – our biases and agendas. We do not see straight. The brothers hated Yosef. They hated him because they were jealous. Jealousy is the type of thing that can warp a person's perspective. You do not see straight because you are so obsessed with your jealousy that you cannot see the facts as they are.

Reuven, Chazal say, got cold feet about this whole incident. He said, "My father is going to blame me for this." This fear put a brake on his jealousy. Once he put a brake on his jealous emotion, he was able to see the facts as they were. He recognized that Yosef was not a *Rasha*. Yosef was not trying to kill them. Reuven saw how the *negiyus* of his brothers – their jealousy and their agenda –

warped their entire perspective, and they were not seeing things as they should be seen.

All of a sudden, Reuven had an epiphany and he said “You know what? Just like their jealousy affects their perspective and they do not see things right, so too when I protested against my father, that was also out of a sense of jealousy for my mother. I felt it was not right that my father should move his bed into Bilhah’s tent after Rochel died. I felt strongly that he should have moved his bed into the tent of my mother, Leah. But I now realize that my jealousy for my mother colored my perspective. It caused me to act improperly and do things that were not right.

Just at that moment, Reuven realized how much *kinah* and emotions of jealousy affect a person’s view of reality. “Just like the brothers were dead wrong, maybe I was dead wrong as well.” That brought Reuven to Teshuva – fasting and sackcloth – at that very moment.

Chanukah: Once the Shirah Starts – It Must Keep Going

The Rambam writes [Hilchos Chanukah 4:12]: The mitzvah of Chanukah is very precious. A person must be particularly careful to publicize the miracle and to add to the praise of the Almighty, and thank Him for the miracles He did for us; even if he has nothing to eat other than from charity funds – he must borrow or sell his clothing to be able to buy oil and wicks and light.

If we pay close attention to these words, we notice a discrepancy. The Rambam begins by saying the goal of the mitzvah is to publicize the miracle (*nes*), singular. Then he says that we are to add to the praise of the Almighty and thank Him for the miracles (*nisim*), plural, that He did for us. So, which is it? Is it *nes* or is it *nisim*?

I heard a second question on this Rambam from Rav Daniel Lander of Monsey: After lighting Chanukah candles, we say "*HaNeiros Halalu*" and then we recite "*Maoz Tzur*." *Maoz Tzur* recounts the miracle of the Exodus from Egypt, the redemption from the Babylonian exile, the story of Purim, and the Chanukah story of the struggle with the Greek empire. Basically, it is a brief synopsis of Jewish history: Egypt, Bavel, Purim, and Chanukah.

On Purim we say "*Shoshanas Yaakov*". We only mention the story of Purim. What about the rest of the miracles of Jewish history? Why in the Chanukah *Pizmon* (liturgical poem) do we mention all the major miracles of Jewish history and by Purim, the holiday *Pizmon* is exclusively about Purim?

Rabbi Lander offered the following answer: The Gemara says [Megilla 14a] that there is a fundamental difference between Chanukah and Purim – namely on Chanukah we recite *Hallel* and on Purim we do not. There are several explanations why this is the case. Rava, in the Gemara there, explains why unlike the commemoration of the Exodus, where we recite *Hallel*, in commemorating the Purim deliverance we do not: When we left Egypt, we could indeed say *Hallel* because we were no longer servants to Pharaoh, but even after the "deliverance" of the Purim story, we were still servants of Achashverosh. The "deliverance" of the Chanukah story was more similar to the Exodus: After the successful Maccabean revolt, we were free men, we were in our own country, and we had our own government. We had the *Beis HaMikdash*. We were not enslaved to anybody! Therefore, on such a *Nes*, we say *Shirah*. On Purim, we were very happy that the decree of annihilation was cancelled. That was a terrific miracle. But after all is said and done, we still were in exile, subject to foreign domination by a Gentile king!

Shirah is an expression of the heart. When you say *Shirah*, you sing! You express your deepest emotions, your feelings of gratitude to the Almighty for all He has done for you. When people engage in *Shirah* they do not stop with a single expression of thanks. They give thanks for everything! Therefore, on Chanukah, which justifies *Hallel*, which is *Shirah*, once we begin singing His praises, we must express thanks for all the *tova* He has done for us throughout the ages! Purim has various *mitzvos* commemorating the event, but they are localized to the exact event that happened “in those days at this time of year.” An obligation to say *Shirah* does not exist “for we are still slaves of Achashverosh.” So this is what the Rambam means: A person needs to be particularly careful to publicize the miracle (i.e. – of Chanukah) and to add to the praise of the Almighty and thank Him for the miracles that He did for us (i.e. – during the rest of Jewish history as well).”

A Freileche Chanukah!

Vayeishev – “Never Give Up”

Written by Chanan Ephraim Rivenson

We read in Parshas Vayeishev that Yosef held firm to his faith in Hashem, no matter what was thrown at him. His never give up, never surrender attitude served him well throughout his life. To Yosef, despite the apparent difficulties of his situation, all that counted was that he maintained the attitude and action of a faith-based person, to keep moving forward.

We all memorized Adon Olam in our youth, but how many of us actually base our decisions on its last stanza, which is commonly translated: I rest my spirit

Success in life is about how hard one can get hit, that is how much one can take, and keep moving forward. We must always be ready to do our part by

strengthening our commitment to living a Hashem-based life. In sum, in the words of our last Lubavitcher Rebbe, Z'TL, “We must translate pain into action and tears into growth”.

No Excuse

Written by Benjamin A Rose

The gemara says that when you come to the Yom HaDin after you die you will have many excuses for your shortcomings. You were too poor and didn't have time to learn. To this Hashem will point to Hillel and ask “were you poorer than him?” You were too rich and were way too busy. Nuh huh try again. Look at Eliezer who was fabulously wealthy and made time to learn. You were too attractive and temptation got to you. Sorry, Yosef was far better looking and he managed.

Rav Yehuda Asad says this is pshat in the pasuk, “Rabos Machshavos B'Lev Ish” there are many ideas or excuses in a person's mind for not passing his tests in life. However, “Atzas Hashem Hee Sakum” Hashem's plan of testing you fairly will stand at the end. How? Hidden in the word “Hee” (Hey-Yud-Aleph) is the acronym for Hillel-Yosef-Eliezer). These famous men should act as examples to us. We have no excuse for not doing mitzvos or studying Torah we are here for that purpose and that purpose only!!

If Your Pit Is Empty, It Is a Bad Sign

Written by Benjamin A Rose

Yosef was thrown in to the pit. “VihaBor Rayk Ain Bo Mayim” – “The pit was empty there was no water inside. Rashi asks, if the pit was empty, obviously there wasn't any water inside! Why is it necessary to say, ”Ain Bo Mayim”? Rashi answers, “Mayim Ayn Bo Aval Nichashim ViAkrabim Yesh Bo” – “There wasn't water in the pit, but there were snakes and scorpions.” The Baalei Mussar explain this concerning the Torah.

The Gemara in Taanis says that Torah is compared to water. The pasuk is saying, “VihaBor Rayk Ain Bo Mayim” – if a person is empty without Torah

(Mayim), “Nichashim ViAkrabim Yesh Bo” – you can be sure that he is filled with snakes and scorpions – Bad Middos and other Aveiros. Therefore a person can not say , “I can still be a good Jew without learning Torah”. He must have both.

Humor

Which hand is best to light the menorah with?

Neither, it's best to light it with a candle.

How can you recognize a Hanukkah hippie?

He's the one with his hair in dreidel-locks

How much Hanukkah gelt did the skunk get?

One cent.

What do you call a speck that falls into the latke pan?

An unidentified frying object.