

## Echoes of the Ages

Many years ago in Eastern Galicia, there was a small farming village. Anti-Semitism was common in those times and when the dead body of a gentile farmer was found, the Jewish community was immediately blamed. A Jewish innkeeper was accused and thrown into prison until his case could be decided.

The son of the innkeeper decided to travel to the great R' Benzion and told the צדיק his bitter tale. He explained how there were three farmers who were after the murdered man's blood and that his father had been blamed for an act which had probably been committed by one of these men.

R' Benzion told the son "Hurry home at once. You must arrive before the farmer's funeral. Tell the judge who is going to decide this case to take my suggestion and ask the four men – your father and the three farmers – to shake the dead man's hand. The one whose hand will become stuck to the dead man's is the guilty party."

The son obeyed his instructions and hurried back to his home

town. The judge was surprised at the strange plan but having heard of R' Benzion and his reputation he decided to do as he had said.

The whole town had come to watch the strange affair take place, including the presiding judge. First the Jewish farmer stepped up and shook the corpse's hand and was able to remove his own without any difficulty. Next came one of the three farmers, who did the same. A second also did so. When the third approached the dead man, he could not bring himself to touch the hand and screamed out how he was afraid, lest it take revenge! He then confessed to the murder of the gentile farmer in front of everyone.

The Jewish innkeeper was freed at once and a great קדוש השם took place. Everyone saw how through R' Benzion's wisdom and sagacity, השם revealed the truth.

למען הציל אתו מידם – בראשית לו : כב

"In order to rescue him from their hands" - *Bereshis 37:22*

**Adapted from "Stories my grandfather told me, Bereishis"**



לעלוי נשמת ר' אליהו רחמים בן מאיר דוד ע"ה ואחיו ר' עבדאללה פרג בן מאיר דוד ע"ה  
No. 245 Parshas Vayeishev 5767 פרשת וישב תשס"ז מס' רמה

## Pit of Perilous Possibilities

We see the beginning of the בני ישראל's descent to Egypt in this פרשה and how ה' brings about the start of the prophecy he had foretold to אברהם: "כי-גר יהיה זרעך" - "Your descendants will be strangers."

Once the brothers decided to throw יוסף in the pit instead of killing him, the פסוק states:

"והבור רק אין בו מים" - בראשית לו : כד

"The pit was empty, there was no water in it" - *Bereshis 37:24*

Rashi says, citing גמרא שבת דף כב, that although the pit was dry, there were snakes and scorpions at the bottom. The דעת זקנים notes that the phrase "empty" implies that there was nothing in the pit. If that was the case, why did the פסוק also say "there was no water in it". From this we can see that there must have been snakes and scorpions in the pit.

Both the רשב"ם and רמב"ם explain that the brothers didn't throw יוסף into a pit full of water because had they done so, יוסף would surely have drowned. They did not intend to kill him. The רמב"ם is implying a question here: surely if the brothers followed יהודה's advice to sell יוסף,

why did they put him in a pit full of snakes? Under normal circumstances he would definitely have been killed.

If they had changed their mind and it was their intention for יוסף to die in the pit, surely they would have seen the great miracle that had been done to him when he survived in the snakes' lair? Would they not have realised that he was indeed a צדיק גמור to merit this to happen and that they had judged him wrongly?

The רמב"ן derives from this that the brothers didn't know about the snakes; they thought that the pit was completely empty just like the פסוק simple translation of the פסוק.

The פסוק says הבור with the definite article "ה" prefix to show that this pit was very deep. According to this understanding of the פסוק, יוסף would not have been able to escape. Perhaps the depth of the pit led the brothers to believe that the pit was indeed empty, and יוסף was not endangered.

This was all planned out by ה' for the good and יוסף was destined to provide for his brothers as viceroy over Egypt.

**By Shmuel Korn**

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## Proud To Be A Jew

”כי-גנב גנבתי מארץ העברי” – בראשית  
מ : טו

”For indeed I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews” - *Bereshis 40:15*

In this פסוק, after יוסף has asked פרעה's former butler if he could put in a good word with his master, יוסף informs the man that he was kidnapped from the “land of the Hebrews”.

The ספר נחלת צבי explores a deeper intent of the פסוק. He points out that the זוהר הקדוש says that this פסוק is the reason why משה didn't merit to be buried in ארץ ישראל, unlike יוסף who was buried in שכם. This is because when משה heard the daughters of יתרו tell their father how an איש “מצרי”, an Egyptian man, saved them from the shepherds, he was silent and did not interject עברי “אני”, “I am in fact a Jew”. יוסף does just the opposite in our פסוק, proudly stating his ancestral home and the land of his antecedents. Hence, he merited to be buried inside ארץ ישראל.

But the נחלת צבי asks, why was משה, of all people, known as “master of all prophets”, ashamed to reveal that he was a Jew at that point?

He answers as follows. Hashem later says to Moshe,

”לך שוב מצרימה כי מתו כל האנשים המבקשים את נפשך”

”Go return to Egypt because all the people who were seeking your life have died”

From there, חז”ל learned the rule that it is forbidden for a man to go to a dangerous place. This can also be proven from what שמואל הנביא replied to Hashem saying, “איך אלך ושמע שאול ויהרגני”, “How shall I go? For if Shaul hears he will kill me”.

With this knowledge we can finally understand משה's puzzling actions. משה was fearful to say “עברי אנכי”, because יתרו was one of פרעה's advisers, and משה was worried that he might be handed over to פרעה – a situation into which Hashem had forbidden him to place himself. Even so, for a man of משה's unsurpassed calibre this behaviour caused him to lose the privilege of being buried in ארץ ישראל. יוסף on the other hand had no such threat of imminent danger and therefore proudly indicated his Jewish background.

**By Yedidya Livingstone**

### Correction

Last week we printed an article entitled “יצחק אבינו's Outlook on Life.” The title should have been יעקב instead of יצחק.

## Hatred Inspired by Heaven

”ויספו עוד שנה אתו” – בראשית לו : ח  
”ויקנאו - בו אחיו” – בראשית לו : יא

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik in his classic work בית הלוי notes the fact that in regard to the first of יוסף's dreams when the sheaves of corn bowed down to him, we are told his brothers hated him. In the second dream, the stars bowed down to him out of jealousy. Why is there a difference in their attitudes between the first dream and the second?

He explains that the dream regarding the sheaves represented material wealth, and that he would be superior to his brothers in wealth and money, with them relying on him for food. In this case, however, there was no jealousy as they all knew that it was spirituality that mattered. The dream with the stars, by contrast represented spiritual superiority. For that they did not hate him, but instead, they were jealous. Spiritual heights were what the other brothers really strived for.

This explanation also helps us understand the motives of יוסף's brothers better. The traditional interpretation is that

they were angry because יוסף was being arrogant about his dreams. In addition, they were jealous of the way יעקב favoured him over all the other brothers. They would have been prepared to kill him had they not backed out at the last minute.

We need to bear in mind who these people were. These are the sons of יעקב אבינו, the grandsons of יצחק אבינו, the great-grandsons of אברהם אבינו who was the greatest man of his era! They can't have been operating on simple hatred.

The explanation of the בית הלוי reveals their true intentions; they did not hate him, but rather were frightened that they may have to pay tribute to יוסף as their spiritual leader. This is the explanation for what would appear to be seemingly out-of-character acts committed by people on such a high spiritual level.

**With thanks to Rabbi D Rowe**

### Quote of the Week

”A soft tongue can break bones”  
משלי כה: טו -

### Riddle of the Week

When, if ever, was it permissible for a healthy person to eat on כפור?

Answer to last week's riddle: If one hears a דין that he is certain is correct he may say it in the name of a גדול even if this is untrue - but only if it wasn't heard in another גדול's name and people wouldn't accept the Halocho if it wasn't quoted from a great authority.