



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

This Issue Contains:

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Sally Barton wrote:

If the pit that the brothers threw Joseph into was full of snakes and scorpions, so how could Reuven think he was saving Joseph by throwing him into a pit full of snakes and scorpions? Doesn't it say that Reuven was trying to save Joseph and bring him back alive to their father?

Dear Sally Barton,

Yes, Reuven wanted to save Joseph. The Torah describes Reuven's response to his brothers' plan as follows:

And Reuven said to them, "Don't shed blood. Throw him into this pit in the desert, and you won't have to lay your hands upon him." This was in order to save him from their hands and return him to his father ... The pit was empty, there was no water in it. (Genesis 37:22,24)

Rashi comments: "The pit was empty of water, but there were snakes and scorpions in it. (ibid.)"

So how could Reuven hope to save Joseph by throwing him into a snake/scorpion pit? Good question.

The well-known Kabbalistic work, the *Zohar*, poses the exact same question, and answers: "In a place of snakes and scorpions, if a person is righteous G-d will do a miracle for him and he will be saved; however, once a person is in the hands of his enemies there are very few who will be saved."

Snakes and scorpions are 'robots': they are 'programmed' to behave in specific ways. If a person is especially righteous G-d will protect him by 're-programming' the snakes not to bite and the scorpions not to sting.

Humans, on the other hand, have free will; and rarely does G-d interfere with human free will. So sometimes a righteous person is allowed to suffer because G-d doesn't want to hinder free will.

The commentaries maintain that Joseph's brothers decreed a death sentence on him, acting as a legal Jewish court. A number of reasons are offered for this:

- Joseph was guilty of false prophecy in his dreams.
- Joseph's dreams advocated a monarchy, which based on their experience, the brothers felt would be destructive to the spiritual nature of the Jewish people. They had witnessed Nimrod, Avimelech and the Pharaohs — all of them despotic dictators who set themselves up as demi-gods. The brothers felt that Joseph's dreams advocated a monarchy of that type.

The brothers thought that attempting to kill Joseph held no risk: If he were a true prophet, G-d would protect him, but if they succeeded in killing him, it would be evidence of his evil nature.

Reuven argued that this would prove nothing, since G-d lets human free-will take its course. The brothers accepted this argument and instead threw Joseph in the pit, leaving his fate to Divine Providence.

Nathan Novelli < novelli@up.spin.it >

I'm a student of Chief Rabbi of Triest, Italy. My Rabbi ask me to send this question: A family want travel in return from USA to Europe in the 8th evening of Chanuka; they have to leave New York at 3:00pm — which is before the time to light. They plan to arrive at home only in the morning of the next day. At home there are nobody to made agent for lighting. What is the correct way for a fulfillment of mizvah? I'm sorry for my terrible english, thankyou for the answer.

Dear Nathan Novelli,

I asked your question to Rabbi Shlomo Fisher, *shlita*. He ruled that in your case there is no obligation to light Chanuka lights. This can be explained as follows: The Talmud describes the mitzva to light Chanuka lights as "a candle for a person and his home" (Shabbat 21b). The obligation to light Chanuka candles applies only if you are based in a home at the appropriate time for fulfilling the mitzva.

But if you're riding with your family in a car or plane the entire night — and there's nobody residing in your home — you're exempt from lighting Chanuka candles.

Alan Shear < alshear@global.co.za >

If a person finds himself camping out in a field during the time of Chanuka with a group of many other people (perhaps 200), and all will be camping outside in tents, what would be the best possible way of fulfilling the mitzvah of Chanuka lighting?

Dear Alan Shear,

As we wrote above, someone not based in a home is exempt from the lighting Chanuka candles. A tent is not a home, unless it's big enough to be considered a halachic 'house' (approximately seven feet by seven feet by three feet high).

However, if there are family members who don't go on the camping trip but remain at home, they should light on behalf of their family member who went camping.

Yiddle Riddle

Last week we asked:

"On one historic Yom Kippur, the entire Jewish people ate and drank and were praised for it by Hashem."
When did this occur?

Answer:

When King Solomon built the Temple, Yom Kippur occurred during its seven Inauguration Days. The Sanhedrin decided that not only must the Inauguration Sacrifices for the Temple be offered but, moreover, the people must cook, eat, and drink on Yom Kippur or else the happiness of the Inauguration would be incomplete. (See Tractate *Mo'ed Katan* 9a.)

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