

# Parshat Vayeishev: Snakes, Scorpions & Personal Enemies

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In Parshat Vayeishev, Yosef was thrown into a pit by his brothers. The Torah tells us that the pit was empty and there wasn't any water in it. Rashi explains that though the pit was empty of water, it was filled with snakes and scorpions.

Snakes and scorpions are venomous creatures. Many species are capable of causing serious injury and even death, God forbid. It's understood: They are very dangerous creatures. However, the holy Zohar says that it is better for a person to fall into a pit full of snakes and scorpions than to fall into the hands of his enemies. Today, though we do occasionally face real danger, most of our enemies just sling insults. So how can it be better to be thrown into a pit of snakes and scorpions than to have to deal with our enemies?

Reb Nosson wonders about this. He offers an explanation. First, we must understand that there are two types of suffering. The first type of suffering is symbolized by the pit filled with snakes and scorpions. This can be a natural disaster, an illness, or other "natural" catastrophe. We easily grasp that this kind of suffering is from the Hand of Hashem. Because we understand the connection, we are more likely to look for a message in this kind of suffering. This kind of suffering can actually bring out the best in people. We often see that people overcome these types of problems with great strength and great achdut (togetherness.)

The other kind of suffering is falling into the hands of our enemies. This is suffering that is caused by people. When we suffer because someone has harmed us, whether he has insulted us, spoken lashon hara (gossip) about us, in some way schemed or plotted against us – God forbid – this suffering is very, very great. With this type of suffering comes racing thoughts and heartache. No matter how much we understand that everything comes from Hashem, no matter how much we intellectually know that this too is from Hashem, it's very difficult to not be hurt by this.

The person who is causing us harm has free will. He could make the choice to not harm us. Yet, he proceeds to harm us. It's even worse if we are close friends or colleagues. We obsess, we have racing thoughts, we think over and over again: Why does he dislike me? What did I do to deserve this? We can't sleep, we toss and turn. It causes real anguish. When we are wrapped up in thoughts like this, Reb Nosson explains we can forget about Hashem. We don't even feel connected to Him (God forbid) because we are so busy worrying about the other person. This, says Reb Nosson, is a far, far greater suffering than snakes and scorpions. This suffering estranges us from Hashem. But it doesn't have to.

We can, as Rebbe Nachman recommends, still treat that person with respect and kindness. We can be strong and remind

ourselves to turn to Hashem in the midst of this suffering, or any kind of suffering at all. We can ask Hashem to relieve us from the pain. We can remember that no matter what, Hashem is with us.

*May you have a day of positive relationships without any suffering at all!*

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