



Vayeshev – Filling the Empty Pit

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

“Now it came to pass when Joseph came to his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his shirt, of the fine woolen coat which was upon him. And they took him and cast him into the pit; now the pit was empty there was no water in it.” (Genesis 27:23-24)

From the opening verses in this week’s Parsha we see the animosity between Yosef and his brothers. The brothers feel that Yosef is arrogant and trying to lord over them. Yosef, seemingly oblivious to the impact of his dreams on his brothers, continues to share them. Tensions reach a boiling point, and when the brothers have Yosef alone, they decide it is time to eliminate him. The first thought was to kill him, but Reuven intervened and convinced the brothers to instead throw Yosef into a pit. The Torah tells that the pit was empty, there was no water. Rashi explains:

Since it says: “the pit was empty,” do I not know that there was no water in it? For what purpose did the Torah write, “there was no water in it”? [To inform us that] there was no water in it, but there were snakes and scorpions in it.”

The Lubavitcher Rebbe (Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, 1902-1994) extracts an incredible lesson from these words of Rashi. The pit represents man. We each have an emptiness within ourselves. God created us this way. He fashioned us but left an empty space for us to fill so we can partner with Him in the creation of our selves. The pit represents the unfinished part of myself. *Mayim*, water, represents Torah. Just as water quenches, refreshes, and creates growth, Torah quenches the thirsty soul, girds us with strength, and creates the platform and framework for dynamic life growth. When a person is “*without water*,” without Torah or spirituality in his or her life, there are “*snakes and scorpions inside*.” The pit or incomplete part of man must always be filling with something; it never remains empty. If we fill it with the holy, beautiful, and rejuvenating waters of Torah then we partner with God in completing our personal creation. If we fail to fill the pit with something meaningful then destructive forces, snakes and scorpions, will fill the void.

The words of the Rebbe give us much to ponder. In life, we are either constructing or deconstructing, there is no status quo or holding pattern. We each have a void, an incomplete part of our self, a pit, and we must decide what to fill it with. To do nothing, to fail to grow and progress allows the emptiness within to be filled with impurity and harmful influences. Let us find the strength to partner with God and finish the process of creation He began. God left us the empty pit and asks us to finish this last small piece of our self-creation. May we fill ourselves and our pits with the beautiful, refreshing, and life-sustaining waters of Torah and spiritual growth.