



This is the third and last time *Chof* appears in the verse, *Boruch Shem*. At least on its own since, as we have seen, it is a part of other letters.

The same section of *Gemora* that discusses the *halachab* of not to place a *Menorah* higher than *Chof* (twenty) *amos* deviates from the main topic to tell us this: Rav Kahana said:

Rav Nachman bar Munyumi elucidated in the name of Rebi Tanchum: Why does it say, “*The pit was empty and had no water*” (*Bereishis* 37:24)? If the pit was empty, do I not know that it was without water? There wasn’t any water, but there were snakes and scorpions. (*Shabbos* 22a)

This is talking about the pit that ten of Yosef's brothers put him into while they decided what to do with him. They had judged him a threat to the future of the Jewish people and seeing that their father, Ya'akov, favored him anyhow, they took matters into their own hands and decided to "quietly" dispense with him, eventually selling him to Arab merchants.

They might have known that the pit was dry and used it for that reason. But apparently they had not known, or cared if they had, that snakes and scorpions kept their brother company. It was nothing short of amazing that Yosef was still alive when they pulled him out to sell him instead of killing him.

Actually, it was miraculous, *quite* miraculous. In fact, so much so that at least *one* of the brothers should have noticed and said something. But they didn't and the question is, *why not?*

The *Gemora* doesn't ask or answer the question.

The *Meforsbim*¹ don't ask or answer the question.

Everyone just seems to assume that the miracle was just something that happens for righteous people like Yosef, and that it wasn't connected to the brothers in any way. While they did their thing, God did His to protect His righteous Yosef.

But the *Gemora* communicates on different levels, and even context can tell a story. For example, the story of

¹ Commentators.

Yosef in the pit comes right after the *halachab* of the *Menorab* being placed within twenty *amos* so that the eye can see the reminder of the Chanukah miracle (*pirsumei nissa*). Random connection?

True, the same rabbis teach both lessons, which the *Gemora*, meant to be committed to memory, often does to help with that. True, both accounts deal with miracles, so why not put them together? But given all that has been said about the letter *Chof* so far, might their juxtaposition not be a hint to something more profound?

For example, we could say that since the *Gemora* said that the eye cannot see clearly past twenty *amos*, that the pit was deeper than twenty *amos*, and that's why the brothers could not see the snakes and scorpions that did not harm Yosef. But given how dark pits are past even a few *amos*, you probably wouldn't need to go that deep to lose that kind of vision.

Or maybe the *Gemora* is indicating that even though, when it comes to the *Menorab*, twenty *amos* is a *physical* measurement, it is really more a *conceptual* one. The physical eye may be "blind" past twenty *physical amos*, but it is the mind's eye that becomes blind past twenty *conceptual amos*.

After all, when someone is intellectually and spiritually blind, does it really matter how far they are from something? In *Parashas Mikeitz*, Yosef will stand right before his brothers as Viceroy of Egypt and even hint to his secret identity, but they will miss all of it. This is why one *parsha*

later when he finally revealed his true identity, they were overwhelmed and shocked.

Truth is a perception, but perceptions are based upon assumptions. If a person has the correct assumptions about life, which have been revealed to us by Torah, then their perceptions will be truthful. If their assumptions are faulty, as they so often are in life when we figure out life on our own, then they will have faulty perceptions and, in the end, a faulty life.

The *Chof* reminds us of this important fundamental of life, so that we can make sure that we don't remain on the level of *Boruch Shem*, but ascend instead to the level of the *Shema*.