

The pit was empty, no water was in it. (37:24)

How sad it is when someone considers himself worthy of the appellation *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, but does not really warrant this title. Heaven help the person who has the audacity to point out this person's deficiency. He will be abused for lacking *kavod haTorah*, the honor due to the Torah, and its representatives. I wrote the word, "sad," because this person is in a situation which, of course, he brought upon himself, and which he can survive as long as he does not press the wrong buttons. Otherwise, one day, someone who is far from being a scholar will unfortunately put him in his place. This could be a very debasing and sobering experience. Obviously, everyone should maintain a sense of humility, regardless of his level of scholarship, since humility just happens to be one of the criteria of a *talmid chacham*.

The Torah relates that the pit in which Yosef was thrown was empty. *Rashi* qualifies the meaning of "empty," in that there was no water in it, but it was infested with snakes and scorpions, creatures that present a greater and more imminent danger than the lack of water. The *Talmud Yoma 23a* teaches, "Any *talmid chacham* who does not take revenge like a *nachash*, serpent, is not a *talmid chacham*." Are we to believe that the determining factor in deciding one's level of Torah wisdom is his ability to take revenge like a serpent? Obviously, *Chazal's* statement holds deeper meaning.

Many a would-be *talmid chacham* has employed this *Chazal* to allow himself license to disparage those who have crossed him. Revenge is an insecure excuse for getting back at people one either envies or has somehow convinced himself have hurt him. The Torah prohibits revenge. To use the appellation of Torah scholar to justify such inappropriate behavior is reprehensible.

Yalkut HaGershuni renders this *Chazal* homiletically. *Mayim ein bo*; There is no water in it (the pit). Consider a person who is void of water, which is a metaphor for Torah (which is compared to water), but *nechashim v'akrabim yeish bo*, concerning the laws of *nekamah*, revenge. He thinks of himself as a serpent, i.e., allowing himself the dispensation to take revenge. This is false piety, for he is using whatever little he might have learned in his life to justify his revenge.

Our Sages teach (*Taanis 10a*) that, when rain does not descend after *Succos* and the people fear that there might be a drought, the *yechidim*, individuals (of repute) should begin to fast. Perhaps in their merit, rain will descend. Rabbi Huna explains that the term *yechidim* applies to *talmidei chachamim*. They should be the first ones to assume responsibility for the community. *Horav Shlomo Levinstein, Shlita*, adds, that when the situation involves fasting (and any other form of sacrifice) one should consider himself a Torah scholar, but when it comes to the dispensation of taking revenge, one should defer the title of *talmid chacham* to those who are sincerely worthy of it.