

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

*Rashi* comments: There was no water in the pit, but there were serpents and scorpions in it. *Horav Elyakim Schlessinger*, *Shlita* explains the *halachic* ramifications that vary between a pit filled with water and one filled with poisonous serpents and scorpions. It was Reuven who suggested that rather than take action outright against Yosef, they should put him into a pit. Had there been water in the pit, it would not be a direct act of murder. Throwing Yosef into a pit filled with poisonous creatures, however, is no different than tying a person up and placing him in front of a lion, which the *Rambam* rules is active murder. In any event, Yosef was going to die.

*Rav Schlessinger* explains that the brothers were certain that Yosef's righteousness would protect him from the poisonous creatures. This is consistent with *Ramban's* opinion (*Parshas Bechukosai*) that animals can strike a human being only if he is tainted by sin. A *tzaddik*, righteous person, reigns over animals. The brothers were well aware that Yosef was without sin. Thus, even though serpents and scorpions were in the pit, the brothers would not be *halachically* liable for active murder. What about Yosef starving to death? *Ramban* posits that causing starvation is also not considered active murder. Thus, it is not punishable by a *Bais Din*, Jewish Court of Law.

A powerful, frightening lesson can be derived from this. Although they knew that Yosef was a *tzaddik* who had no sin, they nonetheless ruled that he was a *rodef*, pursuer, who was liable for the death penalty. Why? He was misguided in his belief and, thus, harmful to the future of *Klal Yisrael*. If one's *shitah*, ideology/judgment, opinion is flawed, misguided, then he presents a grave danger to his followers – especially if he is righteous. At times, innocence and *naiveté* can sully one's outlook in such a manner that it catalyzes harmful decisions.