

The Weekly Daf



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Shabbos 16-22

Week of 16-22 Kislev 5758 / 15-21 December 1997
Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

Candle, Candle, Burning Bright

The *Mishna* of "Bameh madlikin," with its laws concerning the fuels and wicks which may be used for Shabbos lights, is familiar to anyone who prays in a synagogue (*Nusach Ashkenaz*) on Shabbos eve. But there is one detail in that *Mishna* which is less familiar as the center of the halachic dispute.

Beeswax, says the *Mishna*, cannot be used for fuel. The *gemara* stresses that this disqualification does not extend to the use of wax as a wick. Beeswax candles in which the wick is surrounded by wax, says Rashi, are acceptable for use and were commonly used in his time. Tosefos, however, cites the opinion of the Sages of Naravonne that such candles cannot be used since the wax is still serving as fuel. The majority view is reflected in the authoritative ruling of the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim 264:7*) that beeswax candles may be used.

Most candles in our day are no longer made of beeswax (even though some manufacturers sometimes label them as "wax"). The *Mishnah Berurah* (264:23) describes the stearin candles of his day as providing a superior light and perhaps being preferable even to olive oil. The reason for this is the prohibition, mentioned in an earlier *Mishna* (*Shabbos 11a*), against reading by the light of an oil lamp, for fear that in an effort to improve the lighting the reader may forgetfully tilt the lamp to improve the flow of oil to the wick and be guilty of creating fire on Shabbos. This prohibition, rules the *Mishnah Berurah* (275:4), does not apply to stearin candles which are never adjusted even on weekdays. The paraffin candles widely used today offer the same advantage, but there still are many Jews whose custom is to only use olive oil.

Shabbos 20b

Looking High and Low

Two statements may sometimes appear side by side in the Talmud even though the only thing connecting them is that they have the same author. This seems to be the case of one statement quoting Rabbi Tanchum regarding how high a Chanukah lamp may be placed above street level and another citing his interpretation of a passage in Chumash (*Bereishis 37:24*) about the pit into which Yosef's brothers cast him.

A closer look at this second statement may, however, suggest a subtle link between the subjects of both statements. "The pit was empty, with no water in it," says the Torah, and Rabbi Tanchum asks why it is necessary to repeat that there was no water in it if we have already been informed that it was empty. His conclusion is that the Torah wishes to stress that the pit was empty only of water but that it was inhabited by snakes and scorpions which miraculously did not harm the righteous Yosef.

"Were his brothers aware of the presence of these deadly creatures?" asks Rambam. If so, they certainly would have been so impressed with this Heavenly sign of Yosef's righteousness that they would have ceased conspiring against him. His conclusion is that because the brothers were so high above the bottom of the pit where these creatures crept they did not notice them.

Now, suggests one of the commentaries, we may see a link between Rabbi Tanchum's two statements. The Chanukah lamp, which is supposed to publicize the Chanukah miracle, cannot be noticed by those walking below if it is more than 20 cubits high. Yosef's brothers, on the other hand, could not notice the dangerous creatures at the bottom of the pit because it was too far below them.

Shabbos 22a

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