

One Man's Darkness Is another Man's Light
[From Rashi, Midrash Rabba and Ahavas Shalom]
By Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

In Shemos 10:21 we read of the ninth plague brought upon Mitzrayim which was darkness. The Torah tells us that there was a thick darkness all over the land of Mitzrayim. For the three days, no one saw each other. For the second tree days, no one was able to change his/ position because the darkness was so thick it froze people. But Am Yisroel, contrarily, had light everywhere they lived.

Every plague had a purpose in the grander scheme of punishing Mitzrayim. Rashi brings for us two reasons why Hashem brought the plague of darkness specifically. Firstly, there were many among Bnai Yisroel that did not want to leave Mitzrayim. Hashem wanted to punish them but did not want the people of Mitzrayim to see Am Yisroel dying because they would think that Am Yisroel was suffering just as much and Mitzrayim was not singled out for punishment. So he brought darkness on Mitzrayim so that they would not see large numbers of Bnai Yisroel dying. The other reason Rashi brings for the plague of darkness is that it gave Am Yisroel an opportunity to see what was in the houses of the Mitzriyim. Hashem wanted that Bnai Yisroel would come out with the treasures of Mitzrayim. During the darkness, Bnai Yisroel would go through the houses of the Mitzriyim and know where things were. Later, at the time of the exodus, when a Ben Yisroel would ask for a specific item from the Mitzri and be denied, the Yisroel could say, "I know you have that item and I will tell you exactly where it is." and thus compel the Mitzri to give it to him.

Where did this darkness come from? The Midrash Rabbah brings two opinions about the source. Rabbi Yehuda says the darkness came from above and Rabbi Nechemiah says the darkness came from Gehinom. Rabbi Yehuda Bar Rebbi adds that the evil ones are covered in darkness like the netherworld *sheol*. The Midrash also tells us that one of the days of darkness was reserved for the seventh day of Pesach. The Torah tells us that there was *choshech afaila*, very thick darkness for three days. Then there were three days when no one could change his/her position as they were completely held in place by the by darkness. This gives us six days. Since every plague lasted for a week hat happened to the remaining day? This seventh day, the Midrash tells was put off for the seventh day after they left Mitrayim as the Torah tells us in Shemos14:20 the cloud and darkness were over Mitzrayim that night.

The Ahavas Shalom of Kossov brings the two opinions of Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Nechemiah regarding the source of the darkness. The Ahavas Shalom then explains that the darkness of the plague was not the absence of light. On the contrary, it was the excess of light. If a person looks directly at the sun, this person cannot see anything at all because of the intensity of the light. So the darkness is actually caused by the light. This is the meaning of the verse in Yeshaya 45:7 'former of light and creator of darkness'. On a Kabbalistic level, the phrase *yotzer ohr*, former of light refers to the world of *yetzirah* and *borai choshech* refers to the world of *briah* which is higher. Yet, it is associated with darkness because it is higher than *yetzirah* and therefore the light [spiritual] is more blinding. Similarly, the Kohen Gadol wears eight garments, instead of four like the other Kohanim, because his holiness is greater and needs more covering up.

The Ahavas Shalom then explains that what took place at the time of the plague of darkness was that Hashem revealed a great and holy light to the world without any barriers. The Mitzriyim were unable to bear this type of holy light so they felt darkened. But Am Yisroel, being more receptive to kedusha, were able to bear this light and saw it as illumination and not darkness.

The Ahavas Shalom explains that *Choshech* stands for *chamor*, donkey, *shor*, ox and *kelev*, dog, which are three different *klipos*, evil forces. Avraham Avinu subdued *chamor*, Yitzchak subdued *shor* and Yaakov subdued *kelev*. Though they were already conquered, the Mitzriyim were afraid of the *klipos* evil forces, reawakening. However, Am Yisroel had light wherever they were and had no reason to fear any evil or negativity.

This was a foreshadowing of the future. In Malachi 3:19-20 we are told that Hashem will take the sun out of its case and the evil ones will be burned by it and the *tzaddikim* will be warmed by the same sun. Also similar to the Ahavas Shalom's explanation of the plague of darkness, the Navi Yeshaya 60:19-20 tells us that in the future, the sun will no longer be our light by day nor the moon our light by night. But Hashem will be our light as the original light of creation will illuminate the world physically and spiritually. The world will have a clear understanding of Hashem and his kingship over the universe and all will acknowledge and pay reverence to the true king. May we merit seeing the fulfillment of these prophecies in the near future. Amen