

A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

This weekly sheet is brought to you by Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman of Northwood United Synagogue in conjunction with Shapell's/Darché Noam

PESACH

DVAR TORAH: DARKNESS FROM ABOVE

The Midrash asks an unexpected question about the plague of darkness, and one of its answers is especially surprising.

The question: Where did that darkness come from? The question itself surprises us because all of the plagues are miraculous, all clearly from God. But the Yefat Toar commentary explains what is really bothering the author of the Midrash. The Torah calls this darkness tangible – **וימש חשך** – whereas all other darkness is merely the absence of light. The plagues were miraculous manipulations of existing elements of creation – blood, frogs, wild animals and the like – but they weren't new creations. "There is nothing new under the sun," (Kohelet 1:9) quotes the Etz Yosef, so this darkness already existed. So where was it from?

Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Nechemiah both answer, but Rabbi Yehudah's answer seems hard to understand. Rabbi Nechemiah says it came from **חושך של גיהנום**, the tangible darkness of Gehinom, and quotes a supporting verse from the book of Iyov. The Egyptians, for seven days, experienced Gehinom on Earth. This was certainly fitting for a nation that gave the Jews hundreds of years of Gehinom on Earth. But Rabbi Yehudah says that the darkness of the plague came from **חושך של מעלה**, it was darkness from Above. What is darkness from Above, and why did it descend on Egypt for those seven days?

There was also darkness at Mount Sinai: "The mountain blazed with fire to the heart of the Heavens, darkness, cloud, and the **ערפל**, thick cloud" (Devarim 4:11), and "You heard the voice from within the darkness" (Devarim 5:20). Perhaps this was also "darkness from above." That darkness surrounded the great Divine revelation. It was associated with the cloud Moshe had to enter when he ascended Mount Sinai (Shemot 24:18). The darkness that accompanied the Divine revelation at Sinai sheds light on the darkness of Egypt – for there was also a Divine revelation immediately following the Egyptian darkness, on the night of the smiting of the first born.

We read in the Haggadah: "You took us out of Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm and with great awesomeness, and with signs and wonders" (Devarim 26:8) ... 'With great awesomeness – **ובמורא גדול** – refers to the revelation of the Divine Presence – **זו גילוי שכינה**." God appeared in Egypt on the night of Exodus. It was an awesome night for the Jews, now circumcised and eating their Pesach sacrifices in their homes, preparing for the moment of Divine revelation. But for the Egyptians that revelation meant the death of the first born.

This, perhaps, explains Rabbi Yehudah's "darkness from Above." That great revelation of the last plague, Makat Bechorot, was preceded by the darkness of the second to the last plague, Makat Choshech. Rabbi Yehudah in the Midrash quotes a verse as a support for the Darkness from Above: "He makes darkness His hiding place, it is the covering He surrounds Himself with" (Tehillim 18:12). This adds a new dimension to our understanding of the plague of darkness: God's great revelation is preceded by His great heavenly darkness.

SOURCE GUIDE: SHIR HASHIRIM – 4 KEY WORDS

This year, because the first day of Pesach falls out on Shabbat, many will read Shir Hashirim, the Song of Songs, **three** times in a twenty four hour period. Three customs coincide: reading Shir Hashirim before Shabbat, reading it at the close of the Seder night, and reading it in the morning in the beit hakneset (when Pesach does not fall out on Shabbat it is read on Shabbat Chol Hamoed; this year Chol Hamoed is Sunday through Thursday). This source guide focuses on four key words in Shir Hashirim.

Four Key Words in Shir Hashirim

The following four words are, without a doubt, at the core of Shir Hashirim:

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| <p>1. Song of Songs 6:3 I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me; he grazes among the lilies.</p> | <p>שיר השירים ו:ג אני לדודי ודודי לי הרעה בשושנים.</p> |
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Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Barditchov: 2 Names for the Holiday

Based on these words, the Kedushat Levi explains two ways of calling our holiday. The Torah refers to the holiday beginning on the fifteenth of Nisan and ending on the twenty-first as “the **Holiday of Matzot**”:

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| <p>2. Shemot 23:14-15 (14) Celebrate three pilgrimage festivals for me in the year. (15) Keep the Holiday of Matzot; seven days eat matzot as I have commanded you ...</p> | <p>שמות כג:יד-טו (יד) שלש רגלים תחג לי בשנה: (טו) את חג המצות תשמר שבועת ימים תאכל מצות פאשר צויתידך ...</p> |
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This is repeated in Shemot 34:18, and also used in Vayikra 23:6 and Devarim 16:16. On the other hand, the name most commonly used by the people of Israel is **Pesach**, translated as Passover. The Torah uses this name to refer to the sacrifice, offered on the fourteenth of Nisan and eaten on the Seder night. [One possible exception is Shemot 34:25 “... Do not let the sacrifice of the holiday of Pesach stay over until the morning.” However, the Torah’s expression there, זבח חג הפסח, is explained by the Netziv as referring to the Chagigah sacrifice offered on the fourteenth of Nisan along with the Pesach.]

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| <p>3. Kedushat Levi Parshat Bo Behold, it is written, “I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me” (Shir Hashirim 6:3). That is, that we tell the praises of the Holy One, blessed be He, and the Holy One, blessed be He tells the praises of Israel ... The Holiday of Matzot is named in praise of Israel. See Rashi who explains how the Jews baked the morning’s dough without letting it rise, not asking “How are we going into the desert without provisions?” because they trusted in God. It turns out that the holiday is called Chag Hamatzot in praise of Israel who baked their dough while it was still matzot. Therefore the Torah calls this Yom Tov Chag Hamatzot because God is, so to speak, praising Israel. But we call this holiday Pesach in praise of God, may He be blessed, as the verse says, “You will say: It is a Pesach sacrifice to God, who passed over the Jews’ homes when He smote the Egyptians and saved our households” (Shemot 12:27). This is praise of God, in line with the verse that says “I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me.”</p> | <p>קדושת לוי פרשת בא והנה כתיב (שיר השירים ו, ג) אני לדודי ודודי לי, היינו שאנו מספרים שבחו של הקדוש ברוך הוא והקדוש ברוך הוא מספר שבח של ישראל ... והנה חג המצות נקרא על שבח ישראל. ועיין ברש"י על פסוק ויאפו את הבצק עוגות מצות גו' וגם צדה גו'. ועיין ברש"י מגיד שבחן של ישראל כו', שמפורש בקבלה זכרתי לך כו', עיין שם. ונמצא נקרא חג המצות על שם שבח ישראל שאפו את הבצק עוגות מצות. ולזה בתורה נקרא יום טוב זה בשם חג המצות כביכול השם יתברך מספר שבח של ישראל. ואנו קורין היום טוב בשם פסח על שם שבח השם יתברך ואמרתם זבח פסח הוא לה' אשר פסח כו', שהוא שבח השם יתברך על דרך הפסוק אני לדודי ודודי לי.</p> |
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The Master of the Universe's Tefillin

Rav Levi Yitzchak of Barditchov quotes a Gemara built on the same theme:

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| <p>4. Berachot 6a Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak said to Rav Chiyya bar Avin: What is written in the tefillin of the Master of the Universe? He replied: "And who is like Your people Israel, one nation in the world" (Divrei Hayamim I 17:21). Does the Holy One, blessed be He, praise Israel? — Yes, for it is written: You have chosen God today ... and God has chosen you today." The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel: You have made me a unique entity in the world, and I shall make you a unique entity in the world. 'You have made me a unique entity in the world', as it says: Hear, Israel, Hashem is our God, Hashem is one. 'And I shall make you a unique entity in the world', as it says: "Who is like Your people Israel, a singular nation in the world."</p> | <p>ברכות ו. אמר ליה רב נחמן בר יצחק לרב חייא בר אבין: הני תפילין דמרי עלמא מה כתיב בהו? אמר ליה "ומי כעמך ישראל גוי אחד בארץ." ומי משתבח קודשא בריך הוא בשבחייהו דישאל? אין, דכתיב "את ה' האמרת היום" (וכתיב) "וה' האמירך היום." אמר להם הקדוש ברוך הוא לישאל: אתם עשיתוני חטיבה אחת בעולם ואני אעשה אתכם חטיבה אחת בעולם. אתם עשיתוני חטיבה אחת בעולם שנאמר "שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד," ואני אעשה אתכם חטיבה אחת בעולם שנאמר, "ומי כעמך ישראל גוי אחד בארץ."</p> |
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2 Major Principles: The Rambam's and the Baal Shem Tov's

"I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me," as explained by the Kedushat Levi, also highlights the parallel between the following two major principles of the God-Israel interaction. One is *והלכת בדרכיו*, to walk in God's ways (Devarim 28:9), as explained by the Rambam, and the other is *ה' צלך*, God is your shadow.

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| <p>5. Rambam Mishneh Torah – Hilchot Deiot 1:6 [Our Sages] taught [the following] explanation of this mitzvah: Just as He is called "Gracious," you shall be gracious; Just as He is called "Merciful," you shall be merciful; Just as He is called "Holy," you shall be holy; In a similar manner, the prophets called God by other titles: "Slow to anger," "Abundant in kindness," "Righteous," "Just," "Perfect," "Almighty," "Powerful," and the like. [They did so] to inform us that these are good and just paths. A person is obligated to accustom himself to these paths and [to try to] resemble Him to the extent of his ability.</p> | <p>רמב"ם משנה תורה – הלכות דעות א:ו כך למדו בפירוש מצוה זו: מה הוא נקרא חנון אף אתה היה חנון, מה הוא נקרא רחום אף אתה היה רחום, מה הוא נקרא קדוש אף אתה היה קדוש. ועל דרך זו קראו הנביאים לאל בכל אותן הכנויין ארך אפים ורב חסד צדיק וישר תמים גבור וחזק וכיוצא בהן להודיע שהן דרכים טובים וישרים וחייב אדם להנהיג עצמו בהן ולהדמות אליו כפי כחו.</p> |
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The Baal Shem Tov outlines a parallel aspect of the interaction between man and God:

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| <p>6. Kedushat Levi Parshat Beshalach For the Baal Shem Tov explained the verse, "God is your shadow ..." (Tehillim 121:5) to mean that Hashem, may He be blessed, acts towards a man just as the man does, like a shadow. Just as everything a man does his shadow also does, so the Creator, blessed be He, acts towards a man just as he does.</p> | <p>ספר קדושת לוי - פרשת בשלח דהנה הבעל שם טוב אמר פירוש הפסוק (תהלים קכא, ה) ה' צלך, שהשם יתברך ברוך הוא מתנהג עם האדם גם כן כמו הצל. כמו שכל מה שהאדם עושה גם הצל עושה, כן הבורא ברוך הוא מתנהג עם האדם גם כן כמו שהוא עושה ...</p> |
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We strive to imitate God, and He in turn takes His cues from our actions when relating to us: "I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me."

One last question to think about: What is the difference between Shir Hashirim 6:3 and the following verse?

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| <p>7. Song of Songs 2:16 My beloved is to me and I am to him; he grazes among the lilies.</p> | <p>שיר השירים ב:טז דודי לי ואני לו הרעה בשושנים.</p> |
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SPRING IS UPON US! BY RABBI YITZCHAK HIRSHFELD

Spring is upon us! The season of Freedom and Redemption! Following autumn planting, a winter with no visible signs of life, spring brings blossoms and the joy of knowing that there is continuity of life. Looking at the world from a winter point of view we see decay, the end of life. And from that perspective we sense, perhaps, that our own lives are winter lives. The fleetingly beautiful flowers of summer seem to come to a final and rather ignoble end. And then comes spring, and we just know that the seeds of our life too will sprout and produce fruit, that the winter decay was but a prelude to a grander, more elevated existence.

The exodus from Egypt, which began on the 15th of Nisan, wasn't completed until seven days later with the splitting of the Red Sea, accompanied by its majestic song. **אז ישיר משה** – then (at some future time) Moshe and Bnei Yisrael will sing a song transcending any song conceivable in this world. Chazal teach that that song of the future is the song of **תחיית המתים**, the resurrection of the dead.

ה' ימלך לעולם ועד – Hashem will reign for all eternity. With these crowning words of the **שירה**, we proclaim that our this-worldly lives, relative to a glorious spring of rebirth, are in essence winter seeds which are intended to live on and on into eternity. Death is but a winter illusion – G-d's Creation is infinite and unending.

Pesach is soon upon us and the Jewish soul yearns to taste the sweet nectar of freedom. But to do so we must know that our redemption is much more than moving from the bonds of slavery to the finitude of a winter existence in **עולם הזה**, this world. Our very lives are seeds, which will come to a fuller, more spiritualized existence. Seeds, however, do not sprout automatically, without effort. Seeds require sun, water and nutrients. If we wish to experience the joy of unending blissful relationship and connection with Hashem, we need the light of Torah, the nutrients embedded in the 613 commandments.

Pesach is all about **אמונה**, belief and commitment. For many the belief in **תחיית המתים** is vague, and we may have difficulty relating to the concept. However, the pinnacle of our redemptive experience was reached when our forefathers saw so clearly that this redemption must ultimately lead to an **"אז"**, an eternal future, a time when **ה' ימלך לעולם ועד**, Hashem will rule for all eternity.

Pesach is about **אביב**, the spring, which brings with it the promise that every well-tended seed will, with G-d's help, turn into a celebration of our being part of Hashem's eternal world of growth.

(Adapted from the sefer **אמונה רעה** by Hagaon Rav Moshe Shapiro, shlita)

This issue is dedicated in memory of
Chaim Leib Ben Laibel ז"ל

*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples' programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at www.darchenoam.org +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

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