

And G-d said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. (1:3)

In Sefer Tehillim (119:130) David Ha'melech says, “The introduction of Your words illuminates.” The Midrash in Sefer Shemos explains that this pasuk refers to the opening words of the Torah, “In the beginning G-d created.” Light preceded all of the rest of Creation. Similarly, the Aron HaKodesh, which housed the Torah, also called ohr, light, preceded the other vessels of the Mishkan. Light must precede every other creation; in fact, it must precede everything. The ability to see clearly, to understand the basic foundation of knowledge, is a prerequisite for an undistorted view of life. Clarity of vision is the framework upon which all understanding is based.

How many people grope through life due to their inability to see clearly – either because they cannot see, or because they refuse to open their eyes? There are also others who do see, but with colored glasses. Thus, their perspective is distorted. When Hashem created the world, He first looked at the Torah, which preceded Creation. This is a lesson for us; in order to understand the story of Creation, to maintain an accurate perspective on life and the workings of this world; one must look through the lens of the Torah. It illuminates the path toward understanding.

Even in the construction of the Mishkan, the Torah came first. Without the Torah's guidance, many aspects of this most hallowed edifice, its function and service, might interfere with our ability to understand cogently. The Torah illuminates its intricacies, giving meaning to its challenges. Suddenly, everything makes sense. It is all a matter of perspective – a perspective which we should develop through the lens of the Torah.

Seeing is believing. One looks at the Tzitzis and is inspired to mitzvah observance. How? He does not only look with his eyes. He looks with his mind and with his heart. Above all, he looks through the eyes of the Torah which grants him a unique insight into what otherwise might appear to be mere strings. Throughout the Torah, the individual finds an illuminated version of this vision: The Tzitzis with the techeilis, light blue thread, reminding him of the sea, which – in turn – reminds him of Heaven, catalyzing a vision of Hashem and His mitzvos. All of this is the result of seeing properly through the illuminated vision which the Torah provides. If the lens is not perfected by the Torah, one's vision is distorted.

At the end of Sefer Devarim, the people are told, “See – I have placed before you today the life and the good, and the death and the evil... And you should choose life” (30:15,19). What fool

would not choose life? Why would anyone eschew blessing? Why choose evil over a life of goodness? It is because he is missing the key element in this exhortation: “see!” If one does not see the good and the life, how well can he possibly choose? Even worse are those who refuse to look. They are afraid of what they might “see.”

Yet, a problem has surfaced. Amidst the light that Hashem created there were patches of darkness, to the point that light and darkness functioned “in a mixture.” Hashem felt it necessary to distinguish between the light and the darkness, and He separated one from the other. The Midrash goes a bit further in an explanation of these creations and their separation. “And the earth was astonishingly empty, with darkness upon the surface of the deep” (Bereishis 1:2). This darkness is a reference to the actions of the righteous. “Hashem separated between the light and the darkness” (Ibid. 1:4). The Almighty distinguished between the actions of the righteous and the actions of the wicked. Apparently, this separation could only come about through acts of Hashem. Only He in His infinite wisdom could delineate between the light of the righteous and the darkness of the wicked. Why? Anybody who can see should be able to perceive this separation.

Horav Yosef Sholom Elyashiv, zl, explains that Vayehi erev, “And there was evening” (1:5), refers to the maasei reshaim, actions of the wicked. The word erev, evening, has a different connotation than we might imagine. In order for it to be considered erev, it does not have to be pitch-black outside. In fact, the Torah instructs us to slaughter the Korban Pesach ba’erev, “Slaughter the Pesach-offering in the afternoon” (Devarim 16:6). As soon as the sun begins to turn towards the west, even though it is in the middle of the sky shining brightly, it already has the halachic status of erev. Likewise, the term boker, morning, occurs one moment after alos ha’shachar, the morning star has risen in the sky. It is still dark outside. It is a time when it is almost impossible to distinguish between the colors of blue and white – and certainly impossible to delineate between various hues of blue. Yet, it is boker; it is light!

We now understand why Hashem had to distinguish between ohr and choshech. Light and darkness are not necessarily perceptible to the untrained eye. It takes a special “lens,” the lens of Torah, to see the true colors and even the true shades of each color before a decision can be made regarding the integrity of one’s spiritual leanings. We think, we see, but – without the corrective lenses – our vision remains impaired.