

## And there was a thick darkness throughout the land of Egypt for a three-day period. (10:22)

Egypt was plunged into three days of overwhelming darkness, a blackness so heavy that the Egyptians were unable to move. If the purpose of the darkness was to impede the Egyptians' ability to see, Hashem could have struck them with blindness. It happened in Sodom, when the townspeople were about to attack the Angels who had come to save Lot. Hashem could simply have blinded the Egyptians without creating such a heavy darkness. The *Chasam Sofer*, *zl*, explains that it is well-known that when a person loses the power of one of his senses, the other senses become more acute. This is due to the fact that the neurons that flow to the now impeded sense will flow instead to the other senses. Thus, if one's sight becomes impaired, his other senses will be more perceptive. On the other hand, if someone sits in a darkened room with his eyes open, his eyesight working at full strength, he continues to see, to employ the power of all of his senses – he is just unable to penetrate the darkness that envelops him. In such an instance, explains the *Chasam Sofer*, the individual who is unable to see due to the darkness does not benefit from his other senses to the same extent as one who suffers from blindness. Hashem was not about to benefit the Egyptians – even by default.

We might suggest that Hashem did not want simply to impair their sight; He wanted to impede their movement. A blind man has the ability to move; thus, he can sit with a friend, talk, commiserate, thereby maintaining a sense of kinship. When a person is enveloped by a heavy darkness in which his ability to move is impeded, however, he is all alone. He might be sitting a few feet from someone, but is unable to benefit from the nearness. Hashem wanted each Egyptian to feel the loneliness, the inability to reach out to his fellow for comfort, encouragement and hope. The plague of darkness was about helplessness, so that the Egyptians would have some idea of the suffering and pain that they had impacted upon their Jewish slaves.

*Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, quotes *Horav Shaul Brody, zl*, primary student of the venerable *Maharam Shick, zl*, who related a frightening story about his *Rebbe*. In his later years, the *Maharam Shick's* eyesight waned, and he became blind. The sage lamented his blindness because he was not able to learn from *sefarim*, Torah volumes. Nonetheless, he did take solace in the fact that, in his youth, he constantly reviewed his studies to the point that they became committed to memory. He extolled the great benefit of constant *chazarah*, review, since, if one would ever reach such a dire predicament in which he could not see or *sefarim* from which to learn were inaccessible, he would still be able to learn Torah.

*Rav Zilberstein* has an addendum to the story which indicates the incredible diligence and *hasmadah* that the *Maharam Shick* applied to his learning. Once, during the latter stages of his life, his *shamash*, aide, found his *Rebbe* crying. He asked, "*Rebbe*, what is it? Can I do anything to help?" The *Maharam Shick* replied, "Had I known that I would end up like this (unable to read), I would have learned much more." "But *Rebbe*," the *shamash* asked, "if the *Rebbe* would have

known this, would he have studied 25 hours a day?" (In other words, the *Rebbe* was such an extraordinary *masmid* that he never wasted even a moment.)

The *Maharam Schick* was pleased with his *shamash's* response. It was evident that his *shamash's* response had put him at ease. The *Maharam Schick* continued, "From the time that I had some *seichal*, a modicum of intelligence, I never wasted a moment. Nonetheless, if I would have known what would happen with me later in life, I would have minimized the breadth of my learning and spent much more time reviewing what I had previously learned."