

“There was a thick darkness throughout the land of Egypt for a three-day period.” (10:22)

Rashi asks a question regarding makas choshech, the plague of darkness, which he does not ask concerning any of the other plagues: Why did Hashem specifically bring about the plague of darkness? He answers that there were Jews in Egypt who refused to leave. They would rather choose to live with the slavery, suffering and persecution that Egypt had to offer than risk possible death in the wilderness. During these three days of darkness these Jews died and were buried by their brethren. Resigned to remaining in the position in which they were before the plague began because of the “weight” of the darkness, the Egyptians were not aware of this. Otherwise, they might have ignored the impact of the plague, noting that it was happening also to the Jews.

We derive from here the importance for every Jew to seek an environment containing nothing that is counter to his spiritual development. A Jew does not belong in Egypt. A Jew is not to be a slave to Egyptians. He serves only one Master, Hashem. We have to ask ourselves: Why? Why would such a large group of people – which, according to Rashi in Parashas Beshalach, amounted to four-fifths of Klal Yisrael – want to stay? Only twenty percent of the Jewish People desired to leave the miserable conditions and moral depravity of Egypt. Why?

Horav David Shneuer, Shlita, cites the Ibn Ezra in his commentary on the pasuk, “You shall not eat it partially roasted or cooked in water; only roasted over fire – its head, its legs, with its innards” (12:9), which sheds light on the psyche of the Jewish slaves. Ibn Ezra suggests that one might think that since the sheep is the Egyptian god, we should not make a public display of roasting it. Perhaps, just cook it partially, and “get it over with” as quickly as possible. The Torah empathetically replies, No! We must stop being afraid of the Egyptians. They are no longer our masters. We are the victors, and they are the vanquished.

We learn from here the level of depression to which the Jews had descended. Their fear of the Egyptians broke their will and destroyed their spirit. The slave mentality had completely enveloped them. They were like victims of abuse; they cowered, they were filled with anxiety; they were filled with nervous tension. They were willing to suffer, to be cruelly beaten and violated, to be persecuted and afflicted in the most heinous ways – and they would come back for more! To make trouble with the Egyptians, to defy their oppressors, was unthinkable. They would never think of leaving Egypt. They were here forever. They were slaves.

This is called “yiush,” despair, hopelessness, terms antithetical to Jewish belief. The Jew always has hope. He is never to be “meyaesh,” give up hope, because he trusts in Hashem. No one said that life was going to be easy. Without Hashem, however, it is impossible.