

With darkness upon the surface of the deep...and G-d separated between the light and the darkness. (1:2,3)

The darkness about which the Torah speaks is not merely the absence of light, but a specific creation, as we find in Yeshayah 45:7: Yotzeir ohr u'borei choshech, "He Who fashions the lights and creates darkness." Chazal teach us that until light and darkness were separated by Hashem, they functioned b'arvuvya, in a mixture, implying that patches of light and darkness were intertwined with one another. Ultimately, the wonderful light that originated during Creation was of too great an intensity. Its spiritual quality was too pristine for the wicked of this world to enjoy. They were simply not worthy. Thus, Hashem separated it from the rest of the universe and set it aside for the enjoyment of the righteous in the World to Come.

The pasuk in Yeshaya correlates light with yotzer/yetzirah, fashioning/forming and darkness with borei/ bria, creation. The commentators teach that bria, creation, is on a higher plane than yetzirah, fashioning. Why, then, is darkness linked with bria? Is light not the primary creation?

The Nesivos Shalom cites the Sefarim Ha'kedoshim who explain that the darkness linked to bria is actually light – a light that is so powerful, so incredibly brilliant, that it is even brighter than the light connected with yetzirah. There is light that, as a result of its brilliance, will blind a person, rendering him incapable of seeing anything else. Indeed, people who stare at the sun even briefly are momentarily blinded.

Keeping this in mind, let us "gaze" at another instance in which there was a darkness so "dark" that it was devastating, it was palpable, with substance and body to it. This was the character of the darkness that enveloped Egypt during the Makkas Choshech, plague of darkness. The Midrash tells us that the source of this overpowering darkness was from Above, from the Heavens. What darkness is there in Heaven? It is a place that is suffused with Heavenly light!

The Toldos Yaakov Yosef explains that Moshe Rabbeinu was instructed to stretch forth his hand over/toward the Heavens, and take hold of some lofty, elevated spiritual level/entity and bring it down to Egypt. There – in Egypt – the Heavenly light would be transformed into painful darkness for the Egyptians. The Nesivos Shalom compares this to placing a thoroughly evil fellow in Gan Eden, where he will sit together with the greatest tzaddikim. He will go out of his mind observing them basking in the glow of the Divine Presence. This essentially defined the plague of darkness. Moshe took some of the light from Above, and it plunged Egypt into a state of unprecedented darkness.

