

Moshe stretched forth his hand towards the heavens, and there was a thick darkness throughout the Land of Egypt. (10:22)

Chazal (Midrash Rabbah/Shemos 14:2) ask from whence came this *choshech*, darkness. Rabbi Yehudah says it came from on High. It was a Heavenly/otherworldly darkness, as it says in *Tehillim* 18:12, “He made darkness His concealment, around Him His shelter.” (This means: even when Hashem intervenes in a swift and stunning manner in human affairs, He remains concealed [*Ibn Ezra*], or alternatively, man quickly forgets Hashem’s role in all that happens to him [*Horav S.R. Hirsch*]). The question is obvious: If the darkness that plagued Egypt was from Heaven – where in Heaven was it to be found? Is there darkness in *Shomayim*, Heaven? The *Navi* says: *U’nehira imei shrei*, “And light dwells with Him” (*Daniel* 2:22). Furthermore, we are taught (based upon a *pasuk* in *Yeshayah* 19:22) that the darkness which descended over Egypt affected only Egyptians, while simultaneously it was light for the Jews. It was the very same darkness that served a dual purpose: darkness and oblivion for the Egyptians; light and clarity for the Jews. How is this to be understood?

Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl, cites the *Sifsei Kohen* who explains that the darkness that blinded the Egyptians was, indeed, Heavenly light which darkened the eyes of the Egyptians. Due to their evil, they were unable to see. This is similar to gazing at the sun on an unusually sunny, bright day. One is blinded, unable to see. The wicked Egyptians were so overwhelmed by the otherworldly light that they were left devoid of vision, the reality around them obscured.

The Jews, on the other hand, were worthy of seeing. Due to their distinction, they were not overwhelmed and blinded by the Heavenly light. Their vision was able to penetrate its rays, to see the brilliance that surrounded them with amazing clarity. Thus, the very same light that shined for the Jews darkened the lives of the Egyptians. The Jew could walk into an Egyptian home and see what was concealed from the Egyptian’s eyes, that the darkness was actually light.

Ner l’ragli Devarecha v’Ohr linesivasi, “Your word is a candle for my feet and a light for my path” (*Tehilim* 119:105). The Torah illuminates man’s way, enabling him to proceed to his destination in life with vigor and surefootedness. This *pasuk* is a reference to the light that emanates from (one who studies) Torah and *mitzvah* observance. Therefore, darkness descended on Egypt, a darkness that was comprised of the Heavenly light which Hashem sent down, a light that darkened the eyes of the Egyptians, but was a source of powerful illumination for the Jews.

Rav Pincus concludes with a powerful observation. We live in a time in which the world around us clamors for the denigration and disenfranchisement of the Jews. There are those who would do us harm for no other reason than our being born into the Jewish faith – a faith which we observe religiously. The term anti-Semitism is thrown around all of the time to the point that many of our co-religionists bend over backwards to do anything and everything to appease those around us, to

assimilate in any way that garners favor in the eyes of the gentile. The solution is right in front of our eyes: *Ner mitzvah v'Torah ohr*, the light of the Torah will prevail. It provides us with the necessary light, while it concurrently darkens the vision of those who would do us harm. The *choshech* of *Mitzrayim* obfuscates their nefarious vision, impairing their efforts to cause us harm.