

## This Week's Parshah - Parshas Bo

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of

Dov ben Yehudah Leib a”h

a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

### The Egyptian House of Horrors

#### Spotlight on Darkness

One of the events of the *parshah* warranting some added scrutiny is the plague of *choshech* (darkness), which is replete with some unique and intriguing features. Here we will devote specific examination to a particular attribute the *choshech* possessed beyond the “garden variety” darkness:

וַיְהִי חֹשֶׁךְ אֲפֹלָה בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים. לֹא־רָאוּ אִישׁ אֶת־אָחִיו וְלֹא־קָמוּ אִישׁ מִמְּוֹתוֹ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים וְלֹכְל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הָיָה אֹר בְּמוֹשְׁבֹתָם.

“And there was thick darkness in all of Egypt for three days. One did not see his fellow, *nor did one get up from his place for three days*; but all of B’nei Yisrael had light in their dwellings” (*Shemos 10:22-23*).

Apparently, this darkness was so arresting that not only was the ability of the Mitzrim to see affected, but they were paralyzed as well.

Why was this added measure of hindering their movements necessary? To a large extent, the imperative was based on the fact that there was a lot taking place behind the scenes throughout the duration of this plague. One of these events was the reconnaissance operation undertaken by the Jews, who retained their vision capabilities. As Rashi points out, while the Mitzrim sat in darkness, B’nei Yisrael scouted around, viewing the valuables of their oppressors and taking inventory. When the time would later come to “relieve” Egypt of its possessions (*cf. Shemos 11:2*), no Mitzri could claim that he did not own this or that item; the Jews knew exactly who had what and where it was stored.

But poking around someone else’s house could be a dangerous matter. This idea is brought out in a most dramatic way through the *halachah* of the *ba bamachteres* – the intruder who unlawfully enters a house by tunneling his way in. A householder who discovers such an unwelcome guest is even allowed to eliminate him! As the Mishnah states succinctly (*Sanhedrin 8:6*):

הַבָּא בַּמְחִתְרֵת נִדּוֹן עַל שְׁם סוּפוֹ.

“One who intrudes through a tunnel (whose blood is considered forfeit) is so designated based on his (projected) future actions.”

The Gemara identifies the safety concerns involved, upon which this seemingly harsh judgment is predicated. An invader is aware that, should he be caught in the act of pilfering, the owner will put up a fight. This is based on the maxim that אִין אָדָם מְעַמִּיד עֵצְמוֹ עַל מְמוֹנוֹ – a person will not restrain himself in the face of a threat to his possessions. The burglar, of course, will respond with force to this attack on his own person. The upshot of this whole arrangement is that any home invader enters with the knowledge and readiness to “neutralize” the homeowner. His “projected future actions” are lethal; and so the homeowner is authorized to preempt the threat

on his own life and take out his would-be murderer.

The Maharal (*Gur Aryeh, Shemos 10:23*) understands that the same dynamic was applicable to the situation in Mitzrayim during the Plague of Darkness. Why was it necessary to “freeze” the Egyptians’ movements? Recall that the Jews were snooping around their homes at this time. Even if their sight was obstructed, the Egyptians – upon sensing the intruders – would automatically launch into attack mode and harm any Israelite who passed by. To counteract this threat, Hashem visited upon them a darkness that removed not only their vision, but their mobility as well.

### Scared of the Dark

While we now understand *why* it was necessary to arrest their movements, it still must be explained *how* exactly this was achieved. After all, under regular conditions of darkness, one might have difficulty seeing, but he can still move about!

One way to explain this phenomenon may be to attribute it to the “tangible” nature of this particular darkness. According to the Medrash (*Shemos Rabbah 14:1*), it was as thick as a coin. Perhaps, then, this matter weighed down so heavily upon the Mitzrim that their limbs were simply unable to overcome its density. (One potential difficulty with this explanation, however, is that it may not fully account for their inability to move; after all, the Medrash states merely that the darkness was tactile, but not that it was solid.)

Shedding some light on this topic, the *K’sav V’Kabbalah* provides an eye-opening approach, which highlights yet another aspect of the Mitzrim’s ordeal. He quotes from an apocryphal volume known as “*Chochmas Shlomo Rabbasi*” (referenced by the Chasam Sofer [*Toras Moshe*] as well), which makes mention of some very interesting occurrences that took place at this time. Apparently, the Mitzrim were actually granted the ability to see certain things during this plague, but this was not for their benefit. In addition to staying in the dark, they were treated to a viewing of some extremely frightening scenes. This was literally an audiovisual horror presentation, in which they heard terrifying sounds and beheld hair-raising visions.

In fact, the *K’sav V’Kabbalah* attributes one of the familiar phrases of the Pesach Haggadah to this event. In the section recounting the numerous plagues with which the Egyptians were stricken, the Haggadah repeatedly quotes from the verse in Tehillim (88:49): מְשַׁלַּחַת מַלְאֲכֵי רָעִים – “He sends against them His anger, wrath, fury and torment – a delegation of punitive angels.” This “delegation of punitive angels” refers to these celestial messengers who put on for the Mitzrim (sitting in their darkened surroundings) the most terrifying horror show of all time.

In any event, the source for the Mitzrim’s arrested mobility seems clear: they were simply frozen in shock. Their harrowing ordeal left them literally paralyzed from fear.