

Torah Portion: **Bo**

(Book of Exodus)

“Darkness unsettles us. As children we went to sleep with a small light on; as adults we prefer to come home to a dwelling not totally dark. We fear what we cannot see.” These words, penned by Professor Ismar Schorsch, give voice to the great human psychological mystery known as “night.”

Rabbi David Wolpe points out, “In the Jewish tradition, the world began with night. Creation, conceived in darkness, moved on to light. . Night is the original state out of which the cosmos in widening circles was born.”

The ancient prophets encountered their godly visions in the night. God reveals to Abraham the future of the Jewish people in the night. The final three biblical plagues brought upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians - locusts, darkness, and the death of the firstborn - occur at night. It is not a far stretch to conclude faith in God is discovered in the night.

Wolpe continues, “Human beings perceive God differently alone, at night. Night offers inwardness, aloneness. It is when the spirit, unable to forget itself by being lost in the day or distracted, must sleep or seek. It is the time to look for the God who waits within.”

The liberation of the ancient Israelites from Egypt is dependent upon darkness and night. *Night* and *darkness* become a metaphor for the Israelites’ oppressive slavery. God is their *light* of salvation. Abraham Joshua Heschel so poignantly observed, “God is not a hypothesis derived from logical assumptions, but an immediate insight, self-evident as light. God is not something to be sought in the darkness with the light of reason. God is the *light*.”

At age 12, I vividly recall being alone one evening in my synagogue sanctuary while waiting for a ride home. It was a particularly cold and snowy evening. In the darkness of the sanctuary my fears were suddenly abated by the sight of the *ner tamid* (eternal light) hanging above the holy ark. There, standing in real and existential loneliness, I discovered I was not alone.

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