

**Parsha Plug: Parshat Bo**

<p><b>Shemot 10:20-23</b></p>	<p><b>שמות י:כ"ג</b></p>
<p><b>20</b> But the Lord strengthened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go out. <b>21</b> The Lord said to Moses, "Stretch forth your hand toward the heavens, and there will be darkness over the land of Egypt, and the darkness will become darker." <b>22</b> So Moses stretched forth his hand toward the heavens, and there was thick darkness over the entire land of Egypt for three days. <b>23</b> They did not see each other, and no one rose from his place for three days, but for all the children of Israel there was light in their dwellings.</p>	<p>(כ) וַיִּחְזַק יְקֹנֶק אֶת־לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא שָׁלַח אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: (כא) וַיֹּאמֶר יְקֹנֶק אֶל־מֹשֶׁה נָטֵה יָדְךָ עַל־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיְהִי חָשֶׁךְ עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּמַּשׁ חָשֶׁךְ: (כב) וַיֵּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיְהִי חָשֶׁךְ אֲפֹלָה בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים: (כג) לֹא־רָאוּ אִישׁ אֶת־אָחִיו וְלֹא־קָמוּ אִישׁ מִתַּחַתָּיו שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים וְלֹכְל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הָיָה אֹר בְּמוֹשְׁבֹתָם:</p>

<p><b>Rashi on Shemot 10:22</b></p>	<p><b>רש"י על שמות י:כב</b></p>
<p>And there was thick darkness... for three days, etc.: Thick darkness in which they did not see each other for those three days, and another three days of darkness twice as dark as this, so that no one rose from his place. If he was sitting, he was unable to stand, and if he was standing, he was unable to sit. Now why did He bring darkness upon them [the Egyptians]? Because there were among the Israelites in that generation wicked people who did not want to leave [Egypt]. They died during the three days of darkness, so that the Egyptians would not see their downfall and say, "They too are being smitten like us." Also, the Israelites searched [the Egyptians' dwellings during the darkness] and saw their [own] belongings. When they were leaving [Egypt] and asked [for some of their things], and they [the Egyptians] said, "We have nothing," he [the Israelite] would say to him, "I saw it in your house, and it is in such and such a place."</p>	<p>ויהי חשך אפלה שלשת ימים וגו': חשך של אופל שלא ראו איש את אחיו אותן שלשת ימים. ועוד שלשת ימים אחרים חשך מוכפל על זה, שלא קמו איש מתחתיו. יושב אין יכול לעמוד, ועומד אין יכול לישב. ולמה הביא עליהם חשך, שהיו בישראל באותו הדור רשעים, ולא היו רוצים לצאת, ומתו בשלשת ימי אפלה כדי שלא יראו מצרים במפלתם ויאמרו אף הן לוקין כמונו. ועוד שחפשו ישראל וראו את כליהם, וכשיצאו והיו שואלין מהן והיו אומרים אין בידינו כלום אומר לו אני ראיתו בביתך ובמקום פלוני הוא:</p>

<p><b>Ibn Ezra on Shemot 10:22</b></p>	<p><b>אבן עזרא (הפירוש הארוך) על שמות י:כב</b></p>
<p>It often happens on the Atlantic Ocean that a dark cloud comes, such that it is impossible to distinguish day from night. This sometimes lasts for five days. I have personally experienced it many times.</p>	<p>(כב) ויט ולא ידעו שהי' ג' ימים, אלא על פי ישראל שהיה להם אור. והנה בים אוקינוס יבא חשך עב, שלא יוכל אדם להפריש בין יום ובין לילה, ויעמוד זה לפעמים חמשה ימים. ואני הייתי שם פעמים רבות:</p>

<p><b>Sforno on Shemot 10:21</b></p>	<p><b>ספורנו על שמות י:כא</b></p>
<p>"And the darkness will become darker": And the natural darkness of night will be removed. For indeed the darkness of night is atmosphere prepared to receive light. It is only dark due to the absence of light. This</p>	<p>וימש חושך. ויסיר את החשך הטבעי של לילה. כי אמנם חשך הלילה הוא אויר מוכן לקבל האור, והוא חשוך בהעדר האור בלבד. אמנם זה החשך</p>

<p>darkness, however, will be a substance that cannot receive light because of its great thickness, not because of the absence of light, and since it is not prepared to receive light, therefore, 'They saw not one another'. For the light of a candle and torch was not sufficient to illuminate the darkness.</p>	<p>יהיה אויר בלתי מוכן לקבל האור לרוב עביו, ולא יפול עליו העדר האור בהיותו בלתי מוכן אליו, ולפיכך לא ראו איש את אחיו כי לא הספיק לזה אור נר ואבוקה:</p>
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<p><b>Midrash Tanchuma Parshat Bo: 1</b></p>	<p><b>מדרש תנחומא (ורשא) פרשת בא סימן א</b></p>
<p>The Lord said to Moses, "Stretch forth your hand toward the heavens, and there will be darkness over the land of Egypt, and the darkness will become darker." This is what was said, (Psalm 105:28) "He sent darkness, it was dark; they did not defy His word"...The Holy Blessed One said to the angels of the Egyptians, 'It is fitting to plague them with darkness'. Immediately all of them agreed as one and did not challenge His word. What does it mean, "He sent darkness, it was dark," the same darkness He gave? To what can this be compared? To a king whose servant sinned against him. He said to one, 'Go and give him 50 lashes'. He went and hit him 100 times and added to him from his own. So too God sent darkness on the Egyptians and [each Egyptian angel] added his own darkness, that is what it means, "He sent darkness, it was dark."</p>	<p>(א) [י, כא] ויאמר ה' אל משה נטה ידך על השמים ויהי חשך על ארץ מצרים וימש חשך, זש"ה שלח חשך ויחשיך ולא מרו את דברו (תהלים ק"ה)...אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא למלאכים המצרים ראויין ללקות בחשך מיד הסכימו כולן כאחת ולא המרו את דברו, שלח חשך ויחשיך אותו חשך נתן בו ממש, מלה"ד למלך שסרה עליו עבדו אמר לאחד לך והכהו חמשים מגלבין והלך והכהו מאה והוסיף לו משלו כך הקדוש ברוך הוא יתברך שמו שלח חשך על המצרים ונתוסף החשך משלו הוי שלח חשך ויחשיך.</p>

<p><b>Netivot Shalom on Parshat Bo</b></p>	<p><b>נתיבות שלום על פרשת בא</b></p>
<p>As the Midrash teaches, "From where did the darkness come? It was darkness from above, as it says "He made darkness His hiding-place, His pavilion round about Him" (Tehillim 18:12). 'He made darkness His hiding-place' does not mean that there is darkness above; rather that the great and awesome light is hidden until those come for whom it is not fitting for it to be darkness. This is as God said to Moshe, "Stretch forth your hand toward the heavens" to darken for the Egyptians the great light that is the darkness of above. Thus it says, "There will be darkness over the land of Egypt," because for the wicked who are not fitting, it is a darkness without match. For no one had the ability to see his fellow or to get up from his place for three days. But for all of the children of Israel, light was in their dwellings. For the children of Israel benefitted from this light, as the very same darkness for the Egyptians was light for Israel.</p>	<p>וזהו בי' דברי המדרש מהיכן היה החושך ההוא מחושך של מעלה, שנא' ישת חושך סתרו סביבותיו סוכתו, ישת חשך סתרו אין פירושו שיש למעלה חושך אלא סתרו האור גדול ונורא, עד שעבור אלו שאינם ראויים לו הוא חושך. וזה אמר הקב"ה למשה נטה ידך על השמים, שימשיך על מצרים את האור הגדול הזה בחי' חושך של מעלה, ועי"ז ויהי חושך על ארץ מצרים כי לרשעים שאינם ראויים לו הר"ז חושך שאין דוגמתו, שמכחו לא ראו איש את אחיו ולא קמו איש מתחתיו שלשת ימים. ולכל בני ישראל היה אור במושבותם שבני ישראל נהנו מהאור הזה, ואותו חושך למצרים היה האור לישראל.</p>

<p><b>Dr. Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, <i>The Particulars of Rapture: The Knowledge of the Night</i>, p.165-168</b></p>
<p>One way of approaching the problem of the Night of Watching is to notice that the last three plagues are plagues of darkness: the locusts "cover the eye of the earth, so that it cannot be seen" (10:5); the plague of darkness, which is</p>

palpable-- “the darkness shall be felt’...they did not see one another, and they could not stand up from a sitting position” (19:21, 23); while the plague of the firstborn happens at midnight, and the world liela-- “night’-- is repeated with a redundant and subliminal insistence. The difference, most obviously, between light and darkness lies in whether one can see or not...[O]n the surface, this plague seems the most innocuous of all; what are the injuries incurred by three days of darkness?...An intriguing suggestion is made in Torah Temimah: this darkness was a subjective blindness, experienced by the Egyptians, perhaps a cataract, “thick as a dinar.” Such a notion in fact plays out the implication of the midrashic tradition. This darkness is not a prodigy of nature, so much as an inner experience of each individual: a catatonic terror of absolute helplessness.

**Rabbi Shmuel Herzfeld, *What was the Plague of Choshech? Bo, 5774***

According to the literal text of the Torah, the plague lasted for three days. Our sages generally understand three days as a sign of intense depression and immobilization. For example, the Talmud distinguishes between the first three days of shiva and the rest of the shiva. As it states in the Talmud: "Three days for weeping and seven for lamenting" (Moed Katan, 27b). There are different laws of the shiva that apply to the first three days and not the rest of the shiva. So the fact that this plague lasted for three days when the other plagues lasted for longer tells us that this reflects a period of depression and overwhelming sadness that overcame the Mitzrim. There was also no warning to the plague of darkness. The other plagues, which represented physical inflictions upon the Mitzrim, were preceded by a warning. But the damage of this plague was primarily symbolic and emotional. When our world comes crashing down and we realize that our lives are spiritually bankrupt -- on this matter there is often no immediate warning. It is often the result of a lifetime of bad mistakes. For example, we can warn someone don't drive the car drunk or you will crash it. But it is much harder to say to someone if you live a life in this manner, you will eventually enter into a deep depression over the emptiness of your life. And that is exactly what the plague of darkness was. It was symbolic of the Egyptian realization that their whole way of life was tremendously off. The Mitzrim had many gods that they worshipped. But the god that was the most widely worshipped was the sun god named, Ra. So it is easy to see the plague of darkness as a symbolic attack upon the sun god of Egypt. But this is more than just an attack on the sun god, Ra. It is an attack upon the entire Egyptian society that overvalued the power of light. What does it mean to overvalue the power of light?...We often make the mistake of running after the light. In this sense we are like insects attracted to light. We think that where there is the most light and the most fanfare there is the most strength. This is what Egyptian society was about. They had the neon lights that they were using to enslave the Jewish people. The plague of choshech reminds all of us that the most powerful ideas are the ones that are willing to sprout up in the dark. The most powerful ideas in human history were brought forth not by the advanced civilization of Egypt, but by the counterculture spirituality of Moshe Rabbeinu. So the Mitzrim were given the choshech in order to teach them that all their superficial neon lights—their strength, their chariots, their Pharaohs, and their pyramids-- were not illuminating but were really obscuring...The real light in this world is the light of Torah and the light of Hashem and the light of following His path. When the Egyptians were struggling with the choshech the Jewish people had the light of mitzvot. Some Jews died in this plague, but others were busy preparing for the redemption. This is the unbelievable power of spirituality and of having a connection to Hashem: There was physical darkness in the air, but those who had a relationship with God saw the darkness as inspiring and not as debilitating. For the Jews in the face of darkness there was light, hayah or bemoshvotam. When redemption will finally come to the Jewish people it will come bechazot halailah--in the middle of the night. When we have the light of the Torah to guide us, then even in the middle of the night, we will be able to overcome darkness and see the light.

