



לע"נ אבינו היקר  
 ר' בן ציון  
 בן ר' יעקב ע"ה  
 נלב"ע כ"ח שבט ה'תשפ"א  
 ת'נצ"ב"ה

נדפס ע"י  
 הרה"ת ר' מנחם ארי' זוגתו מרת  
 עדינה רחל ומשפחתם שיחיו לנדא  
 נאוואטא, קאליפארניא

# Light in the Dark

IN HONOR OF 60 YEARS SINCE THE REBBE INTRODUCING HIS REVOLUTIONARY APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING RASHI, 5725—5785, THIS MONTHLY COLUMN FEATURES AN ADAPTATION OF ONE OF THE REBBE'S "RASHI SICHOS."

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וַיְהִי הַשָּׁדָיִם אֲפֹלָה בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְגו' (י, כב)

## And there was thick darkness over the entire land of Egypt

”וְלָמָּה הֵבִיא עֲלֵיהֶם הַשָּׁדָיִם? ... שֶׁחָפְשׂוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְרָאוּ אֶת כְּלֵיהֶם, וּכְשִׁינְעָאוּ וְהָיוּ שׂוֹאֲלִים מֵהוּ וְהָיוּ אוֹמְרִים אֵין בְּיַדְנוּ כְּלוּם, אוֹמֵר לוֹ, אֲנִי רָאִיתִיו בְּבֵיתְךָ, וּבְמָקוֹם פְּלוֹנִי הוּא” (רש"י)

“Why did He bring darkness upon them [the Egyptians]?... The Yidden searched [the Egyptians’ dwellings during the darkness] and saw their belongings. When they were leaving [Egypt] and asked [for some of their things], and they [the Egyptians] said, ‘We have nothing,’ he [the Yid] would say to him, ‘I saw it in your house, and it is in such-and-such a place.’” (Rashi)

The same explanation (with some differences) appears in the Midrash, but with an additional piece:

”ולכל בני ישראל היה אור במושבותם” (י, כג)—‘בארץ גושן לא נאמר, אלא ‘במושבותם’; שכל מקום שהיה יהודי נכנס היה אור נכנס, ומאיר לו מה שבחביות ובתבות ובמטמוניות.”

“But for all the B’nei Yisroel there was light in their dwellings’ [(10:23)]—it does not say ‘in the land of Goshen,’ but rather ‘in their dwellings’; [this is to teach us] that in every place that a

*Yid entered, a light would enter [with him] and illuminate the contents of the barrels, chests and caches [that were there].”<sup>1</sup>*

According to this Midrash, a miraculous light accompanied the Yidden when they entered the Egyptians’ homes, and assisted them by illuminating all of the places where the Egyptians kept their wealth hidden. Thus, *makkas choshech* consisted of two miracles: 1. The darkness which befell the Egyptians. 2. The light which accompanied the Yidden on their searches.

Rashi, however, maintains that the Yidden were not assisted by a miraculous light; they found the Egyptians’ wealth in a natural manner (and the words “in their dwellings” in *posuk 23* retain their simple meaning—the land of Goshen).

There are a few indications of this in Rashi’s wording. One example: “The Yidden searched and saw their belongings”—meaning, that they had to search in order to find the Egyptians’ belongings; there was no miraculous light illuminating the hiding places for them. Accordingly, the only miracle of *makkas choshech* was the darkness that befell the Egyptians, whose purpose was to help the Yidden by rendering the Egyptians immobile, thus enabling the Yidden to search the Egyptian houses unhindered.

The explanation for the difference of opinion between the Midrash and Rashi (whether finding the treasures was miraculous or not) is as follows:



We know that one should strive as much as possible to fulfill *mitzvos* in natural ways, and not miraculous ones. The same applies to the preparations for a *mitzvah* as well—they should be done in a natural way.

This latter point is reflected in a well-known story of the Alter Rebbe: At one point during the Alter Rebbe's imprisonment, he was transported by boat from one location to another. He asked the officer in charge to stop the boat so that he could perform *kiddush levana* properly. When the officer refused, the Alter Rebbe stopped the boat miraculously—but he still did not perform *kiddush levana*. Only after the boat resumed its movement and the officer agreed to stop the boat himself did the Alter Rebbe recite *kiddush levana*. The reason for this is that he wanted that even the preparation for the *mitzvah*—stopping the boat—should be done in a natural way, and not by means of a miracle.

That is why Rashi holds that the Yidden found the Egyptians' treasures in a natural way: The search for the Egyptians' treasures was a means towards an end; it was just a step towards fulfilling the *mitzvah* of “*Let them ask, each man from his friend and each woman from her friend, silver vessels and golden vessels*” (11:2). Since the search was a preparation for a *mitzvah*, it had to be done in a natural manner.

(The fact that the search was made possible by the plague of darkness (as Rashi himself says)—which is a miracle—is not a contradiction to the above-mentioned “rule of nature,” since the plague was only there to *enable* the search—not part of the search itself. This point is also brought out in the story of the Alter Rebbe: The reason the officer ultimately acquiesced to the Alter Rebbe's request to stop the boat was because he saw that the Alter Rebbe was able to do so through a miracle. This did not, however, detract in any way from the “naturalness” of the *mitzvah*, since the first (miraculous) stop was just an *enabler* for the second (natural) stop.)

The Midrash, on the other hand, differs from Rashi's approach—and for two reasons: 1. The Midrash is of the opinion that the principle which requires that the fulfillment of *mitzvos* be in a natural way only applies after *Mattan Torah*. 2. The Midrash is also of the opinion that taking the “*silver and golden vessels*” from the Egyptians is not a *mitzvah*, but rather a reward and compensation (as promised by Hash-

em to Avraham: “*After that they will leave with great wealth*” (Bereishis 15:14)). Therefore, there was no problem with the search happening with the help of a miracle.

In terms of *avodas Hashem*, Rashi's approach (namely, that the words in *passuk* 23, “*But for all the B'nei Yisroel there was light in their dwellings*” is not a part of *makkas choshech*) refers to the *neshama's* journey:

The *neshama* comes down to this world as a “descent for the sake of an ascent” (*yerida l'tzorech aliya*). Through the *neshama* doing its mission of refining the physical world, it is able to attain a very high level of connection to Hashem—even more than before it came down to this world.

The *makka* of *choshech* was when the Yidden laid the groundwork for their ultimate acquisition of all of Egypt's wealth, which—as Chassidus explains—included the sparks of holiness (*nitzutzei kedusha*) which were trapped in Egypt, and which the Yidden took out with them together with the wealth. This symbolizes the general mission of the *neshama*—to refine the world.

But the other part of the *possuk*, “*For all the B'nei Yisroel, there was light in their dwellings*” is a separate thing altogether. It symbolizes the *aliya* that the *neshama* has after completing its mission. This is a level in which there is no place for the concept of “Egypt” and the struggle to refine it, but only for Yidden and Hashem alone.

### Takeaway:

Even though we find ourselves in a very dark *galus*, Hashem arranges events in such a way that Yidden should be able to do their mission without hindrance. True, our *avoda* has to be done through natural means, but the world around us facilitates our *avoda* in a way that is higher than nature—at times, even in a revealed way.

(Likkutei Sichos vol. 31, p. 46)

1. Shemos Rabbah 14:3.