

# Toronto Torah

## Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Bo

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This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Dali Balaban  
in memory of her father, Zev Yitzchak ben Shmuel Yosef HaLevi z"l

### Illuminating the Darkness

**Idan Rakovsky**

The plague of darkness is described in our parshah as the one that almost broke Pharaoh and made him release the Jewish people:

Then Hashem said to Moses, "Hold out your arm toward the sky that there may be darkness upon the land of Egypt, a darkness that can be touched." Moses held out his arm toward the sky and thick darkness descended upon all the land of Egypt for three days. People could not see one another, and for three days no one could move about; but all the Israelites enjoyed light in their dwellings. Pharaoh then summoned Moses and said, "Go, worship Hashem! Only your flocks and your herds shall be left behind; even your dependents may go with you." (Shemot 10, 21-24. JPS trans.)

A midrash explains that the darkness of the plague was so thick that the Egyptians couldn't see anything and, as the Torah said, they could actually feel the darkness. (Shemot Rabbah 14:1) But we should ask: What was so severe about this plague, especially if we compare it to the other plagues that caused injuries and deaths to the Egyptians? Perhaps we might offer two different perspectives, based on academic research, to explain the meaning of this plague in the eyes of Pharaoh and the Egyptians:

#### Dualism

One of the fundamental concepts that were at the core of Ancient Egyptian belief was the concept of Dualism. (See Encyclopedia Britannica [here](#).) This is

the idea that the world, and everything in it, is divided into two opposite forces - the good and the bad, the light and the darkness. This came to be expressed in the contrast between the Egyptian gods Seth and Osiris. Seth was a violent, aggressive, "foreign," sterile god, connected to disorder, the desert, and loneliness. He was opposed to Osiris, the god of fertility and life, who was active in the waters of the Nile.

We can suggest that by bringing darkness upon the Egyptians, Hashem demonstrated to the Egyptians that their belief in dualism is false. In that case, the plague of darkness was more of a spiritual plague than a physical one, and this might be the reason for the crack that started in Pharaoh's stubbornness.

#### Darkness in Egyptian Mythology

Dr. Racheli Shlomi-Hen, an expert in Egyptology writes the following:

In Egyptian mythology, the sun god was believed to have a solar barque, or boat, and an entourage with which he crossed the sky every day from east to west. He would start his cruise in the eastern horizon as a new-born baby, become a man at his prime at noon, and an old man in the evening. When the sun god set in the western horizon as a tired old man, he entered the Realm of the Dead, the Netherworld, in his solar barque, beginning his dangerous nocturnal sail. Ancient Egyptian society was very anxious about the possibility that the sun god might fail his nocturnal sail in the Realm of the Dead, and never rise again. It

was believed that this would allow chaos to take over creation and bring the world to its pre-creation state of endless dark, inert, and opaque waters. Hence, the solar priests of ancient Egypt performed detailed nightly rituals to secure the sun god's journey. (From *Tanach Eretz Yisrael*, Koren Pub.)

It makes sense, then, to say that the plague of darkness was a symbol of Hashem's victory over the Egyptian's god of sun, and that from Pharaoh's perspective, it would have seemed as if his strong god had lost the battle to Hashem.

Both of these explanations are consistent with the view that the plagues were a demonstration of Hashem's might and the lack of power in the Egyptian gods. We find this idea expressed in chumash (see Shemot 12:12) and amplified in midrash (see Midrash HaGadol to Shemot 7:17). Here, we can view the plague of darkness as such a clash; perhaps the Torah's language of "feeling the darkness" can be understood as the spiritual feeling of a shattered false belief.

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## Summary

Chapter 34 begins a new prophecy, directed at the nations of the world who harm the Jews, and letting them know that G-d has doomed them in His righteous fury. The heavens will be rolled up like a scroll (Rashi - the world will darken for them, as if the sun and light were rolled up like the rolling of a scroll), and all within shall wither like a leaf on a vine or fruit on a tree. Hashem's sword will then come down on those peoples whom He has doomed in judgment, metaphorically feeding on the blood and fat of those it cuts, and leaving the land drunk with blood and the soil fertilized with fat. (34:3-7)

A day of Divine retribution is described. The cities shall lie in smoky ruins for generations, with only birds residing there. Thorns will grow in these places, and the strongholds will become the home of jackals while all sorts of demons will frequent there. Snakes will lay eggs and buzzards will gather. In fact, no animal will be missing. Yeshayahu says to read in the "scroll of Hashem", all animals will come together,

and they will then dwell in this land forever. (8-17)

## Insight

There are several opinions as to what the "scroll of Hashem" at the end of the prophecy refers to.

- Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel Wisser (Malbim on 34:16) says that everything that happens is recorded in a book, including the names of all of these various animals.
- Radak, citing his father, says that it refers to the Torah, and the list of animals in the laws of kashrut. All of those animals will be present.
- Rashi says that it refers to the story of Noach and the flood recorded in the Torah. This involved all of the animals coming together in the ark, as they come together in Yeshayahu's prediction.

Interestingly, there are some other parallels to the Flood here. The prophecy begins with darkness falling, like a brewing storm, involves mass destruction of those who have sinned, and

concludes with the survival of a chosen nation with the goal of ushering in a new era in history under Hashem's guidance. This time, however, animals thrive rather than being wiped out as well.

Perhaps this parallel is fitting. If the goal is for the world to have evil wiped out and to continue in a righteous direction, it would make sense for it to call back to the previous destruction and new beginning before ushering in that new age of productive service of Hashem.

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# Siddur Insights: Between Day and Night

The first part of the daily morning prayer is the recitation of "birkot hashachar," literally, "the blessings of the morning." Nearly all these blessings find their source in the Talmud (Berachot 60b). One such berachah is presented as follows: "Upon hearing the sound of the rooster, one should recite: Blessed... Who gave the *sekhvi* understanding to distinguish between day and night." (adapted from the Koren English translation)

Commentators debate the meaning of the word "*sekhvi*". Rashi (Berachot 60b) understands it as "rooster." He points us to Rosh Hashanah 26a, where Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish calls a rooster, "*sekhvi*." This understanding makes sense contextually, since the Talmud prescribes this blessing after hearing a rooster crow.

Tosafot (Berachot 60b) seems to accept this understanding, but asks a simple question: May one make this blessing in the morning even if one did not actually hear the rooster crow? He answers in the affirmative, writing, "This berachah is recited on the *distinction* [between day and night], and on *benefiting* from light, since the rooster can distinguish, and he benefits from daylight." According to Tosafot, we praise G-d for giving the rooster the ability to recognize the difference between daytime and nighttime, even if we didn't hear the rooster crow.

Rabbeinu Asher, however, understands the word "*sekhvi*" differently. He writes (Berachot 9:23), "The heart is called '*sekhvi*' in the Bible, as in Iyov 38:36, 'Who has given understanding to the heart.'" [However, see Rashi there who again translates "*sekhvi*" not as 'heart' but 'rooster'.] And, similar to Tosafot, Rabbeinu Asher explains that even if one does not hear the rooster crow, one still makes this berachah, since it is about *our* ability to distinguish between day and night, which the rooster also happens to do. For Rabbeinu Asher,

the berachah focuses on our ability to recognize the difference between night and day.

Rabbi Shimon Schwab (page 43 in the Hebrew edition of *Iyun Tefillah*) notes that according to both views, this berachah focuses on distinguishing between day and night. But if so, why is it only recited in the morning? Why not also in the evening, when the day transitions to night? He answers that our ability to discern between the two is much sharper when moving from night to day – the breaking of sunrise unequivocally means the day has begun. But, at night, even after sunset, a person may still be plagued with wondering, "Is it late enough yet? Is it *fully* nighttime?"

Rabbi Schwab continues to say that this difference extends to our general feelings at these times of day. At night, as we reflect on our day, we may feel doubtful and dismayed by all that we failed to achieve during the day. In the morning, however, we feel clear-eyed and excited, ready to conquer the day and accomplish new goals. According to Rabbi Schwab this berachah expresses the feeling of excitement and eagerness that we only truly feel in the morning.

How fortunate are we that each morning we thank G-d for giving us the ability to transition from a world of darkness and doubt to one of positivity and excitement.

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## Biography

### Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Rabbi Adam Frieberg

Rabbi Hershel Schachter was born in 1941 in eastern Pennsylvania, and moved to New York City where he attended Yeshiva University's high school. He went on to pursue his B.A. at Yeshiva College.

In 1967, Rabbi Schachter earned his M.A. in Hebrew Literature from the Bernard Revel Graduate School and was ordained by RIETS, where his father, Rabbi Melech Schachter, zt"l, was a Rosh Yeshiva. That same year he joined the faculty of RIETS, becoming its youngest Rosh Yeshiva, and he remains a Rosh Yeshiva there to this day. In addition, he serves as the Rosh Kollel in RIETS' Marcos and Adina Katz Kollel. Rabbi Schachter has written several sefarim, including *Eretz HaTzvi*, *B'Ikvei HaTzon*, and *Ginat Egoz*, which provide insight into a wide spectrum of topics.

At the age of 22 Rabbi Schachter became an assistant to Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik and developed an extremely close relationship with him as his student. Through hundreds of personal encounters, as well as thousands of hours he spent listening to Rabbi Soloveitchik's lectures, he learned many of the Rav's halachic positions. Rabbi Schachter has recorded these positions, along with other thoughts he heard from Rabbi Soloveitchik, in many volumes, including *Nefesh haRav*, *MiPinei haRav* and *Divrei haRav*, as well as numerous essays in a range of Torah journals.

Rabbi Schachter serves as a world renowned authority of Jewish law, fielding questions from rabbis and lay people from around the world. Rabbi Schachter has published positions on the major issues grappled with by today's Orthodox community, including determination of the time of a person's death, the importance of honesty and ethical conduct, and the public role of women in the Jewish world. He also serves as a leading halachic authority for the Rabbinical Council of America and the kashrut division of the Orthodox Union, and he speaks occasionally in Toronto.

## Weekly Halachah: May a Jew Break Shabbat For You?

Rabbi Yehuda Mann

People often take upon themselves stringencies that are not universally accepted - such as not opening bottlecaps with sealed rings, using baby wipes or relying on an eruv on Shabbat. May Reuven, who doesn't do certain things on Shabbat, ask Shimon to do those things, knowing that Shimon is lenient in those cases?

Rabbi Yisroel Belsky zt"l (Shulchan HaLevi 10) gave four reasons to prohibit this:

- 1) *Sh'lichut* - In this week's parshah, Rashi (Shemot 12:6) tells us that "*shluchu shel adam kemoto*" - the actions of your proxy are as if you performed them yourself. Rav Belsky argues that if you hold an act is prohibited, asking someone else to do it is like doing it yourself. In addition, although generally we say that there is no such thing as a proxy for sin ("*ein Shalich ledvar aveirah*"), that is only where the proxy might refuse because of the Torah's prohibition. In our case, since we are certain the proxy will do it, indeed he is your proxy.
- 2) *Lifnei Iver* - One may not cause someone else to sin. Rav Belsky contends (and this is also recorded in *Shev Schemateta* 6:19) that this applies even where you are the only one who thinks the act is prohibited.
- 3) *Amirah L'nochri* - Also in this week's parshah, we are taught that we may not have non-Jews do melachah for us. [See Shemot 12:16 and Mechilta Parshat Bo Masechta d'Pischa 9.] Rav Belsky says that there shouldn't be a reason to distinguish between a Jew and a non-Jew; in both cases we may not have them perform melachah for us.
- 4) Finally, and perhaps most important, it is not right to ask someone to do things that you believe are prohibited. Asking him to do this gives the impression that you feel above him, and your mitzvot are more valuable than his.

Note that Rabbi Asher Weiss distinguishes between things you believe are truly prohibited and things you believe are only a personal stringency. One may ask people to perform the latter. (Minchat Asher I 11)

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## Sefer haChinuch, Mitzvah 10: Eat Matzah, Part 2

By Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Aside from not becoming leaven, the matzah we use for our mitzvah has other requirements, including:

- The matzah must be made of material which could have become chametz, had it been allowed to rise. Therefore, we require that the matzah be made from a grain, and mixed with a liquid which could cause fermentation. (Pesachim 35a-36a)
- The matzah we eat at the Seder must be *shemurah*, guarded from becoming chametz, with intent to use it for the mitzvah. (Pesachim 38b) Some view this as a biblical obligation (Pri Chadash to Orach Chaim 460:1), while others contend it is rabbinic (Bach Orach Chaim 460; Shulchan Aruch haRav Orach Chaim 453:19).
- The matzah must be *lechem oni*, a pauper's simple bread; if enriching agents are added, the matzah is disqualified. (Pesachim 38b) It is noteworthy that the Rosh is cited as having gone out of his way to prepare the matzah of the Seder personally, and this is brought as halachic counsel in the Shulchan Aruch. (Orach Chaim 460:2) While this practice is traditionally attributed to the principle that we should perform mitzvot personally rather than outsource them (Magen Avraham 460:1), the Maharil (Hilchot Afiyat haMatzot 14) said it was in part because matzah is supposed to represent the bread of a pauper, who cannot hire workers. Similarly, the Jews who left Egypt carried the matzah on their own shoulders, even though their animals could have carried the matzah. [And see Mishneh Halachot 11:388.]

There is some debate regarding whether one must intend to perform a mitzvah when doing so, in order to be credited with the mitzvah. Matzah is one of the focal points in this debate, as the Talmud (Rosh HaShanah 28a-29a) states that one who is compelled to eat matzah still fulfills the obligation - indicating that no intent for the mitzvah is required. However, sources regarding the mitzvah of blowing shofar indicate that intent is required. (ibid. 32b, 33b) As a general rule, the Shulchan Aruch sides with the view that intent for mitzvot is necessary, as seen regarding shofar. (Orach Chaim 589) As far as matzah, all agree that no intent is needed, since the mitzvah is simply to eat matzah, and one can eat without meaning to do so. [See Ran Rosh HaShanah 28a and Maggid Mishneh Hilchot Shofar 2:4.]

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### Shabbat Jan. 27-28

After hashkamah R' Yehuda Mann, Halachah from the Parshah, Clanton Park

After minchah R' Mordechai Torczyner, Gemara Ketuvot, BAYT (Milevsky Bais Medrash) (men)

After minchah Idan Rakovsky, Halachah in the Parshah, Shaarei Tefillah

45 min. after Shabbat R' Jared Anstandig, Parent Child-Learning, Shaarei Shomayim (middle school)

### Sun. Jan. 29

9:00 AM R' Zev Spitz & R' Yehuda Mann, Semichat Chaver Program, Clanton Park (men): Niddah

### Mon. Jan. 30

9:00 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Halachic Philosophy of Rav Soloveitchik, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university men)

2:00 PM Idan Rakovsky, Esther: Week 4 of 5, on ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/idanrak>

7:00 PM Prielle & Idan Rakovsky, Song of the Week, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklysong> (note the time)

7:30 PM AZKARAH FOR MR. KURT ROTHSCHILD z"l  
At Shaarei Shomayim, 470 Glencairn Ave., and at [https://youtube.com/live/sBgg\\_rTvC1M](https://youtube.com/live/sBgg_rTvC1M)  
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### Tues. Jan. 31

9:00 AM Idan Rakovsky, Tzidkat haTzaddik, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university men)

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Wisdom of King Solomon: Mishlei, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt>

7:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 17), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (men)

8:00 PM Idan Rakovsky, Israel's Judicial Overhaul Explained, on ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/idanrak>

8:15 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Shovavim Shiur (Semichat Chaver Chazarah), Clanton Park (men)

8:30 PM R' Jared Anstandig, Women's Beit Midrash, Shaarei Shomayim (university women)

### Wed. Feb. 1

10:00 AM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Icons of Jewish Morocco 4 of 4: The Baba Sali / Rabbi Shalom Messas  
There is a fee, Register at <https://torontotorah.com/wednesdays>; On ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt>

7:00 PM Idan Rakovsky, Esther: Week 4 of 5, Shaarei Tefillah Congregation

8:15 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Contemporary Halachah, Clanton Park

### Thurs. Feb. 2

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 30), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (women)

8:00 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Beitzah (advanced), for location: [ymannt@torontotorah.com](mailto:ymannt@torontotorah.com)

8:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Parshah w/Torah in Motion on ZOOM, Register at <http://tiny.cc/tim-bo>

### Fri. Feb. 3

9:00 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Parshah, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university)

10:30 AM R' Jared Anstandig, R' Mordechai Torczyner, R' Yehuda Mann, Ketuvot Perek 1 *advanced*  
In-person at Yeshivat Or Chaim, on ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/frishiur>

### COMING UP!

7:30 PM to 9:00 PM Monday February 13

NUSBAUM FAMILY MEDICAL ETHICS AND HALACHA PROGRAM: THE "SHOTEH"

R' M Torczyner, ZOOM @ <http://tiny.cc/mtethics> / Register @ <https://torontotorah.com/cme> / CME Accredited

Monday February 20

PARENT-CHILD BREAKFAST YARCHEI KALLAH AT BAYT: IS DONATING BLOOD A MITZVAH?

All Middle School Students and Parents Are Welcome!

Shabbat February 25

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