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PARSHA ENCOUNTERS

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Parshas Bo  Rabbi Moshe M. Willner

Blinding Light

Darkness is usually defined as the absence of light. Makas choshech, however, was different. Rashi explains how the darkness during the day was darker than the darkness of night, as we know it. The darkness at night was then doubly as dark as that darkness. Eventually, the darkness was so dense that the Mitzriyim were unable to move. Where did this darkness come from? The medrash answers that it descended from above. The Nesivos Sholom however, is uncomfortable with this medrash. Where is there darkness in heaven? Are the heavens not full of heavenly light? The answer lies in the description that the Torah gives us of Makas Choshech. During some plagues, the Torah explains how the Egyptians were effected by them, yet yidden were not. However, during Makas Choshech, it does not simply say that Klal Yisroel did not have darkness. "To all of Klal Yisroel was **light**," says the possuk. We can derive from here that the Egyptians were not smitten with darkness, rather, they were blinded by the heavenly **light**! To the decadent Egyptians, this holy light was darkness. Just as looking at the sun can be blinding, so too, this intense spiritual light blinded the Egyptians.

Indeed, when one is living an intensely mundane life, spirituality is darkness. In fact, there are those who explain that Gehenom and Gan Eden are really one and the same. After a neshama leaves this world, it is brought to a place where everyone is occupied with spiritual engagements. To the Tzadikim, this is Gan Eden. To the Reshaim, this is a most terrible punishment.

We find this idea on a smaller scale as well. In next week's parsha, there is an episode concerning Klal Yis-

roel going three days without water. Finally, upon finding water, they were unable to drink from it, because it was bitter. The Toldos Yaakov Yosef explains this scenario homiletically. Torah is likened to water. Hence, we're being told, that Klal Yisroel went three days without learning Torah. By the time they started learning again, the Torah was bitter! In truth, however, the Torah was really as sweet as ever. However, by living with the absence of toiling in Torah for even a short while, their "Torah taste buds" were impaired.

In light of the above, we can understand a brocha we make everyday. In Birchas Hatorah we ask Hashem to make the Torah sweet. This could seem to mean that the Torah needs to be sweetened in order to be palatable. Yet, the Torah is perfect and surely needs no improvement or change! In fact, we are asking Hashem to help purify ourselves to be able to appreciate and taste the true sweetness of Torah. How careful must we be to keep up our daily regimen of spiritual endeavors! For the less one is rooted in spirituality, so does his appreciation of it diminish. Engaging in holy pursuits once again would present that bigger of a challenge.

We must also learn from Makas Choshech that it is possible for one to misinterpret light as darkness. How fortunate are we that we have Gedolim to guide us. Their total immersion in Torah gives them the sensitivity to differentiate between true light and darkness. May we all be zoche to become rooted in spirituality and appreciate the light of Torah.

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HALACHA ENCOUNTERS

Teffilin of Rashi and Rabbeinu Tam

Rabbi Hensch Plotnik

Parshas Bo concludes with the section of “Kadesh Li” which includes the mitzvah of tefillin. The tefillin consist of the shel yad, worn on the hand and the shel rosh, worn on the head. The shel rosh has four sections, each one containing a different insert.

There is a well known dispute between Rashi and Rabbeinu Tam as to the proper order of placement of the parshios in the four sections of the tefillin shel rosh. According to Rashi (as well as the Rambam) the parshiyos are arranged in order of how they are written in the Torah, that is, Kadesh on the left of the wearer, followed by V'haya Ki Y'viyacho, Shma, and V'haya Im Shemoa. Rabbeinu Tam has the last two parshiyos reversed in the bayis although he agrees that the parshiyos are written in the order they appear in the Torah. (This machlokes stems from their divergent opinions in interpreting the sugya in Menachos 34B). Legend has it that when Rabbeinu Tam was yet a child, his grandfather, Rashi, was holding him in his lap while wearing his tefillin. Rabbeinu Tam proceeded to tug on Rashi's tefillin shel rosh, prompting Rashi to comment, “One day he is going to take down my tefillin.” The halacha follows Rashi's opinion. The Shulchan Aruch paskens that one is not even allowed to be machmir like Rabbeinu Tam unless, he is well known and established as an individual who is very scrupulous in his mitzvah observance. (See below for further elucidation of this point.) One who does indeed put on Rabbeinu Tam's tefillin, must have in mind he is only doing it out of doubt, otherwise he may be transgressing “bal tigra”, detracting from the proper procedure of mitzvah performance (Biar Halacha Orach Chaim 34). Interestingly, when the Talmud Yerushalmi on Kodshim was published in the Chofetz Chaim's lifetime (later to be exposed as a fraud), the Chofetz Chaim began donning Rabbeinu Tam's tefillin in accordance with the “newly discovered” Yerushalmi in Menachos, as recorded by his son.

The Kesef Mishna (Hilchos Tefillin CH.4:5) writes that the mesorah was in accordance with Rashi's opinion, as the tefillin of Rav Hai Gaon were discovered, opened and found be arranged this way. Strangely enough, the Ra'avad (ch.3:5) and Tosfos in Menachos report that Rav Hai Gaon's tefillin were in accordance with the opinion of Rabbeinu Tam! To explain this seemingly impossible quandary, the Ramo M'pano (107) suggests that Rav Hai Gaon himself was in doubt as to what is the proper approach and had two pairs of tefillin in accordance with both opinions.

The Sefer Shailos U'Tshuvos min Hashomayim reports that when the question was posed who the halacha should follow, the answer given was, “Eilu V'eilu Divrei Elokim Chaim.” Just as there is a dispute about this matter in this world, there is a similar dispute going on in shomayim!

Some Rishonim quote a document that had been sent from Eretz Yisroel discussing that the bimah above the kever of Yechezkel Hanavi collapsed, and a pair of tefillin were discovered beneath it in accordance with Rashi's opinion. The Drisha counters that there is no proof from this story that the mesorah follows Rashi because the tefillin were buried. Perhaps they were buried because they'd been written with the parshiyos out of order, rendering them posull (See above that even Rabbeinu Tam agrees that the parshiyos must be written in order. See Aruch Hashulchan at the end of siman 34 for a lengthy discussion of the opinion of the Zohar Haka-dosh and an attempted resolution of the puzzling dilemma of how such a basic issue could be the subject of debate and without clear tradition).

The Chida encourages donning both pairs of tefillin. He writes that the issue of “yuhara” (showing off and haughtiness) does not apply nowadays with regard to wearing R' Tam's tefillin, once the wearing of such tefillin has become more widespread. Furthermore, he writes that this custom had spread and become obligatory in accordance with the Arizal. The Aishel Avrohom (Butchach) follows the same line of reasoning and writes that someone who is machmir like Rabbeinu Tam can even put them on in a place where nobody else does, and does not transgress Lo Sisgodidu (giving the appearance of two Torahs). The Shulchan Aruch Harav encourages putting on tefillin of Rabbeinu Tam after davening. However, he recommends that this is done in the privacy of one's home, and one should learn for a while with them on. On the other hand, the Sefer Teshuvah M'ahava (vol. 2 #121), the outstanding disciple of the Noda B'Yehuda, maintains that the whole issue of “yuhara” only applies when both pairs of tefillin are donned simultaneously.

Rav Moshe Feinstein Zt”l (O.C. 4:9) writes that in his earlier years in Luban he owned a pair of Rabbeinu Tam's tefillin and wore them after davening. He did this having in mind that it was done bli neder- (without a promise to commitment.) When he moved to America, only after he found a pair of such tefillin that met his standards of perfection did he begin to wear them. He explained that Rashi's tefillin are obligatory and even if one can't find “perfect” ones he must make do with any kosher pair he finds. Rabbeinu Tam's tefillin, however, only retain the status of a chumra, and therefore Rav Moshe felt that unless he found tefillin that were of the highest quality it was not necessary to fulfill the chumra. (Rav Moshe proceeds to explain why it is so difficult to make the parshiyos mehударos). His father wore tefillin of Rabbeinu Tam, however because he didn't do so with the intention of obligating his children to, it wasn't binding upon them to wear R' Tam's tefillin.

As in any area of halacha and minhag, one should seek guidance from his own Rav and Moreh Derech before adopting this chumra in the beloved mitzvah of tefillin.

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