

# False Night

BY DON JARASHOW

The taste of donuts and latkes is still fresh in our mouths. We just came off the lights of Chanukah. We felt connected, inspired, and uplifted, and now it is over. For those of us who tapped into Zos Chanukah, we learned about the tremendous opportunity of the day and hopefully we utilized it. We davened. We prayed for ourselves, for others, for everything we want and need.

We all have things we want and need, and it is not only important but incumbent upon all of us to remember that the one address for everything is our loving Father in heaven. Yet it is important to consider what happens when we pour our hearts out in prayer, when we channel everything to Him, and we do not see the results we hoped for. When we encounter rejection, disappointment, or shattered hopes.

When we want light and miracles, when we seek happiness and joy, and instead we encounter darkness, difficulty, rejection, or disappointment, how does a Yid respond? What does the Torah teach us? More fundamentally, what is the true and only perspective?

## SEARCHING FOR CLARITY

Going back to the 12th century, there was a young, sickly *talmid* of the Ramban who carried a deep question. He was destined to pass away at a young age. Before he died, he turned to his rabbi, the Ramban, and asked for clarity. He wanted to understand why he had been given a life that seemed filled with misery, pain, and ultimately ended so young, unaccomplished and unfulfilled.

The Ramban reassured him and promised to write a *kamei'a*, an amulet, to be buried with him. This *kamei'a* would grant him access to a very special, exclusive chamber called למשפט, the Thrones of Justice. In that chamber, he could ask all of his questions, especially why he had died so young, and also why the Jewish nation in this generation suffers so many *tzaros*.

Some time later, after the boy had died, the Ramban was learning Torah near a window. Suddenly, the window opened, and he saw his

student, as though he were alive. The Ramban said, "Nu, what happened? What about the *shailos* I told you to ask?"

The *bachur* responded, "With your *kamei'a* in hand, I went from chamber to chamber, and indeed, none of the *malachim* stopped me. I reached the chamber called למשפט. But I did not ask the questions you instructed me to ask, because Hashem's kindness is revealed in that chamber. Even matters that seem bad here are solely for the good. I had nothing to ask."

The perspective is that we do not know best, and we do not have the master plan. But the one thing we do know is that even when it seems dark, even when we do not have the answers, even when the outcomes are not as we expected, in the place of the divine where Hashem resides, everything fits perfectly. Everything is truly good, and nothing is missing. There is no such thing as darkness.

**"In the place of the divine where Hashem resides, everything fits perfectly."**

## A VISION OF NIGHT

In this week's parshah, after Yosef reveals himself, Yaakov Avinu prepares to leave Eretz Yisrael and descend into Mitzrayim. It is the beginning of *galus*, the opening of one of the darkest periods in Jewish history, a reality that will bring centuries of suffering to his descendants.

Before Yaakov takes this step, the Torah records a dialogue between Yaakov and Hashem:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִרְאֵת הַלַּיְלָה. וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר הֲנִי.

Elucidating on an idea from Rav Meilech Biderman, on a simple level, "במראת הלילה" means that Hashem appeared to Yaakov in a prophetic

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vision at night. But the wording of the *pasuk* is unusual. If the Torah merely wished to describe the time, it could have said *ויהי בלילה* or placed the phrase at the beginning of the *pasuk*. Instead, “במראה הלילה” appears embedded within the *pasuk*, suggesting that it is not describing when Hashem appeared, but *how* He appeared.

The Torah is teaching us that Yaakov Avinu was about to enter *לילה*. Not literal night, but a spiritual darkness. A reality in which the presence of Hashem would feel hidden and distant. Hashem therefore appears to Yaakov specifically in the *בחינה* of *הלילה*, a vision of night, to show that what lies ahead will look like *לילה*, but it will only be a *מראה*. An appearance. Hashem is showing Yaakov that He is present even when He seems concealed.

This understanding sheds light on Yaakov’s response. When Hashem calls out “יעקב יעקב,” Yaakov answers “הנני.” This is not a simple acknowledgment. “הנני” expresses full *פנימיות*, complete presence. Yaakov is not merely hearing the words. He is internalizing this new mode of divine relationship, learning that even when Hashem appears through concealment, He is still fully there.

Only after Yaakov reaches this level of *אמונה* and *ביטחון* does Hashem continue:

אלִּיתִירָא מִרְדָּה מִצְרִימָה...אֲנִכִּי אֶרֶד עִמָּךְ מִצְרִימָה.

*Do not fear the descent...I Myself will go down with you.*

The reassurance comes after Yaakov’s *הנני*. Once Yaakov understands that the *לילה* is only a *מראה*, once he accepts that Hashem is present even within the darkness, fear no longer defines the descent.

And this is not only the story of Yaakov Avinu.

I would like to add, the Zohar Hakadosh points out an irregularity in this *pasuk*. He wonders why the word *במראה* is written *חסר*, missing the letter *ו*, and leaves the question unanswered. We can suggest an approach: Perhaps the missing *ו* hints at a deeper meaning. The *מראה* is not the full image. It is only an allusion, a hint. Something is indeed missing. When we encounter darkness, it is not the complete picture. The darkness we feel is only an appearance, fake. In the world of truth, it is not real. There’s only light.

Every Yid encounters moments of *מראה הלילה*. Times that feel dark, confusing, and empty of clarity. The Torah teaches us that these moments may look like *לילה*, but they are not true darkness. They are a *מראה*. Hashem is there, even when He is hidden.

And when a person can say “הנני,” not because it is easy, but because he trusts that Hashem is present even here, that itself transforms the night.

## THE PASSPORTS THAT WEREN’T

The Bobover Rebbe ז”ל would relate that during the Second World War there was a brief period when it was possible to obtain passports to Costa Rica, which could save a person from the Nazis. The Rebbe invested enormous sums of money to secure passports for himself and his family. When the day came to collect the documents, he was told that the operation had suddenly been shut down. No passports were

being issued. The Rebbe was shattered. Aside from the great financial loss, this had seemed like the only viable escape.

Not wanting to return home empty-handed, he went to the *beis medrash* to learn and seek *chizuk*. He took a *sefer kabbalah*, *sefer Tiferes Uziel*, and opened to the page which cited the *pasuk*:

רחוק מישועתי דברי שאגתי. אלקי אקרא יומם ולא תענה ולילה ולא דמיא לי.

*Far from my salvation are the words of my roar. My G-d, I call out by day, and You do not answer; and by night, and there is no rest for me.”*

The *sefer* cited a *pirush* from the Shelah Hakadosh on the *pasuk*:

ואני תפלתי לך ה' עת רצון אלקים ברב חסדך ענני באמת ישעך.

A person often davens for something he believes is good, when in truth it is not. Therefore, one should *daven* that Hashem answer only “באמת”, with truth. Give me what is truly my *yeshuah*.

This is the meaning of “רחוק מישועתי דברי שאגתי”. If my request is far from my true salvation, then “אקרא יומם ולא תענה”. Hashem should not answer.

Learning this insight gave the Bobover Rebbe great comfort. With this clarity, he returned home.

Months went by and soon the Rebbe was informed that all those who received the Costa Rica documents were killed. The Rebbe and his family were saved precisely because the passports never came.

## FOR OUR BENEFIT

The message is clear: What may feel like disappointment or loss in this world can actually be the greatest act of Divine kindness. Hashem’s ways are beyond our understanding, and sometimes what seems devastating is exactly what protects us. In His wisdom, everything is for our benefit, even when we cannot see it at the time.

So we return to where we began.

After Chanukah, after the *tefillos*, the inspiration, the closeness we felt, we sometimes find that the answers did not come the way we hoped. The light feels distant. The days are short, the nights are long, and the darkness begins to weigh on us.

But this is what we must remember: Everything is good, and everything is for our benefit, even when we cannot see it.

There are moments when we wish the outcome were different, when we do not understand why our *tefillos* were not answered as we imagined. But when we surrender, when we submit ourselves to Hashem with *אמונה* and *ביטחון*, we stop demanding, we stop insisting. We accept that we do not see the full picture, and that He does.

*לילה*, darkness and hardship, is not what we want. But with the right perspective, we know that it is not true darkness at all. It is only *מראה הלילה*. A vision of night. Merely an illusion.

Because in the world of truth, even in the night, even in the darkness, there is light. •

