

PARSHAS BO

by Gedalia Litke

Rashi says (10:22) that the Plague of Choshech/Darkness consisted of two basic periods, a three-day period of regular darkness followed immediately by a three-day period of thicker, tangible darkness in which the Egyptians were unable to move about. Rashi then asks what was the reason for the Plague of Darkness. He answers that it was so that the Egyptians wouldn't see the funerals of the many dying Jews and also so that the Jews would have an opportunity to scope out the location of valuables belonging to the Egyptians. In this way, when the Jews would later demand valuables from the Egyptians and the Egyptians would claim they had none, the Jews would be able to point out exactly what valuables they had and where they were located. This presents two questions:

1. Rashi previously indicated (8:17) that the reasons for the plagues followed a military strategy, with blood being an attack on the water supply, etc. Darkness would correspond to jailings under this analogy. Why does Rashi now need to add additional reasons for the Darkness?
2. Rashi on some of the later psukim says (11:2-3 and 12:35-36) that Hashem made the Jews very favorable in the eyes of the Egyptians and the Egyptians gladly gave their valuables to the Jews once they were asked. But if the Jews had already scoped out the location of the valuables, why would this lead to finding favor in the eyes of the Egyptians? It is hard to imagine an Egyptian first saying he has nothing to give or lend, and then softening up after being told that the Jew has already been through his things and knows exactly where the valuables are - to the contrary, the knowledge that the Jews had already rummaged through would cause greater conflict!

Based on the Mforschei Rashi (Maskil L'Dovid in particular) and Rav Hirsch the following answers emerge:

1. It is true that Darkness is part of the overall military strategy of the Plagues. Here, however, Rashi's question is not simply why is there a Plague of Darkness. Instead, Rashi's question is, specifically, why did the Darkness have two components, the regular followed by the thicker? To this Rashi answers that the Darkness served two additional needs beyond the basic military analogy. While the regular darkness was sufficient to hide from the Egyptians the fact that Jews were dying, a thicker darkness was needed to immobilize the Egyptians and allow the Jews to scope out the valuables.
2. What impressed the Egyptians is the very fact that the Jews had scoped out the location of the valuables but had not taken anything. This powerful realization made the Jews (and Moshe as their leader - see 11:3) extremely favorable to the Egyptians, and they gladly gave them the valuables as a

result.

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