

The Truth About the Darkness

Volume VI Issue #13

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—Sponsored anonymously for the Refuah Shleimah of Yair Nissan Ben Sara—

Parshas Bo, 6 Shevat, 5786

January 24, 2026

On The Parsha

In Parshas Bo (Shemos 10:22), the Torah recounts the plague of darkness. Rashi offers two interpretations regarding the Divine rationale behind this event:

"Why was darkness brought upon them? Because among the Israelites of that generation there existed individuals who were unwilling to leave Egypt. These individuals perished during the three days of darkness, so that the Egyptians would not witness their demise and conclude, 'They too are being afflicted as we are.'

Additionally, during the period of darkness, the Israelites (who had light and could see in the darkness) inspected the dwellings of the Egyptians and observed their possessions. Consequently, when departing from Egypt and requesting these items, if an Egyptian denied possession, the Israelite could say, 'I saw it in your house, located in such and such a place.'

This second explanation warrants further examination. The Israelites were instructed to request gold and silver vessels from the Egyptians as partial recompense for their servitude—a justifiable request that Hashem would ensure was granted favorably, as noted in the verse, "Hashem gave the people favor in the eyes of the Egyptians."

Given this context, the necessity for prior inspection of Egyptian households is unclear. If the Egyptians were predisposed to comply willingly, why was it important for the Israelites to know the exact locations of their valuables?

It would seem that Rashi's explanation only makes sense if we assume Hashem anticipated that even though generally speaking, the Egyptians would give up their possessions willingly, there would still be some Egyptians who would lie. When asked for their valuables, they would claim: "We have nothing."

Thus, Hashem orchestrated the plague of darkness to enable the Israelites to counter potential dishonesty effectively. Armed with direct awareness of Egyptian possessions, they could confront any attempts at deception.

From this, we derive a profound principle:

Hashem did not simply command the Egyptians to be honest, nor did He rely solely on miraculous "favor" that he would place in the Egyptians' eyes to guarantee compliance. He actively constructed circumstances so that any dishonesty would be immediately exposed and Bnei Yisrael would not be misled.

This episode in Egypt serves as a Divine model for human institutions. Whether in business, communal organizations, or interpersonal dealings, we should not rely solely on trust or moral appeals to be honest; rather, we must proactively build systems of transparency to make attempts at deception futile. The plague of darkness reminds us that true integrity emerges not only from exhorting people to be honest, but from creating environments where engaging in dishonesty will be caught promptly—making honesty the only viable path forward.

Chizuk - Inspiration

Rav Yaakov Yechiel Weinberg, renowned as one of the great Gedolim (sages) of the twentieth century, was known for his unwavering commitment to Emes (truth) an absolute honesty that shaped his character. Years later, in Montreux, Switzerland, Rav Weinberg recounted an early incident to his students.

As a young man, he would sometimes become so lost in his studies, so absorbed in a Sugya (a specific topic or subject matter in Talmud), that he would forget to pray Minchah (the afternoon prayer) altogether. This was no exaggeration; Rav Weinberg was known to become so immersed in his studies that as a young Yeshiva student he was once seen eating an egg while still in its shell, completely unaware of what he was doing.

Seeking guidance, Rav Weinberg approached Rav Naftali Amsterdam and confessed his problem. Rav Naftali, alarmed, asked whether he missed Minchah entirely or failed to pray with a Minyan (quorum).

The intensity of Rav Naftali's reaction caught the young Weinberg off guard. Flustered, he replied that he merely forgot to daven with a Minyan—when in truth, there were times he had missed Minchah entirely. It was a lie told without ill-intent, when caught off guard, in a moment of embarrassment.

Unable to ignore the dishonesty, Rav Weinberg sought counsel

from the Alter of Slabodka ("Alter"). Upon hearing the story, the Alter responded sternly: "You lied to an Adam Gadol (a great sage)! I do not want to see you again until you return to him, confess to the truth, and ask for forgiveness."

Rav Weinberg attempted to explain himself, but the Alter refused further discussion. Heavy-hearted, Rav Weinberg set out on foot on a long journey toward Rav Naftali's study hall in Kovno, ready to admit his mistake despite the shame it would cause.

Unexpectedly, someone followed him, delivering a message that the Alter wanted him to come back right away. Confused—he was already close to Kovno—Rav Weinberg obeyed and returned to Slabodka. There, the Alter explained his intentions: "I wanted to remove the falsehood from within you. When I saw the level of Mesiras Nefesh (self-sacrifice) that you were willing to undertake for the sake of Emes (truth), to take the long journey to Rav Naftali to tell him the truth and ask him for his forgiveness, that was sufficient - you did not need to embarrass yourself as well."

Rav Weinberg often recalled this story, his eyes glistening with tears: "That was the Alter's way of teaching his students. I think that experience was when I truly embraced a deep commitment to honesty—a value that has stayed with me ever since."

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: My brother took his driving test on Friday here in New York. In the past, some people have threatened or attacked the driving instructors that failed them, so now results aren't given in person—they are only shared by phone after 6pm.

But since sunset comes early during these winter months, it is already Shabbos by the time they call, which means my brother has to wait anxiously all Shabbos for his results. As his sister, I am wondering: Could I call the DMV and say that I am his wife and attempt to persuade them to provide the results before Shabbos? If I am honest and say that I am calling as his sister, I worry they will not take me seriously and I will not be able to persuade them.

ANSWER: The Gemara in Yevamos 65b establishes the principle of "Mutar Leshanos Mipnei HaShalom" - it is permitted to deviate from the truth for the sake of peace. Rabbi Nosson goes further and says it is even a Mitzvah to do so. So in your case, to save your brother from anxiety and allow him to have a peaceful Shabbos, it is possible that a lie may be permitted.

However, there are some key points to keep in mind: The

Sefer Chassidim (#426) specifies that this leniency applies only to events that have already occurred, not to present or future events. The Eliyahu Rabbah (Siman 166) supports this interpretation. According to Rav Yavrov (Niv Sfasayim Vol. II #6), it is preferable to follow the Sefer Chassidim's guidance whenever possible. Therefore, using a lie to obtain information about something that might happen in the future—such as whether your brother can drive—may not be covered by this leniency.

Rav Yavrov (Niv Sfasayim Section II #5 and #6) explains that the leniency of Mutar Leshanos Mipnei HaShalom only applies to people who are generally committed to leading a life of complete honesty. If one is generally not careful with the truth, one may not avail oneself of this dispensation. Additionally, Rav Yavrov advises that even when permitted, one should phrase things so that what is said could still theoretically be interpreted in a truthful manner.

It is important to reduce instances of dishonesty whenever possible. Instead of misrepresenting oneself as a spouse, one should consider a different strategy—for example, stating: "I am contacting you on behalf of my brother regarding his road test results due to an urgent family concern." This approach maintains the significance of the request without resorting to a direct falsehood.

In circumstances where there is absolutely no alternative, and your brother would experience considerable anxiety during Shabbos, certain Halachic authorities may allow you to lie under the principal of Mutar LeShanos Mipnei HaShalom. However, such exceptions should remain infrequent, otherwise one can habituate oneself to lying which must be avoided.

"May I back out of a school carpool that I have already committed to?"
"Should I report a co-worker who is acting dishonestly?"

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