

A-338

"THE SOURCE OF DARKNESS"

1. From the very beginnings of time, when Adam complained of his loneliness, man has regarded his solitude as a painful experience, even a curse. Modern man is especially bothered by loneliness. Despite - - or maybe because of - - his large cities and giant metropolises, he finds himself terribly alone in the world. He finds the silence of the universe and its indifference to his problems unbearable. He is alone and does not like it.
2. It is perhaps this feeling of loneliness that was the essence of the ninth plague that G-d brought upon the Egyptians and of which we read in this morning's Sidra. The CHOSHECH or darkness imposed a rigid and horrifying isolation upon the Egyptians. The effect of the plague is described by the Torah as LO RAU ISH ES ACHIV - they did not see one another. All communication between a man and his friends ceased. He had no family, no friends, no society, he was completely and utterly blacked out of any contact with any other human. How lonely! What a plague!
3. It is all the more surprising, therefore, to read the opinion of R. Yehudah, recorded in the Midrash on the ninth plague. Our Sages asked: ME'HECHAN HAYAH HA-CHOSHECH HAHU? - what was the source of that darkness? - where did it come from? - what is the nature & origin of loneliness? R. Nehemiah gave a credible answer: ME'CHOSHECH SHEL GEHENOM, the darkness that descended upon Egypt came from the darkness of Gehenom, from the nether-world. Loneliness is a curse, hence its origin is the place of punishment. But R. Yehudah's answer is astonishing: ME'CHOSHECH SHEL MAALAH, SHENE'EMAR YASHES CHOSHECH SISRO, the source of that darkness was from Heaven, for it is written that (G-d) dwells in secret darkness! What an unexpected origin for a plague - G-d's dwelling place! Darkness comes - - from Heaven!
4. Astonishing, yes, but in that answer by R. Yehudah we have a new insight into the problem of loneliness, and hence into the condition of man as a whole. Darkness or solitude can become the curse of loneliness, as it did when it plagued the Egyptians and separated every man from his brother, a loneliness that prevented one from feeling with the other, from sharing his grief and his joy, his dreams and his fears. Darkness can indeed be a plague. But the same darkness can be a blessing, it can be worthy of the closest presence of G-d Himself. For solitude means privacy, it means not only a devastating loneliness but also that precious opportunity when a man escapes from the loud brawl of life and the constant claims of society and in the private intimate seclusion of his own soul and heart he gets to know himself and realize that he is made in the image of G-d. Loneliness can be painful - - but it can also be precious. The same CHOSHECH that can spell plague for a man if it deals him off from others by making him blind to the needs of his fellows, this same CHOSHECH becomes G-dly when it enables a man to become more than just a social animal, more than just a member of a group, but also a full, mature, unique individual in his own right. YISHEIV BE'SEISER ELYON, G-d dwells in the highest kind of secrecy or mystery which cannot be penetrated by man. So must every person have an inner life, an internal SEISER, a chamber of blessed GOAH SHECH, which, in its privacy assures him of his uniqueness as a different, individual man or woman. As Longfellow once wrote, "Not in the clamor of the crowded street, / Not in the shouts and plaudits of the throng, / But in ourselves are triumph and defeat." - - In ourselves; that is where we can develop that brilliant darkness which has its source in G-d.
5. An American scholar recently wrote an article called "The Invasion of Privacy" in which he says that the perfect symbol of the confusion of our times is the Picture Window so typical of our newer houses. The Picture Window, he says, is more a means of letting others look in than for having the owner look out. Modern life with its

perpetual telephone calls and never-ending blare of television, with its round of constant appointments and business and social duties represent an intrusion upon the privacy of each of us, a deliberate attack upon <sup>the extent of</sup> one's personal privacy. And modern man succumbs to this attack -- he opens the blinds on the picture window of his heart, seeking to reveal his deepest secrets either to an ever-widening circle of friends or to his analyst or to his priest. We are often afraid of the solitude of privacy. We often fail to realize that CHOSHECH is not only a MAKAH but also an aspect of G-dliness. Educators and parents sometimes go to extremes and are appalled by a child who prefers to play by himself or think independently, and rush to impose "group games" and "doing things together" upon the delicious solitude in which a child seeks to discover himself. For a child realizes that, <sup>and to himself</sup> it is within himself that a man can hear the voice of G-d. Society may be the stage where the command of G-d is executed; but the inner solitude of man is the audience-chamber where we hear that command. How can a man be a truly good father, as G-d requires of him, if he does not have a few moments a day to contemplate in utter loneliness the wonder of children? How a good husband if he only acts out his role without ever thinking through his relationships in the stillness of his heart? How a good son or daughter if we never are alone long enough to realize the enormous debt we owe parents for life and love? "Woe to him who is never alone and cannot bear to be alone!"

I have never known a really creative person who did not precede the creative act with at least a moment of profound, thoughtful solitude. No really great speech or beautiful musical composition is rolled off extemporaneously; it is forged in the silence of the mind when the outside world is shut out by a G-dly darkness. No brilliant idea - whether in the sciences or business - is born out of the brawl of life; it is hatched out of the stillness of a creative personality. What is inspiration? - it is nothing but the product of positive and constructive silence in the innermost, inviolable chambers of a man's heart. The source of light is in this kind of darkness or solitude. And the source of this darkness is in G-d. It is the CHOSHECH SHEL MAALAH.

- 6. It is therefore of the greatest importance to all of us that even as we seek to banish the plague of loneliness we do not drive away the blessing of privacy. We ought to regard it as sacred and protect our moments of solitude with zeal.

Don Isaac Abrabanel, that great 15th century Jew who was treasurer to the King of Portugal until the exile in 1492, put it in sharper fashion in his comment on the first passage in Pirjei Avot or Ethics of the Fathers. We read "MOSHEH KIBEL TORAH MI-SINAI" - he received the Torah from Sinai. But, asks Abrabanel, it was not from Sinai that Moses received the Law, it was from G-d and at Sinai. It should have been stated MOSHEH...BE-SINAI or MIN HA-SHEM. The reason for MI-SINAI, he answers, is that the Torah was revealed to Moses only because of his inimitable capacity for creative solitude, only because at Sinai he isolated himself from man and with G-d for 40 days and nights, because Sinai was the place that NIGASH EL HA-ARAFEL, that he in his oneness approached the darkness wherein G-d dwelt. MOSHEH KIBEL TORAH MI-SINAI - Moses received the Torah by virtue of Sinai, because he learned the secret of G-dly solitude. So solitude gave birth to Torah. So does it give birth to ideas and to thoughts and to art and to beauty and to the essence of man and to all that is noble in life.

- 7. If in the conditions of contemporary life it becomes difficult to escape these intrusions upon our privacy, it becomes all the more important to guard it zealously. We ought to seek opportunities for this solitude of contemplation wherever and whenever we can -- whether during our vacation periods when we can afford more of this precious and delicious time; at the beginning of the day in the synagogue at Minyan, when we can in a silent Shemoneh Esrei truly find that we are alone with G-d; any time we can wrest from our busy schedules for the sweet silence of solitude. There is a great deal of CHOSHECH-solitude in the world. The Egyptian makes of it a plague of isolation,

From - reputation of solitude - in human life - unbroken  
 value - depth - in human life - unbroken  
 value - depth - in human life - unbroken  
 value - depth - in human life - unbroken

to enjoy the solitude

psychologist who advised patients

-- LO RAU ISH ES ACHIV -- an inability to see his fellow-men, a Picture Window thro ugh which others can look at you ~~bu~~ but he is blind to them. The G-dlike, however, will make of this solitude an atmosphere of holiness, YAHEIS CHOSHECH SISRO, a creative opportunity to discover themselves and the voice of G-d that speaks to them, a Window which does not allow others to peer within, but enables them to see their fellow men and be with them. This kindof CHOSHRCH is not the plague of darkness; it comes from the Most High source of all existence. May we learn to make use of that darkness and thus bring great light into the lives of all of us.

idea for more material. The rabbis in ANON PLN say that  
 difference between iel & Gii is that Gii leads to  
 "togetherness", iel to solitude.

Gii - מלכות / מלכות / מלכות etc.

iel - מלכות / מלכות / מלכות etc.

scripture: first 100 (1111 1100) because  
 מלכות מלכות מלכות