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תשפ״ז

Darkness is Not רע

Dovid Kopel

First the אור: Light Before Darkness in יוצר אור

The גמרא in ברכות raises a question about the opening ברכה of קריאת שמע.

Every morning, we draw on the words of the נביא:

> יוֹצֵר אוֹר וּבוֹרֵא חֹשֶׁךְ עֹשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם וּבוֹרֵא רָע אֲנִי ה׳ עֹשֶׂה כָּל אֵלֶּה (ישעיהו מה:ז)

Yet in our תפילה, we do not say ובורא רע. We say ובורא את הכל instead.

The גמרא explains that this is a לשון מעליא, a more refined expression. But if refinement is the concern, why keep the word חושך at all? Why not replace it with נוגה?

The גמרא answers:

> כדי להזכיר מדת יום בלילה ומדת לילה ביום׳

To mention the attribute of day at night, and the attribute of night by day.

But the question deserves more than that. If the נביא said ובורא רע, why would the אנשי כנסת הגדולה establish different words in our תפילה? Surely the words of the נביא were appropriate.

We are not correcting the פסוק.

A פסוק has its own meaning within תנ״ך, and its teaching reaches beyond any single application. But תפילה is a specific and exacting עבודה, with its own סדר and its own כוונה. The אנשי כנסת הגדולה established the נוסח התפילה, drawing on the language of the פסוקים to express the particular purpose of each ברכה.

The נביא reveals an essential אמת: even רע comes from הקב״ה. Nothing exists outside His sovereignty.

But ברכת יוצר אור has a particular purpose. We contemplate the חסד and the רחמים through which הקב״ה continually renews His creation:

> המאיר לארץ ולדרים עליה ברחמים ובטובו מחדש בכל יום תמיד מעשה בראשית

Who illuminates the earth and those who dwell upon it with compassion, and in His goodness renews each day, continually, the work of creation.

We acknowledge that everything comes from הקב״ה through the words ובורא את הכל. But we do not make רע the subject of this עבודה.

Yet we deliberately keep חושך.

Why?

✦

Darkness That Is Not רע

The בית יוסף brings two explanations for mentioning חושך by day.[2]

The first rejects the mistaken belief that the Creator of light is not also the Creator of darkness. There are not two powers governing the world.

The second goes further:

> שאם לא היינו מזכירים מדת לילה ביום היה נראה שהחושך רע, ואינו כן, שהכל עשה יפה בעתו

For had we not mentioned the attribute of night by day, it would appear that darkness is evil. But it is not so, for He made everything beautiful in its time.

This is a remarkable distinction.

We naturally regard light as something positive. It illuminates, reveals, and lets us see. Darkness seems to be a lack, the absence of something good.

But that does not make it רע.

Here we must distinguish between חושך and דין and רע.

The world is founded upon חסד:

> כִּי אָמַרְתִּי עוֹלָם חֶסֶד יִבָּנֶה שָׁמַיִם תָּכִן אֱמוּנָתְךָ בָּהֶם (תהלים פט:ג)

Yet חסד does not exclude דין. The דין establishes גבולות, limitation and measure. And those very limits are what allow the שפע of חסד to be received within a finite world. Without גבולות there could be no distinct מקבל to receive it.

So דין is not the opposite of חסד. It is the בחינה through which חסד arrives.

But רע is something else entirely.

If both come from הקב״ה, why does the ברכה name the one and fold the other into הכל? To answer that, we first need to understand what חושך is.

✦

Two Kinds of חושך

At the very beginning of מעשה בראשית, the תורה tells us:

> וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹקִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל פְּנֵי הַמָּיִם (בראשית א:ב)

Only afterward does הקב״ה say:

> וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים יְהִי אוֹר וַיְהִי אוֹר (בראשית א:ג)

It appears that חושך existed before אור.

Yet we ordinarily understand darkness as the absence of light. Enter a dark room and turn on the light, and the darkness is gone. Remove the light, and it returns. Darkness seems to have no existence of its own.

The רמב״ן draws an extraordinary distinction. Commenting on the separation of light from darkness, he writes:[3]

> איננו החשך הנזכר בפסוק הראשון, שהוא האש, אבל הוא אפיסת האור
>
> *This is not the darkness mentioned in the first* פסוק, *which is the fire; it is the absence of light.*

The darkness that is separated from the light is not the original חושך. The original חושך is יסוד האש, elemental fire, a created reality. The darkness of ויבדל is אפיסת האור, the absence of light.

So the fact that a lit room loses its darkness does not prove that every חושך is merely an absence.

There is a חושך that is a created reality.

And there is a חושך that is only the absence of illumination.

A created reality can receive illumination. The darkness we experience describes its condition before the אור arrives.

But a question remains. If חושך came before יהי אור, is darkness the original condition of existence?

Not at all.

The אריז״ל describes what preceded the עולמות:[4]

> היה אור עליון פשוט ממלא כל המציאות
>
> *A simple, supernal light filled all of existence.*

This is not the physical light of our world, nor the created אור of יהי אור. It is the אור אין סוף that precedes the created order. Only through the צמצום, and the השתלשלות of the עולמות that follows it, does finite creation become possible.

In the sequence of מעשה בראשית, the חושך appears before יהי אור.

But in the higher סדר, the אור precedes even the possibility of חושך.

The אור is first.

And חושך is itself a creation.

Darkness is not the foundation of existence. Concealment belongs to the סדר through which creation becomes possible.

✦

When Greater אור Produces Greater חושך

The אריז״ל reveals another dimension in the words of our ברכה. He explains that יוצר אור corresponds to עולם היצירה, while בורא חושך corresponds to עולם הבריאה.[5]

But this is surprising. The עולם הבריאה is higher than the עולם היצירה. Why should the higher world be called חושך, and the lower world אור?

The אריז״ל answers that בריאה is more concealed and יצירה more revealed:

> כי אדרבה מקום הגילוי נקרא אור, ומקום הסתום נקרא חושך

On the contrary: the place of revelation is called light, and the place of concealment is called darkness.

We ordinarily link light with revelation and darkness with its absence. Yet the higher מדרגה may be less revealed to us precisely because it is higher.

Consider the nature of sight.

Without light, we cannot see. But an overwhelming light also prevents us from seeing. A person who looks directly into an intense brightness is blinded by it.

In the first case, he cannot see because the light is lacking.

In the second, he cannot see because the light exceeds his capacity to receive it.

The existence of אור does not guarantee its גילוי. The אור must be received in a measure the מקבל can hold. Sometimes it must first be limited, contracted, or concealed before it can become accessible at all.

More אור does not necessarily mean more גילוי.

This is the place of דין within the חסד of creation. An overwhelming אור would exceed the capacity of the כלי. Through limitation and measure, the כלי becomes able to receive the שפע. The concealment does not diminish the חסד. It is how the חסד arrives.

So the אריז״ל teaches that the אור is דוכרא and the חושך is נוקבא. The אור is the משפיע, and the חושך is the מקבל.

The אור enters and illuminates, and the darkness is dispelled. But the receiving reality does not disappear. It becomes illuminated.

Sometimes חושך is not the absence of אור.

It is the concealment of an אור too great for us to perceive.

We find the same truth in כתר. In פנימיות התורה, כתר is called אין, not because it lacks reality, but because it lies beyond our השגה. A crown rests above the head. The one who wears it cannot see it.

Too much light is also darkness.

Its שם is אהי״ה,[6] a name spoken in the language of the future. Perhaps we can suggest that the future speaks not of any change in הקב״ה, but of a revelation still to come for the מקבל, of what already exists at its higher שורש and has not yet been revealed to us.

Sometimes what appears to us as חושך is the very source from which the אור will emerge.

✦

The Concealed World: לאה and רחל

The תורה tells us:

> וְעֵינֵי לֵאָה רַכּוֹת וְרָחֵל הָיְתָה יְפַת תֹּאַר וִיפַת מַרְאֶה (בראשית כט:יז)

The זוהר identifies לאה with עלמא דאתכסיא, the concealed upper world, and רחל with עלמא דאתגליא, the revealed lower world.[7]

The contrast in the פסוק itself, eyes that are רכות beside a beauty that is seen, invites us to consider what is visible and what remains hidden.

The higher one, לאה, is the less revealed. The lower one, רחל, is the more accessible.

Her concealment is not a deficiency. It belongs to her higher בחינה.

Perhaps we can suggest that the relationship between לאה and רחל provides another way to understand how concealment can serve the ultimate חסד of creation. The higher בחינה remains concealed, while the lower world is where our בחירה and עבודה take place.

The רצון להיטיב that stands at the source of everything is hidden from us.

Perhaps the concealment also belongs to the conditions under which בחירה becomes possible. We do not see the ultimate purpose of the entire הנהגה. Yet within the revealed world, we must distinguish clearly between טוב and רע and choose accordingly.

Without בחירה there could be no שכר ועונש. Whatever a person received would be a gift he had not earned.

This is what is called נהמא דכיסופא, the bread of shame.[8]

One who eats what is not his own cannot look his host in the face. A good that is only given, however great, is not the fullest good.

The fullest good is the one we earn.

Through that בחירה and our עבודה, the טוב we ultimately receive becomes something we have earned, rather than merely a gift bestowed upon us.

This is part of what it means that the ultimate purpose of creation is להיטיב.

✦

The Reality of רע

But that the ultimate purpose is להיטיב does not mean that רע is unreal.

There are genuinely wicked things in this world. There is suffering. There are people who choose רע and inflict it on others. We must not deny their existence, or explain them away as goodness we have failed to understand.

The רמח״ל draws the line precisely. Not every חסרון is רע. A created being may lack complete שלמות without being evil. Even among the מלאכים there are higher and lower מדרגות, and the lower are not רע.

But genuine רע exists, and it exists only within limits:[9]

> הרע הזה שנברא, לא נברא אלא בגבול שרצה בו החפץ העליון

This evil that was created was created only within the bound that the Supreme Will desired.

So רע is real. But it is not a second power, and it is not one of His מדות. It is a creation, set within the bounds of the דין, inside a סדר whose end is הטבה.

Its purpose does not make it good.

Its existence does not make it independent.

Perhaps we can suggest that the אור expresses the בחינה of חסד, while חושך can express the גבולות and concealment associated with דין. The contrast is not between טוב and רע, but between the שפע and the measure through which it becomes accessible.

The רע is something else. It is a creation that the דין contains.

✦

From the אור of Creation to the אור of תורה

Why did the אנשי כנסת הגדולה establish יוצר אור as the first ברכה before קריאת שמע? And why does אהבה רבה follow it?

We often treat them as two separate ברכות. The first concerns the אור of creation. The second concerns the אהבה of הקב״ה for ישראל and the gift of His תורה.

But the תורה itself is called אור:

> כִּי נֵר מִצְוָה וְתוֹרָה אוֹר וְדֶרֶךְ חַיִּים תּוֹכְחוֹת מוּסָר (משלי ו:כג)

And in אהבה רבה we ask:

> וְהָאֵר עֵינֵינוּ בְּתוֹרָתֶךָ

Illuminate our eyes in Your תורה.

The הלכה recognizes this. Under the conditions the פוסקים discuss, אהבה רבה can fulfill the obligation of ברכת התורה when one learns after completing תפילה.[10]

The halachic reason is its content: we ask to learn, to teach, to keep, and to fulfill. But there is a deeper reason, which is its place. The first ברכה speaks of the אור through which הקב״ה illuminates the world. The second speaks of the אור through which He illuminates the אדם.

His תורה is the אור through which He reveals His רצון. And the capacity to receive that אור is itself His אהבה.

The move from יוצר אור to אהבה רבה is not a change of subject.

And then, in שמע ישראל, we accept עול מלכות שמים.

✦

The Unity We Declare in שמע

Two names stand at the center of שמע:

> שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה׳ אֱלֹקֵינוּ ה׳ אֶחָד (דברים ו:ד)

Our חכמים teach that the name ה׳ is מדת הרחמים, and the name אלקים is מדת הדין.[11]

And שמע declares that they are one.

Not that only חסד exists. Not that דין is an illusion. Both מדות are His, and both are directed to one end, which is להיטיב.

Perhaps we can now understand the ברכה that prepares us to say it.

The ברכה must name both sides of that unity: the אור of חסד, and the חושך of the גבול, the measure, and the concealment through which the חסד is received.

Remove חושך, and the ברכה would declare only half of the unity.

The גמרא keeps חושך to mention the מדה of night by day. That mention may itself be part of the unity we are about to declare.

But רע is not a side of that unity. It is not one of His מדות. It is a creation that exists within the bounds the דין has set.

So the ברכה does not name it. It acknowledges it within ובורא את הכל, and no more.

The אנשי כנסת הגדולה did not correct the פסוק. They employed its teaching within the specific תפילה of עבודה, naming exactly what שמע is about to declare one, and nothing else.

That is the nature of שמע.

Everything is from הקב״ה. Nothing exists outside His sovereignty.

The ultimate purpose of creation is להיטיב.

And that does not mean that רע does not exist.

✦

Our עבודה: Revealing the אור

A room may be fully prepared to receive light. Everything necessary is in place. Yet it remains dark until someone turns on the switch.

The capacity is present.

But someone must act.

Our עבודה is not to manufacture the אור. The אור already exists at its higher שורש, concealed because it is too great for us. Our עבודה is to become the מקבל through which it can be revealed.

Through our תפילות.

Through our חסד.

Through our לימוד התורה.

Through our שמירת המצוות.

Every act of תורה and every act of חסד brings something of that אור into the world.

We recognize the אור in יוצר אור. We ask to receive the אור in אהבה רבה. And in שמע we accept the responsibility to live by it.

Perhaps we can now return to the גמרא with which we began:

> כדי להזכיר מדת יום בלילה ומדת לילה ביום

We mention the מדה of day at night because even when everything appears dark, the אור has not disappeared. It may be concealed from us, but it remains present at its higher שורש. The darkness we experience is not proof that הקב״ה has withdrawn His חסד.

But we must also mention the מדה of night by day. Even when life appears bright, when we experience ברכה and success, we must remember that we are still in גלות. The world remains incomplete. There is still suffering, still רע, and still an אור that has not yet been revealed.

We must not allow the חושך to make us forget the אור. And we must not allow the אור we have received to make us forget the חושך that remains.

Perhaps this is why our תפילה requires us to mention both. Neither the darkness of the present nor the light we experience reveals the complete picture. We acknowledge both, recognizing that the חסד and the דין are directed toward one ultimate purpose, even as we continue our עבודה to reveal the אור.

The ברכה of יוצר אור concludes:

> בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה׳ יוֹצֵר הַמְּאוֹרוֹת

Blessed are You, Hashem, Who forms the luminaries.

We begin by naming both אור and חושך.

But we conclude with המאורות.

Because our focus is the אור, and our responsibility is to bring it into the world.

The תורה is טוב. It is never רע. But רע is real in the world, and we must not pretend that רע does not exist.

We must not mistake דין for רע. We must not mistake concealment for the absence of His care.

Sometimes there is too little light for us to see.

Sometimes there is more light than we can receive.

We need to turn on the light.

The אור is first.

The חושך is a creation, and it is not רע.

The רע is real, but it has no sovereignty of its own.

And the חסד and the דין through which He governs us are one.

May we be זוכה, through our תורה, our תפילות, and our מעשי חסד, to fill this world with the אור of הקב״ה. May we merit to reveal the אור that remains concealed, and to recognize His חסד even where it is hidden. And may we merit the גאולה השלמה with the coming of משיח צדקנו במהרה בימינו אמן.

✦

Notes: מראי מקומות

[1] ברכות דף י״א ע״ב

[2] בית יוסף אורח חיים סימן נ״ט ד״ה ברוך אתה ה׳ אלהינו מלך העולם יוצר אור

[3] רמב״ן בראשית פרק א׳ פסוק ד׳ ד״ה ויבדל אלהים בין האור ובין החשך

[4] עץ חיים שער א׳ ענף ב׳

[5] פרי עץ חיים שער קריאת שמע פרק א׳

[6] שערי אורה שער עשירי

[7] זוהר חלק א׳ פרשת ויצא דף קנ״ח ע״א

[8] דעת תבונות סימן י״ח and ירושלמי ערלה פרק א׳ הלכה ג׳

[9] דעת תבונות סימן קי״ח

[10] משנה ברורה שם ס״ק י״ד and ח׳ and שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן מ״ז סעיפים ז׳ and ברכות דף י״א ע״ב through ט״ז

[11] בראשית רבה פרשה ל״ג סימן ג׳

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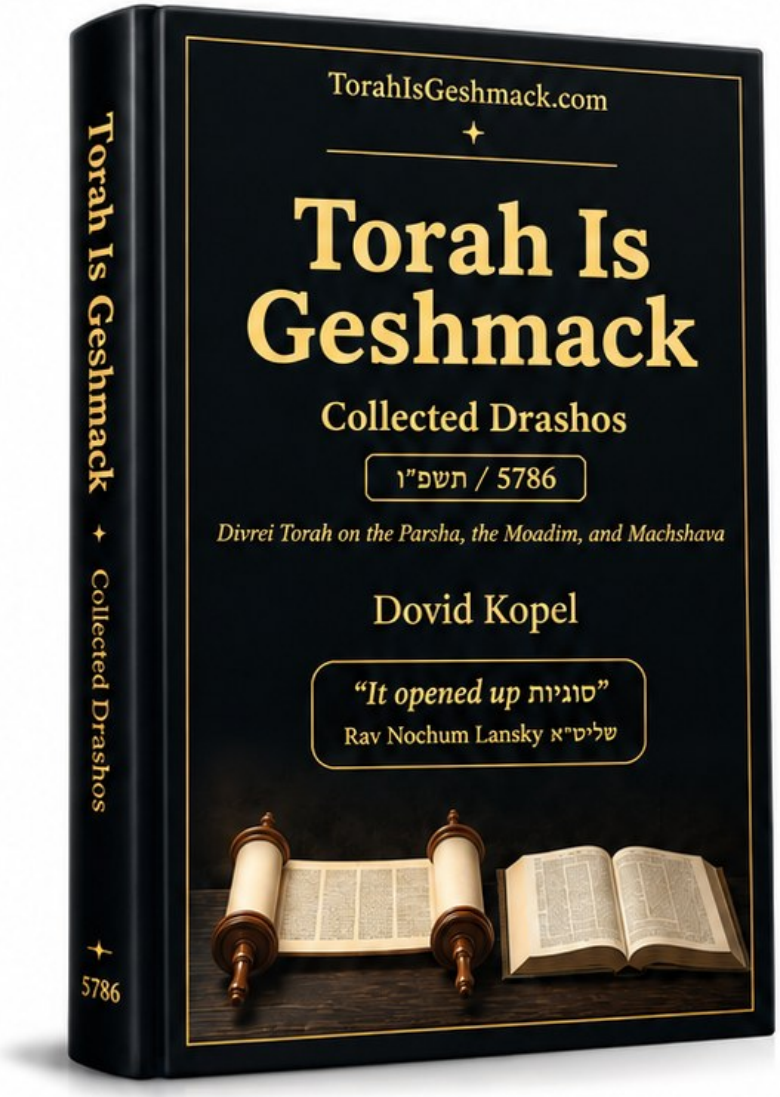
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