

were in hiding in the secret underground caves (below the study halls), we were unable to discern night and day. To solve this problem, we lit candles. When the candlelight was dim, we knew it was day. When the candles shone brightly, we knew it was night.” In Rav Huna’s caves, there was no visible distinction between night and day; the absence of light seems to have been of equal measure. And still, the candles shone more brightly and night than by day. Thus we see that there is apparently an **inherent difference** between actual nighttime darkness and just a “plain” lack of light. This would seem to bolster the notion that (at least as far as night is concerned) darkness is an actual created entity with specific properties – one of which is that it provides greater contrast than a mere absence of light, thereby affecting the magnitude of a candle’s light.

One of the matters that has subsequently come to light is the fact that the Netziv explicitly makes this very point. As he writes: “...The light of fire illuminates more brightly in the darkness of the night than in a darkened area during the day” (*Meromei Sadeh, Pesachim 2a*).

Resolution of the Future

Also quite noteworthy is the intensity with which some of the Sages regarded this issue. There were, to be sure, some who held that the darkness of night is, after all, no more than a mere absence of light. No less a personage than the venerated R’ Sa’adya Ga’on maintains this position in his *sefer Emunos V’Dei’os*. However, the Maharsha (*Tamid 32a*) holds the opposite; in fact, so strongly does he feel that darkness is an actual creation that he calls the dissenting side “the opinion of the *minim* (heretics).” (The Maharsha does not name R’ Sa’adya Ga’on, and the latter would obviously dispute both the actual opinion, as well as the designation.)

In any event, it is worthwhile as well to cite the very fascinating proof that the Brisker Rav derives from one of the *piyutim* (hymns) of the Pesach Seder. The final verse of the composition, “*Va’yehi Bachatzi Ha’laylah*” states: קָרַב יוֹם אֲשֶׁר הוּא לֹא יוֹם וְלֹא לַיְלָה – “Bring near the day which (in essence) is neither day nor night.” This is a reference to *Acharis Hayamim* (the End of Days), which will feature a period of time that apparently will be neither day nor night. Now, such a contingency would be impossible if the darkness of nighttime is merely the absence of light. According to this school of thought, nighttime darkness results automatically from a lack of daylight; as such, whenever there is no daylight, there perforce is darkness. How, then, could the *piyut* speak of a situation that is “neither day nor night”? It must be, then, that the darkness of night is more than just the absence of light, thus allowing for the existence of a “third” type of day that is neither day nor night.

This thought is borne out by the very next line of the *piyut*, which states: רַם הוֹדַע כִּי לָךְ הַיּוֹם אַךְ לָךְ לַיְלָה – “O Exalted One! Make known that the day is Yours; even night is Yours.” This will be the effect of the new, third type of day. It will demonstrate – as per the derivation of the Brisker Rav – that night’s darkness was not just an automatic result of lack of daylight, but rather, “*af lecha laylah*” – even darkness, like light, is one of Your created entities (*K’motzei Shalal Rav*).

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