Light and Darkness

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Western culture is filled with the motif of light versus darkness. The media clearly emphasizes that light is associated with positive knowledge and goodness while darkness is a manifestation of evil. Horror movies revolve in shadows and darkness emphasizing the evil characters and plots, while “happier” movies are filled with much more theatrical light and brightness on the screen. Novels follow this same pattern. Authors use darkness to demonstrate evil and light to portray goodness in the characters, setting, or themes of a novel.

In *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad, darkness is such a central theme that it is important enough to be part of the book’s title. Taking place in the time of Europe’s imperialism over Africa, darkness engulfs Africa and its natives. The imperialists see the Africans as primitive and describe them as dark, cannibalistic beings living in a sea of darkness. Darkness therefore operates metaphorically and existentially in the novel, portraying a land and a people ignorant and primitive. England and imperialism seem to glow in a ray of light. However, Conrad hints to the darkness and malevolence that he personally feels about imperialism into the novel.

In the novel *Frankenstein*, by Mary Shelly, this same idea is conceptualized. The main character, a scientist, is consumed with a pursuit of knowledge, a desire to discover the secrets of life. By trying to create a man, the protagonist follows a ruthless search of “the light” of discovery that in the end becomes lethal. The novel, like a horror movie, however, progresses around shadows that block out the light. The being, the monster, which the protagonist created, becomes an embodiment of darkness, and the protagonist himself becomes a victim to that darkness which he himself created. The motif of light and darkness in non-Jewish society become realities.

While Judaism agrees with this separation of light and darkness, it is not as definitive, nor as rigid. With the Torah and the works of Mussar, light and darkness are manifested in many different ways. The Torah, like Western culture, portrays light at times as a goodness, a following in the ways of Hashem, and darkness as an evil, a digression and sinning against Hashem. Light at times can be signify redemption,
Gאולה, a positive reality, and darkness can be seen as exile, while darkness, or shade, is something that Баинישראל search for and desire. Throughout Tanach and Jewish history, light can be portrayed as a discomfort, a closeness to Hashem, or a symbolic manifestation of redemption. Parallel to this, darkness can represent comfort, a separation from Hashem or an expression of exile. Each of these different outlooks reveals a fundamental truth of Judaism and the relationship between Hashem and Баинישראל. This three pronged analysis of dark and light forms a cohesive portrait, one which is filled with bright colors and dark shades, that allow the beauty in Judaism to emerge.

In שיר השירים, the representative of Баинישראל, expresses her desire for shade from the דוד from Hashem. She describes, "do not gaze upon me, because I am black, because the sun has scorched me". This negative statement about her describes how she does not want to be darkened by the sun, rather as it states, "I sat down under his shade with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste". Баинישראל want the shade, comfort, sustenance, and protection from Hashem. This can be compared to many verses in תהלי where the shade denotes this protection for which the ריה longs. similarly, "For You have been a help to me, and in the shadow of Your wings I will joyfully sing. Additionally, "Hashem is your guardian, Hashem is your shade at your right hand. By day the sun will not smite you, nor the moon at night. Hashem will guard you from all evil; He will preserve your soul." Hashem guards and protects them from the sun. The shade, a positive connotation, is protecting from a destructive sun, guarding them from a heat that is synonymous to ממז. It is this sun that the ירה does not want, and it is this shade for which she pleads. The Torah uses this concept of shade, a type of darkness, to demonstrate
Hashem’s protection, and it is the sun, a type of light, from which בני ישראל are being protected.

However, while בני ישראל beg for the shade from Hashem, Hashem requests from בני ישראל to make an effort and come closer to Him. As the state: " Reached a place in which only one person enters, but close Hashem and it is the sun, a type of light, from which בני ישראל are being protected. However, while בני ישראל beg for the shade from Hashem, Hashem requests from בני ישראל to make an effort and come closer to Him. As ל' חז state: "Let my door be opened as a lodge for a hawk, and before me an open door: 'Arise My love, My fair one and go forth". Yet, בני ישראל do not rise to greet Hashem, and finally, Hashem turns away. Hashem leaves exposed to the heat, with no shade for solace, as it says "עַד שָׁמְעָה יְהוָה וּמִשְׁכְּנָהוּ לְעָוָן."

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In contrast to Yonah, lies the story of Avraham. Still in pain from his ברית מילה, Avraham sat out in the פָּנוּת לְיָדָיו waiting for the opportunity to fulfill the מצוה of הֵקִיע אֶל הַמָּחָר. As Rashi explains, Hashem intentionally caused a heat wave to occur. Hashem wanted to offer Avraham the chance to stay in his tent, in the shade, where he could heal comfortably. However, Avraham so much desired to perform acts of חסד that he did not allow the heat to stop him. In fact, Avraham was so preoccupied with the castor-oil plant that he didn’t even ask Hashem for shade.
Similarly, themitsvah ofסוכהexpresses the same idea of shade and sun-light. Even in theמצוה, who was originally unwilling to rise and greet Hashem, later searches for Him. The sun is no longer an embodiment of sin or badness, but rather it is a discomfort, andבני ישראלare willing to withstand the discomfort for Hashem. "I found myself throughout my days in the vineyard of Hashem, in it I delighted and sat and its fruit is sweet to my palate," like an apple-tree among the trees of the forest, so is my Beloved among the sons, in its shade I delighted and sat and its fruit is sweet to my palate" (שיר השירים ב:ג). The apple tree does not provide shade, but still compare Hashem to this. Although they want the shade, they ultimately want the substance from the apples, the Torah. These two views of light and shade exemplify man's relationship with Hashem. Man wants shade and comfort from Hashem, but to get this luxury man must be willing to make the effort. He must be willing to sometimes sit in the sun in order to reach a level of closeness with Hashem.

In contrast to this approach of light and shade, or darkness, exists a deeper and more fundamental aspect in the life ofבני ישראל:גלות וגאולה. Exile and redemption followבני ישראלthroughout the ages. From Egypt, to Bavel, to the exile of today, בני ישראלare constantly praying for the light of redemption. In התうちに, Hashem is described as a light and a shield, “כי שמש ומג אלוקי.” Radak explains thatבני ישראלare asking Hashem to be a great light for them in exile, and to take them out of the darkness and bring them into the light.

"On that day … I will make the sun set at noon, and I will darken the earth on a clear day. I will turn your festivals into mourning and all your songs into a dirge …" (עמוס ח:ט). Rashi explains that "on that day" refers to the day of theחורב. The beginning of the exile will be a day that the sun will leave and the happiness that accompanied theבית המקדשה will be replaced with mourning. When redemption arrives and Hashem is ready to bringבני ישראלback home, then, "You will no longer need the sun for daylight or the moon to give light at night. G-d will always be your light, and your G-d will be your glory” (ישעיהו ס:ט). Rashi and Ibn Ezra both explain that ישעיהו is describing the period of redemption. בני ישראלwill no longer need the superficial sun for light because Hashem’s light, the
eternal light, will have returned to earth. Here, light and dark take on a new dimension. The sun is no longer an unpleasant and undesirable physical discomfort, but rather the sun, the light, is a metaphorical and metaphysical state of redemption. Darkness is no longer a physical comfort that shades man from the sun, but rather representative of exile. In exile, one may find some physical comfort. However, it will be a darkness that will always lack the closeness to Hashem that only the light of redemption can bring.

As an extension to this view of light and dark, which, like in Western culture, light is positive and darkness is negative, the Torah builds and reshapes this motif to show another level of the relationship between Hashem and His people. The child lays in the dark, fearing the monster under his bed. It is only when his mother comes into the room and turns on the light that the child’s fears dissolve. Darkness, a scary reality, portrays בני ישראל’s separation from Hashem, while light denotes their closeness to Hashem. In (חֱז:יא)קהלת, it states \( \text{לָא רְאוּת אֶת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ.} \) Light is defined as “sweet” and it is good for a person to see this “radiance”. However, concerning darkness it is said in (יג:ב)משלי: \( \text{לְלֹא הוּא בְּדַרְכֵי חֲשָׁם} \). Those who turn away from the אמת, the truth, the light, walk in a darkness, thereby walking away from Hashem. (פרק ג)לת ישרי furthers this idea by saying that to do good and to find the “light” one must first examine what is truly good and adhere to it, and what is truly evil and run from it. The evil inclination, however, blinds man’s eyes, causing darkness and making it difficult for him to see and understand what is truly evil. This darkness can cause man to err in two ways. It can cover man’s eyes so that he cannot see what is in front of him at all, or the darkness can deceive man into thinking that a pillar that is in front of him is really a man or the man that is in front of him is really a pillar. It says in (ב:ה)ישעיהו: \( \text{לָא יְדַעֵֽו אֵֽהֲוָֽא בָּאֵֽהֲוָֽא} \), “The way of the wicked is like darkness; they know not at what they stumble”. This represents the first type of error caused by darkness. The רשע is in darkness because he can’t see the wrong that he is doing and on what he is stumbling. Secondly, a man who comes to see evil and think it is good or see good and think it is evil is under the influence of darkness and is subject to the rule of the evil inclination. As (ב:ה)ישעיהו says: \( \text{לָא רְאוּת אֶחָֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו} \). Man sees the good as bad and the dark as light.

Because of this destructive nature of obscurity, one must constantly search for ways to overcome the darkness, "לֹא יָדוּעָה אֶלֶֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵֽו אֲלֵessler. During the day, when things are clear and life seems easy,
man can see Hashem’s kindness; he can see the good. However, at night, when things are distorted and life gets hard, one must have אמונה.

In "משכבל בלילות, ובששון את שאהבת" (משלי 3:8), light and darkness go out in the night to search for the רע, Hashem. Even in the dark, even though the world at night is filled with robbers and wild animals, she finds the courage and faith to search for Hashem. Like Hashem desires, she is making an effort to find and be close to Hashem, even in the scariest of times. "Upon my bed at night, I sought the one I love". It is up to man to find a light from within to conquer the darkness, the רע, which dwells within him. While this approach can be seen as a parallel to Western culture - darkness as evil and light as goodness - the Torah amplifies these terms in a different way. This darkness is not an evil, but an obstacle. Darkness can be compared to this world, and light can be compared to the next world. The Maharal (ספר נצח גרשון) states that in the verse "וәמעון וְאָמֻנֶּת בְּבֵיתֵי ב' עָלְנוּ בְּבֵיתֵי ב' עָלְנוּ", morning refers to the next world, and night refers to this world. In the next world, man will see all the good and good from Hashem, but in this world, one must rely on faith, אמונה.

One must strengthen that faith, that light, from within to dispel the darkness. True light, the light from Hashem, can only be purely manifested in the world to come, and nature, this world, covers or shades this light. However, this darkness is not bad, but it exists for man to be able to strengthen his faith, and it exists so that one day man will be able to understand and see the true light in the עולם הבא. "The darkness is a means to gain greater reward. In addition, "מי שטרח בערב שבת יאכל בשבת" (ברית מיתר פרק ד שמות ען) states that in the verse "וַיָּשֶׂם ה' עַל עַמָּיו עַל אַרְץ גְּבוּל עוֹלָה" (שמות 12:12), "The darkness is a means to gain greater reward. In addition, "מי שטרח בערב שבת יאכל בשבת" (ברית מיתר פרק ד שמות ד). Performing מצוות in this world, preparing and working amid the darkness, allows man to enjoy the Shabbat, to enjoy the light of the world to come. While the darkness can cause a separation from Hashem, Hashem places the darkness there for a reason. It is not an evil, but a challenge for man to be able to see the true light in the עולם הבא.

Darkness and light are multifaceted concepts. In A Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens, the thread of darkness is used to express evil during the French Revolution. By being cast in shadows and darkness, the novel manifests the shadowy depths of the human heart. Many characters are consumed with this evil that leads to their ultimate destruction. Similarly, Lord of the Flies revolves around this darkness of the human heart. A group of boys stranded on an island become consumed with evil, having no order and society to keep them tamed. Shadows in the forest, tribal rituals held in the dead of the night, portray the boys' loss
of innocence and emergence into their own “heart of darkness.” It is a fire, a light, which saves the remaining boys, and returns them to society. The novels do not stray from the set stigma of light as good and dark as bad. However, the Torah has many approaches to these same terms. Man sees light, the sun, as a discomfort, and shade, darkness, as a desired state of being as well as one that is frightening. To man, both these terms, the sun and the darkness, are a representation of physical states. However, to Hashem, these terms are more than just physical; they are also metaphysical. Light and dark are spiritual states of being, means of closeness to or separation from Hashem, obstacles or rewards from Hashem. Each different approach to light and dark demonstrates the different relationships man has with Hashem. They demonstrate what man should strive for and what man should run from, how man should act and how man should think in relation to Hashem. The world was created with light and darkness. Both are dependent on each other, both build off each other.