

PARASHAT SH'MOT



אורות וכלים Lights and Means

■ They Multiplied and Grew

The Nation of Israel has lived and breathed miracles throughout its generations and history, and continues to do so even today. It would seem that among this long line of amazing wonders, the most incredible miracle of all was its very formation as a nation, during the period of its bondage in Egypt.

During the course of 210 years, a relatively short period in the history of a nation, the family of our Patriarch Yaakov sprouted up from just 70 souls to some three million people; some 600,000 of them were men aged 20 and over. This was a growth rate of almost 43,000-fold in just over two centuries! To grasp the fantastic proportions of these numbers, note that if the population of the State of Israel in 1948 – 600,000 people – would grow at this rate for 200 years, it would reach 25 billion (not including Aliyah)! Keep in mind that there are now (in late 2015) over 7.37 billion people in the entire world...

Though it sounds incredible and imaginary, this is precisely what happened with the Jewish nation in Egypt. The opening verses of the Book of Sh'mot distinctly impress upon us the massive building-up of the families of the Nation of Israel, by the thousands and myriads. Verse 7 states:

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| 1. <i>The Children of Israel were fruitful,</i> | וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל פָּרוּ |
| 2. <i>and increased abundantly</i> | וַיִּשְׂרְצוּ |
| 3. <i>and multiplied,</i> | וַיִּרְבוּ |
| 4. <i>and became strong,</i> | וַיַּעֲצְמוּ |
| 5. <i>exceedingly</i> | בְּמֵאֹד |
| 6. <i>and extremely.</i> | מְאֹד. |

The Torah seems to be using every synonym for “growth” it can find to depict an unprecedented population explosion. Each of these six words is chosen with precision to show how Hashem precisely fulfills His promises to our Forefathers. When G-d first forged the Covenant of Circumcision with Avraham, He promised him:

וְאֶתְנָהּ בְּרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ וְאַרְבֶּה אוֹתְךָ בְּמֵאֵד מְאֹד.
 ...וְהִפְרֵתִי אֹתְךָ בְּמֵאֵד מְאֹד וּנְתַתִּיךָ לְגוֹיִם...

*I have given My covenant between Myself and you,
 and I will multiply you greatly
 ...and I will make you exceedingly and
 extremely fruitful... (B'reshit 17,2-6)*

This promise, which was fulfilled completely in Egypt, is expressed by the 1st, 3rd, 5th and 6th of the above synonymous expressions of growth used here in Sh'mot: *fruitful* and *multiplying*, *exceedingly* and *extremely*.

In addition, before He destroyed S'dom and Amora, G-d used the 4th above expression to announce Avraham's success:

וְאַבְרָהָם הָיוּ יְהוּיָהּ לְגוֹי גָדוֹל וְעָצוּם...

Avraham will certainly become a great and strong nation... (18,18)

And finally, the remaining term, the second in the above list regarding the Children of Israel, is *vayishr'tzu*, meaning “*they increased abundantly*.” Its source is in Yaakov's blessing of Yosef's sons Menashe and Efraim; he said *v'yidgu*, “*may they multiply greatly like fish*” (B'reshit 48,16). What is the connection between the multiplicity of fish and *vayishr'tzu*? The answer is found in the account of Creation, where the verb used to describe the proliferation of fish is also *yishr'tzu*: “*The water shall teem with swarms of living creatures...*” (1,20)

All of G-d's promises are fulfilled, literally word for word. No force in the world can stop the fulfillment of the Divine plan – not even the diabolical scheming of Egypt's King Pharaoh. Quite the contrary: “*The more the Egyptians afflicted them, the more the Jews multiplied and grew strong*” (Sh'mot 1,12). The People of Israel continued to grow and multiply, and even the harshest conditions simply appeared to spur on more growth. The Egyptians tried with all their might to stop this astonishing increase with various frightful decrees, beginning with hard labor and continuing with the outright killing of newborn babies. But they had no success.

Our Sages described this amazing natural growth by saying that every pregnancy was of six fetuses, all born at one time. What stands behind this remarkable growth process? Is there another process intertwined with this one that we do not see?

There most certainly is.

■ The Suspension of the Prophetic Light

Let us note the verse that precedes this story of the Children of Israel's amazing growth: *“And Joseph died, as did all his brothers and that entire generation.”* (verse 6)

The Torah makes sure to clearly emphasize the link between the disappearance of the generation of Patriarchs – a generation totally enwrapped in prophecies, visions and holy dreams – and the beginning of the natural increase of the nation. The Torah is teaching us that it had to be this way: The previous generation of Patriarchs and Prophets, together with their prophecy and heavenly spiritual inspiration, had to leave the stage in order to allow the nation to be fruitful and multiply.

Our holy fathers Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, as well as the next generation, notably Yosef – all had children only with great difficulties. Sarah, Rivka and Rachel were all barren for a very long time, until they finally miraculously gave birth to one or two sons each. Yosef, as well, only had two sons, despite the conditions of abundance in which he lived.

Throughout this time, Hashem very often blessed the Patriarchs that their seed should be “as the sand on the shores” and “like the stars of the heavens.” Barely a prophecy was given to the Patriarchs that did not include a blessing for many descendants. In practice, however, the Patriarchs did not see the fruits of these blessings. The promises began to come true only when the period of Prophecy and Divine dreams ended. Only then, during the period of prophetic darkness and lack of overt connection with Divine Providence, did this astounding period of “six babies in one womb” begin.

Why did the great Prophetic light have to be hidden away to enable this massive birthrate?

■ Speaking Animals of Fire

In the Book of Yechezkel, filled with prophetic descriptions and visions of the upper spiritual world, we read of “fiery animals” bearing a heavenly firmament above their heads. They are called חשמל, *hashmal*:

...ומתֹּכָה בְּעֵין הַחֲשָׁמַל מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ, וּמִתּוֹכָה דְמוֹת אַרְבַּע חַיִּוֹת...
 מְרֵאִיהֶם כְּגַחְלֵי אֵשׁ בְּעָרוֹת...
 ...and from its midst, like the hashmal from within the fire,
 and from its midst, the likeness of four living beings...
 their appearance was like fiery coals... (Yechezkel 1,4-13)

Why are these animals of fire called by this strange word *hashmal*, which has been adopted by modern Hebrew to mean “electricity”?

The Talmud (Hagigah 13b) explains that this word is a symbolic type of abbreviation of the phrase חַיִּוֹת אֵשׁ מִמְּלִלוֹת, *hayot esh m'malelot*, which Rashi explains as meaning “animals that speak fire.” The Talmud adds that it is also a compound word *hash-mal*, meaning, “sometimes silent (*hash*), sometimes speaking (*mal*).” That is, when G-d emits His Divine speech, these animals are silent, but when G-d is silent, they speak.

These fire beings are a very superior type of angels, representing all life upon the face of the earth. When their faces are lifted upward to receive the upper Divine light, they are silent and attentive. But when the illumination of the Divine light is stopped, they turn downwards, to speak and influence.

Teaching this concept, our Sages establish a very important principle: When one is engaged in giving and influencing others, he cannot receive, and when engaged in absorbing, he cannot give off or transmit to others.

This is a very significant principle in Jewish Law, such as in the laws of salting meat for the purpose of removing its forbidden blood. One is permitted to salt several pieces of meat, one atop the other, in a perforated utensil (so that the blood will drain off). We may wonder: Why is this allowed, if the blood that is expelled from the top piece will likely be absorbed into the pieces below?

The answer is rooted in the principle established above. When the meat is busy giving off blood via the salt sprinkled upon it, it cannot at the same time absorb blood from elsewhere. Two opposite actions cannot take place at the same time.

This principle also helps us understand what goes on during an argument. People, too, cannot give off and accept at the same time. If one disputant is busy explaining himself very heatedly, he is unable to hear the other, and certainly cannot understand or absorb his message. Only once he stops to listen, can he begin to understand.

■ **Dreams and Senses**

Another example: When one is in a deep sleep, his senses are “in neutral” and inoperative. He is quite unable to wield influence over others, nor can he lead or take action. Yet it is precisely then, during sleep, that his spiritual conduits are opened, and the wellsprings of spiritual plenty begin to spout forth Divine light onto the soul. Sleep is the time of communication between the soul and its source; it is the time of accepting and receiving, not a time of giving. Only when the stream of Divine abundance ceases does the person awaken from his sleep, ready to use his powers in full force.

This, too, is precisely how prophecy occurs. A prophet receiving G-d's word would generally be asleep with his face down; only once the prophecy stopped, would he be able to speak and act and have influence over others.

Moshe Rabbeinu was an exception to this rule. During the day, when he was totally awake, active and interacting with the People of Israel, he was able to receive G-d's word to him at the same time. He was like a simultaneous translator, able to hear and absorb Divine speech and at the same time give it over in another language.

Something like this once occurred with the Prophet Samuel as well. Even while he was actively engaged in reviewing the sons of Jesse to see who was suitable to be King, he received, and accepted, the Divine word that David was to be chosen: “*Arise and anoint him,*” Hashem told Shmuel, “*for he is the one.*” (Shmuel I 16,12)

■ **Studying for Breadth and in Depth**

Another manifestation of this principle is this: When a person reads Psalms out loud, or reviews Mishnayot, or reads the Torah, he is involved in the dynamics of “absorbing,” which spurs him on to accomplish more. His enjoyment comes from absorbing new material, and his sense of fulfillment stems from his progress and the amount he has accomplished. He is not delving into the depths of what he is studying, but is rather absorbing more and more words of Torah and the Sages.

This is not the case when one studies in depth, where he must invest great efforts in thinking creatively and expressing new ideas. This is the time for working with what he has absorbed, for asking questions, for making comparisons – actions that put a halt to dynamic progress. New channels of expression of thoughts and ideas from within the soul are opened. He is not absorbing, but rather giving out.

For this reason, we cannot combine the two types of learning – *b'kiut* (study for breadth) and *iyun* (study in depth). They are opposites, essentially contradicting each other; we cannot be engaged in both at the same time.

■ In the Hidden Terrace

Let us now return to our original question: Why did the great prophetic light that filled Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov in every aspect of their lives not enable them to reproduce and multiply? Why were the Patriarchs not privileged to experience the fulfillment of G-d's many blessings for abundant descendants?

The answer is because when spiritual ties are directed upward, they cannot develop downward, towards child-bearing and rearing, at the same time. The total involvement that is required for building a nation cannot co-exist with total devotion to spiritual pursuits. The two directions cannot be taken simultaneously.

Let us elaborate: The appearance of “prophetic light” fills us with vision replete with great spiritual ambitions. Lights of this type flood the soul with longing for the revelation of the Divine Presence that is to spread throughout the entire world.

Clearly, these ambitions include within them the means by which they can be fulfilled – but these will be revealed only when the ambitions are moderated and toned down. Then, when the missions have been accomplished, the ambitions will once again return in full force, and will become true reality.

The ambitions are called “lights,” and the means are called “tools” or “utensils.” The lights include within them the tools in their abstract form. The lights must be hidden away and contracted in order that the tools be revealed – and when they do, the lights will once again return and dwell within them.

Only when the Prophetic Light of the generation of the founding forefathers was hidden away – that is, when Yosef and his generation died out – could

the great blessings that G-d had given the Patriarchs begin to come to fruition. Only then did the true “population explosion,” the growth of the body of the nation, occur. Only then did the blessing of *“so shall your descendants be [like the stars of the heavens]”* (B'reshit 15,5) begin to take real shape. The population of the Nation of Israel is the “tools” by which the spiritual light of the Kingdom of Hashem will appear.

Jewish history then continued this way for 210 years, without Priests and Prophets, without leaders and Divine guidance. The Torah makes no mention at all of these four generations, and they left behind absolutely no prophetic legacy.

But on the other hand, this was a period of building the strongest foundations for the Nation of Israel, upon which the Divine Presence would dwell and on which the Light of Hashem would appear and illuminate. It happened at the Stand at Mt. Sinai, and will occur with the construction of the Beit HaMikdash and the establishment of the Kingdom of Israel in the Land of Israel.

■ Today

The applications of this teaching for our times are poignant.

The State of Israel is developing at a rapid pace: Houses, communities, and cities; roads and bridges; industry, agriculture, medicine and technology; government and army. All of this phenomenal development is occurring under a mantle of secularism. This is a period of Prophetic darkness, lacking inspiration from our Prophets of truth and justice. Many have turned their backs against the G-d of Israel and His eternally sanctified land. Instead of longing for G-d's closeness, we see a deterioration towards Western culture and its sanctification of materialism and personal indulgence. We find the desecration of the holiness of physical relations, the dismantling of family cohesion, and the violation of the covenant between G-d and His world.

And it is precisely during this period, just like during the darkness in Egypt, that our great physical national infrastructures are being built. This is the time for the construction of the tremendous utensils into which G-d will pour great spiritual inspiration, and which will provide genuine content for the physical infrastructures thankfully being built here in the Land of Israel.

When the longed-for hour arrives, at the right time, the Prophets of truth and justice will once again appear, in the name of G-d, and will bestow sanctified content upon the entire House of Israel. We will then be worthy of being called the People of G-d, and our Land, Eretz Yisrael, shall once again be called the Inheritance of G-d.

Over the past 67 years since the State of Israel was established, we have certainly made significant progress. But it is hidden, as alluded to in King Solomon's Song of Songs, in a verse relating to the formation of the Nation of Israel in Egypt. It sums up our steady-but-hidden advance towards Redemption in these words:

יוֹנֵתִי בַּחֲגוּי הַסֵּלַע בְּסִתְרֵי הַמְּדִרְגָּה...

*My dove in the clefts of the rock,
in the hidden place of the terrace...* (Shir HaShirim 2,14)

It refers to a terrace, which is a large step up – but it is hidden. We are progressing. The tools are being prepared for the spiritual bounty that we do not yet see, but which is certainly on its way.

