
FAMINE AND *PIRYA VERIVYEH*

ונתוספה להם יוכבד בין החומות

And Yocheved was added to them between the ramparts. (Rashi, *Bereishis* 46:26).

Rashi is evidently puzzled by the Torah's statement that: "All the souls of the house of Yaakov that came into Egypt were seventy." By all counts, the total number of people arriving with Yaakov was only sixty-nine. How could the Torah have stated that there were seventy? Rashi concludes that Yocheved was conceived in *Eretz Canaan*, but was born just as they entered Mitzraim, thus rounding out the number to seventy (*Bava Basra* 123:).

The Rosh (*Pesachim* 10:40; Radak , *Shoftim* 9:5) suggests that the round number of seventy presented by the Torah is merely a literary style of rounding off a number to the nearest ten and cites examples of this technique: the tendency of the Torah to refer to the forty-nine days of the *Omer* as fifty days; or the practice of referring to the thirty-nine lashes administered by the court as forty lashes. The proposition of the Rosh is difficult to accept in light of a number of passages in the *Gemara* which ask similar questions, but do not resort to a similar solution:

- *Ta'anis* (29.) asks how the Torah could label the *meraglim's* expedition in *Eretz Canaan* as a forty day sojourn, when in reality it lasted only thirty-nine days?
- *Kidushin* (38.) asks: how can the Torah state that the manna fell for forty years when it actually fell for thirty days short of the full forty years?

- *Sanhedrin* (107:) questions the stated term of David *Hamelech's* tenure as forty years; that would leave a discrepancy of six months.

The Rashbam (*Bereishis* 46:26), in his discussion of the phrase “All the souls were sixty-six,” proposes that Moshe *Rabbeinu* was included (*Devarim* 10:22) in the count of seventy. The *Yalkut* (ibid.) presents two views: the first, that Hashem was included, the second, that Yaakov was included in the count of his offspring. Rashi's aforementioned explanation seems the most likely, but it leaves us with a dramatic question. The *Gemara* (*Ta'anis* 11•) categorically states that it is prohibited to have marital relations during years of famine. This is deduced from the *pasuk*:

וליוסף ילד שני בנים בטרם תבוא שנת הרעב
And unto Yosef were born two sons before the year
of famine came (*Bereishis* 41:50).

Therefore, *Tosafos* (*Ta'anis* 11.) asks: in light of this dictum, how could Levi father Yocheved during the years of famine? Tosfos responds that Yosef's act of abstinence was only an act of *chasidus* (zealousness), but in actuality, it was permitted for all men to continue to procreate.

Tosafos' conclusion is hard to understand in view of the fact that of all the *Shivtei Kah*, Levi was identified as the *chasid*:

וללוי אמר תמיד ואוריך לאיש חסידך
And of Levi he [Moshe] said: “Your *Tumim* and
your *Urim* be with your zealous one” (*Devarim*
33:8).

Levi was designated with special holiness while still in his mother's womb (Rashi, *Bereishis* 29:34), and was therefore selected for the Priesthood. In general, Levi was unique because he was “separated to serve Hashem” (Rambam, *Hilchos Shemitah Veyoveil* 13:12). It would not seem appropriate to accuse Levi (as *Tosafos* does) of being any less zealous than Yosef!

The *Torah Temimah* (*Bereishis* 41:50) suggests that the difference in status between the permissiveness of Levi and the

abstinence of Yosef lies in the fundamental principles of degrees of suffering. Because Levi was actually suffering from the famine, it was not necessary to introduce the pain of further denial. Yosef was not personally involved with the famine, but was only an observer from the sidelines. It was necessary for him to impose additional elements of self-denial so that he could more profoundly empathize with the actual sufferers. Therefore, the *Gemara* concludes with the phrase:

דכל המשתתף עם הצבור רואה בנחמת צבור
He who participates in the suffering of the public
will ultimately participate in their comfort (*Ta'anis*
11.).

The Chizkuni (*Bereishis* 41:50) expands on this theme a bit differently. He writes that Yosef took the road of self-denial so that he could more easily empathize with the sufferers; but Levi knew that his family was not really suffering (they had secretly hoarded food) and so they had no need for additional impositions. The difficulty with this thesis is that it presupposes that Levi did not take the suffering of the other inhabitants of *Eretz Canaan* into account. Although Levi's family might not have been directly affected by the famine, he should still have been sympathetic to the suffering of his fellow citizens. The implications are obvious. Once the family of Yaakov is established as the *Am Hanivchar* they are no longer responsible for the well being of the other nations (*Avodah Zarah* 20.).

The Maharal (*Gur Aryeh, Bereishis* 41:50) makes two fascinating proposals. The *mitzvah* of *piryah verivyeh* (propagation) mandates the birth of viable male and female offspring. Levi, who thus far had only sons, was permitted marital relations, even in the years of famine, because he had to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *piryah verivyeh*. Yosef, the Maharal suggests, might already have had a daughter prior to the birth of his sons. In addition to this he presents a second proposal: abstinence during a famine is dependent upon one's knowledge of the time limit for the suffering. Yosef, who knew that the duration of the famine would be seven years, was

obligated to abstain. Levi, on the other hand, had no knowledge of the time limit of the suffering, and was therefore mandated to have children, for one may not postpone the reproduction of children indefinitely. Similarly, Yitzchak, who had not yet fulfilled the obligation of *piryah verivyeh* was permitted marital relations during the famine in the land of the *Pilishtim* (Rashi, *Bereishis* 26:8).

The Taz (*Orach Chaim* 574:4) quotes the *Beis Yosef* that before *Matan Torah*, marital relations during a famine was definitely permitted. The statement of the *Gemara* (*Ta'anis* 11.) linking Yosef's action to the concept of abstinence during a famine is merely suggestive (*asmachta*), for Yosef was certainly under no halachic obligation to refrain from marital relations.

It is interesting to note that Noach and his sons were ordered by Hashem to cease and desist from marital relations during the flood (*Bereishis Rabbah* 31:12). The Redak (*Bereishis* 6:18) declares that it was only appropriate that while the entire world was being annihilated, the survivors should refrain from indulging in physical pleasures. As much as *piryah verivyeh* is a *mitzvah*, when the suffering is of world-wide magnitude, then abstinence becomes mandatory.

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YISSACHAR AND ZEVULUN

In both Yaakov Avinu's and Moshe Rabbeinu's blessings, we find Zevulun preceding Yissachar (*Bereishis* 49:13, *Devarim* 33:18), although he was born after Yissachar. The *Zohar* (*Devarim* 33:18) poses the question that Yissachar, who was *Klal Yisrael*'s Torah leader, should have been listed before Zevulun, for Torah takes precedence over everything else. The answer lies in the financial contract in which Zevulun supported Yissachar's Torah learning. The *Zohar* explains that this arrangement gave Zevulun the merit of being listed first. He who supports Torah merits both *Olom Hazeh* and *Olom Haba*. Zevulun had *Olom Hazeh* because he had the wealth obtained from his mercantile trade and he also merited the reward of *Olom Haba*. This does not imply that Zevulun did not learn Torah on his own, for he certainly did learn Torah; his special merit, however, was due to the fact that he

withheld bread from his mouth, while providing for the mouth of Yissachar
(*Zohar, Devarim* 33:18).

This is indicated by Yaakov's use of the word "*chof*" — "shore" — twice, "sea shore...shore for ships"); the first *chof* indicates *Olom Hazeh*, and the second *chof* indicates *Olom Haba* (*Zohar, ibid.*).

The *Sifri* (*Devarim* 33:10) offers another glimpse into the unique role of Zevulun. He was entrusted with the task of attracting the nations of the world to Judaism. In their commercial endeavors, the merchants of the world had to visit Zevulun's territory. Once they were in *Eretz Yisrael*, they then proceeded to visit Yirushalayim, where they became impressed with Judaism and asked to be converted. Zevulun was responsible for the initial contact with the nations.

Zevulun's prosperity is ordained in Moshe's blessing:

כִּי שָׁפַע יָמִים יִינָקוּ וְשָׁפְנֵי טְמוּנֵי חוֹל

They shall suck the abundance of the seas, and the hidden treasures of the sands
(*Devarim* 33:19).

The *Gemara* (*Megillah* 6•) indicates that their wealth came from the capture of the *chilazon*, from commerce in tunny fish, and from the manufacture of white glass from the sands of the sea shore. It is obvious that the good fortune of Zevulun was linked to the seas. As mentioned earlier, (page 35) the seas represent the great nemesis of mankind. The earth was at first covered with water, and Hashem had to forcibly make room for man. Adam *Harishon* had dominion over all aspects of creation, but not over the seas (and fish). The *Olom Hazeh* merit of Zevulun is now much more profound; of all humanity he seemed to be the closest to having dominion over the seas, for the sea was his blessing in life.

It is thus startling to discover that Zevulun registered dissatisfaction with his lot to Hashem (*Megillah* 6•). Zevulun complained,

לאחיי נתת להם שדות וכרמים... ולי נתת ימים ונהרות

To my brothers You have given fields and vineyards... and to me You have given lakes and rivers.

With all his wealth and potential power in the service of Hashem, why was he unsatisfied; why did he complain? The Maharsha (*Megillah* 6•) puts it all in perspective by pointing out that both Yissachar and Zevulun shared the same territories, but only Zevulun registered a complaint. Yissachar were *ba'alei Torah*, so they were satisfied with their lot in life, although they chose not to involve themselves in mundane labor. Zevulun, who was appointed to harvest the seas both physically and spiritually, did not fully comprehend his assigned duties. He did not have a deep enough understanding of his role because he lacked depth in his personal Torah learning. Perhaps if he had been a *ba'al Torah*, as described by the Maharsha, he would have understood his assigned lot of utilizing the physical to perfect the spiritual, but due to this short-coming, he could not complete the task of Adam *Harishon*.

Although Yissachar reached the greatest heights in Torah, he, too, did not complete the task of Adam *Harishon*. Yissachar confined himself solely to the spiritual realm; he did not occupy himself with the mundane. To emulate Adam *Harishon*, it was necessary to be involved on both the physical and spiritual levels. The Rambam (*Pirkei Avos* 1:10) interprets the *pasuk*

ויקח ה' אלקים את האדם וינחהו בגן עדן לעבדה ולשמרה

And Hashem took the man, and put him in the Garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it (*Bereishis* 2:15),

to indicate Adam's involvement with worldly endeavors. Thus, as there are two sides of a coin, there are dual roles to be played by the heir to Adam *Harishon's* task. Excellence in Torah exertion is requisite, but involvement with the physical world is also necessary.

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