

A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

This weekly sheet is brought to you by Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman of Northwood United Synagogue in conjunction with Shapell's/Darché Noam

PARSHAT VAYIGASH

DVAR TORAH: JOY MIXED WITH DREAD

What is the mood of the Torah's account of Yaakov's trip to Egypt in this week's parshah?

On the one hand, it is joyous. Yaakov and his beloved son Yosef will finally be reunited. There will finally be an end to the tension and mourning that began when Yaakov saw the blood stains on Yosef's coat decades earlier. After Yosef and his brothers so dramatically reunited, Yaakov's family can now grow as a unit, as "Bnei Yisrael." They also now breathe a sigh of relief as they see how Divine hand saved them from the grip of the famine. Yosef will sustain them. Yaakov's sons were instantly transformed from anonymous grain purchasers, just another faceless ten hungry people among thousands of others streaming to Egypt, to the favored family of the Egyptian viceroy, protected and elite.

But other emotions cloud the natural joy of that family reunion. Mixed in with happiness was fear, worry, dread. Hovering over Avraham's descendants is the ominous vision he had of exile in a strange land. Is that prophecy finally coming true? Is so, doesn't that also entail "They will enslave and torture them four hundred years? This is also the land where Yaakov's grandmother Sarah was snatched from Avraham and brought to Pharaoh, escaping only through miraculous intervention. How will the family survive Egyptian idolatry and culture?

Yaakov goes to Be'er Sheva and "offers sacrifices to the God of his father Yitzchak. Why Yitzchak, not Avraham?

Midrashim and commentators grapple with this, but Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchov ז"ל (קדושת לוי ויגש) (ד"ה ויזבח) suggests the following: Yaakov did not really want to descend to Egypt. Whereas Avraham was forced to go down to Egypt during a famine, Yitzchak was able to stay in the land of Canaan. God forbade him from going down to Egypt. Yaakov attempted to prevent the descent to Egypt by taking on a Yitzchak-like approach – to be Yitzchak. He went to Be'er Sheva and "wanted to cling to the middah of his father Yitzchak." But Hashem had other plans.

In "visions of the night" Hashem reassures Yaakov. "Do not fear the descent to Egypt ... I (אנכי) will go down with you, and I (אנכי) will surely also bring you back up" (Bereishit 46:4). Says Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchov ז"ל (קדושת לוי ויגש ד"ה או יבואר אנכי) explains. Hashem is telling Yaakov, between the lines, that the goal of the descent to Egypt, the necessary descent to Egypt, is the אנכי of the giving of the Torah. Through the Egyptian slavery the people of Israel will be formed, a people that will be elevated to a state where the Divine name, the אנכי, is revealed within each and every one of them. Whereas Hashem revealed Himself to Yitzchak, telling him not to descend to Egypt (Bereishit 26:2), He now tells Yaakov – as He did to Avraham before him – "Do not fear the descent to Egypt." The mood changes to one of reassurance and security. Hashem is with Yaakov, and will be with his descendants.

SOURCE GUIDE: COUNTING TO 70

The Midrash points out a glaring difficulty with one of the verses in the parshah. The Torah says that there were seventy people in Yaakov's household, but the count seems to only come to sixty-nine.

<p>1. Bereishit 46:26-27 (26) All the people coming to Egypt with Yaakov, those descended from him, excluding the wives of Yaakov's sons, all the people were sixty-six. (27) And Yosef's sons, who were born to him in Egypt, two people; all the people of the house of Yaakov who came to Egypt were seventy.</p>	<p>בראשית מו:כו-כז (כו) כָּל הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַבָּאָה לְיַעֲקֹב מִצְרַיִם יֵצְאֵי יִרְכּוּ מִלְּבַד נָשִׁי בְנֵי יַעֲקֹב כֹּל נֶפֶשׁ שְׂשִׁים וְשֵׁשׁ: (כז) וּבְנֵי יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר יָלַד לוֹ בְּמִצְרַיִם נֶפֶשׁ שָׁנַיִם כֹּל הַנֶּפֶשׁ לְבֵית יַעֲקֹב הַבָּאָה מִצְרַיִם שְׁבָעִים:</p>
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The number is repeated in the beginning of the book of Shemot:

<p>2. Shemot 1:5 (5) All of Yaakov's offspring were seventy people; and Yosef was in Egypt.</p>	<p>שמות א:ה (ה) וַיְהִי כֹל נֶפֶשׁ יֵצְאֵי יִרְךָ יַעֲקֹב שְׁבָעִים נֶפֶשׁ וַיֹּסֶף הֵיחָד בְּמִצְרַיִם:</p>
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The Midrash raises the difficulty – the numbers don't add up – in a humorous way:

<p>3. Midrash Rabbah Bereishit 94:9 Rabbi Levi quoted Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman: In all of your days did you ever see a person give his friend sixty-six cups and then give him an extra three, and count them as seventy?!</p>	<p>מדרש רבה בראשית צד:ט רבי לוי בשם רבי שמואל בר נחמן: ראית מימך אדם נותן לחבירו ששים וששה כוסות וחוזר ונותן לו אף שלשה והוא מונה אותם שבעים?!</p>
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Two of the commentators on the Midrash (Imrei Yosher and Yedei Moshe) explain why the Midrash chose to express the question in this way. The Midrash wanted to reject the knee-jerk response: "The Torah merely used a round number. Doesn't the Torah refer to the thirty-nine lashes as forty?" To that the Midrash responds: That would be a possibility if the Torah didn't count the people 'like it was counting cups.' But here the Torah seems to be adding up the items on a spreadsheet and telling us 66 + 3 + 70! The Midrash offers five solutions (some of them adopted by the commentators).

Solution #1

<p>4. Midrash Rabbah Bereishit 94:9 Rather, this [last person who brings the count to 70] is Yocheved, who completed the count of Israel in Egypt. Rabbi Levi quoted Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman saying that Yocheved's conception was in the land of Canaan and her birth was in Egypt.</p>	<p>מדרש רבה בראשית צד:ט אלא זו יוכבד שהשלימה מנין של ישראל במצרים רבי לוי בשם רבי שמואל בר נחמן אמר יוכבד עבורה בארץ כנען ולידתה בארץ מצרים.</p>
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Solution #2

<p>5. Midrash Rabbah Bereishit 94:9 There are those who say that Yaakov completed the count along with them. Rabbi Yitzchak said this is compared to two legions of the king, the Decumani and the Augustiani. When the king is counted with one legion, that legion is considered complete, and when he is counted with the other, that other one is considered complete.</p>	<p>מדרש רבה בראשית צד:ט ויש אומרים יעקב השלים עמהם את המנין אמר רבי יצחק משל לשתי לגיונות של מלך דיוקמנייא וגאוסטיינא בשעה שהמלך נמנה עם אלו נמצאו שלמים ובשעה שהמלך עוד נמנה עם אלו נמצאו שלמים.</p>
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Solution #3

<p>6. Midrash Rabbah Bereishit 94:9 There are those who say that the Holy One, blessed be He, completes the count along with them.</p>	<p>מדרש רבה בראשית צד:ט וי"א הקב"ה השלים עמהם את המנין.</p>
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This is developed in another midrash:

<p>7. Pirkei D'Rebbi Eliezer 38 When they reached the border of Egypt all of the males in the family were accounted for – sixty-six men. And when you add Yosef and his two sons in Egypt they make sixty-nine, yet it is written in the Torah as "seventy people"! What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He entered into the count with them and their number came out to seventy. This fulfills the verse that says, "I will go down with you to Egypt" (Bereishit 46:4). And when Israel came up from Egypt all of the males in the family were counted, and they were missing one. What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He entered into the count with them, to fulfill the verse that says, "I will surely come up with you [from Egypt]" (Bereishit 46:4).</p>	<p>פרקי דרבי אליעזר פרק לח וכשבאו לגבול מצרים נתייחסו כל הזכרים ששים ושש איש ויוסף ושני בניו במצרים הרי תשעה וששים וכת"י בשבעים נפש מה עשה הב"ה נכנס במניין עמהם ועלו במספר שבעים נפש לקיים מה שנ' אנכי ארד עמך מצרימה וכשעלו ישראל ממצרים נתייחסו כל הזכרים ששים רבוא חסר אחד מה עשה הב"ה נכנס במניין עמהם ועלה במספר עמהם לקיים מה שנ' ואנכי אעלך גם עלה.</p>
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Hashem counts Himself among the exiled and the redeemed (see Rashi on Devarim 30:3)!

Solution #4

<p>Midrash Rabbah Bereishit 94:9 There are those who say that Chushim son of Dan completed the count. In the Torah of Rabbi Meir they found it written "And the son of Dan was Chushim."</p>	<p>מדרש רבה בראשית צד ט ויש אומרים חושים בן דן השלים עמהן את המנין בתורתו של רבי מאיר מצאו כתוב ובן דן חושים.</p>
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This approach seems astounding. Wasn't Chushim son of Dan already counted as part of the sixty-nine (Bereishit 46:23)? Commentators suggest that the Midrash is based on the word **בני**, "children of", written here in the plural form. That indicates that Chushim is to be counted as more than one. Why? As the Midrash later brings, he had a tremendous amount of descendants, and was treated like a double person (his name is also in the plural. This is supported by Rabbi Meir's notes on the Torah ("the Sefer Torah of Rabbi Meir") indicating that in truth there was only one person named Chushim and the Torah is hinting at something special about Chushim by using the plural (some commentators read this in exactly the opposite way – that Rabbi Meir argues with the approach that Chushim was the one who completed the count).

Solution #5

<p>Midrash Rabbah Bereishit 94:9 There are those who say that Serach the daughter of Asher completed the count.</p>	<p>מדרש רבה בראשית צד ט וי"א סרח בת אשר השלימה עמהן את המנין</p>
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This approach raises the same difficulty as the previous solution – Isn't Serach also listed above? Shouldn't she also be part of the sixty-nine? Two suggestions appear in the commentators: One (Eitz Yosef, Yefeh Toar) is that she was an extremely wise woman, lived an extremely long life (she appears as the woman who saved the city of Aveilah from being destroyed by Yoav – see Shmuel II 20:1-22), and deserves to be counted as two. The Nezer Hakodesh suggests that, according to the Zohar, great tzadikim like Serach have no disconnect between their upper and lower selves, Serach's upper soul was also counted among the seventy.

For the Maharal's discussion of this Midrash see Gevurot Hashem Chapter 13.

YEHUDAH, YOSEF, & THE MESSIANIC DREIDEL

BY RABBI GIDON SHOSHAN

In this week's parshah we read about the beginning of the Egyptian exile. The verse describes how the very first step into exile was taken by Yehudah, as he was sent by his father to Yosef, to prepare the area of Goshen for the rest of the Jewish families' arrival. Why was Yehudah sent to Yosef?

The Bnei Yissas'char offers a famous and remarkable explanation of this important moment in Jewish history. The Egyptian exile and our exodus from it were the paradigms of all future exiles and redemptions. It was our trip to Egypt that laid the spiritual groundwork for any future banishment from the land and the leaving of Egypt that provides hope and potential for all future salvations. For this reason God at Sinai, and we in our prayers, invoke the exodus from Egypt as the single, most powerful event in world history.

Yaakov understood that it would be necessary to begin the process of redemption from Egypt – and redemption from all forms of exile – even before the exile itself began. For this reason he sent Yehudah, the forebear of the Davidic Mashiach, to convene with Yosef, the forebear of Mashiach ben Yosef, to prepare the exile for all future redemptions.

Amazingly, when describing the trip “to Goshen” the Torah uses the alternative form **גשנה**. The Maharal writes that these four letters, **נ-ג-ש-ה**, allude to the four exiles. Nun, standing for **נפש**, soul, alludes to the Babylonian exile which ended the Temple rite. Gimel, standing for **גוף**, body, refers to the Persian attempt to annihilate us physically. Shin, standing for **שכל**, mind, refers to the Greek attempt to destroy our intellectual purity. Hei is a reference to the last exile, the one in which we currently are, one that began with the second Temple destruction, was followed by physical threat, and now attempts to destroy us through the attractive, ideological assimilation. It stands for **הכל**, everything.

When Yehudah and Yosef prepared for the exile, it was the Egyptian exile and the four **גשנה** exiles to follow. **גשנה**, whose numerical equivalent is 358, would be ultimately neutralized by **משיח**, whose equivalent is also 358. It is for this reason that on Chanukah we celebrate by spinning the dreidel, a four sided piece of wood decorated with the letters **גשנה**, gimel, shin, nun, and hei. They represent the four exiles which have cast us to the four corners of the earth. We will ultimately be redeemed by the one single unifying point upon which they all spin, the unified and reunited people of Israel. As the prophet Yechezkel says in this week's haftorah, “Take one piece of wood and write on it for Yehudah, and one piece of wood and write on it for Yosef, bring them together in your hand and fuse them, for they will be one” (Yechezkel 37:16-17) – may it be soon.

This issue is dedicated in memory of
Nechama Leiba bas Yosef ז"ל

*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples' programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at www.darchenoam.org +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

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