

**PARASHAT HASHAVUA**

**PARASHAT VAYIGASH**

**By Rav Yaakov Meidan**

These are the Names of the Children of Israel – Names and Numbers

Our parasha contains the list of the seventy members of Yaakov's house who came to Egypt. The list is rife with difficulties.

I) Chetzron and Chamul

These two sons of Peretz son of Yehuda are mentioned among those who descended to Egypt during the years of famine. The commentaries have already raised the difficulties concerning the closeness of events in Yehuda's life, which take place during the twenty two years that elapse between the sale of Yosef and the descent of Yaakov's family to Egypt. It will be recalled that Joseph was seventeen at the time that he was sold, thirty at the time of his appointment as viceroy, and that a further seven years of plenty and two years of famine passed before the descent to Egypt. During the course of those twenty-two years, Yehuda married the daughter of Shua, and begat Er and Onan. These two sons consecutively married Tamar and then died. 'Many days passed' before Tamar was deemed able to marry Shela. In the meantime, Yehuda married Tamar and begat Peretz. Peretz himself grew up, married, and begat Chetzron and Chamul who were among those who descended to Egypt. In other words, during the course of twenty two years, three generations were born to Yehuda and came of age, not to mention the 'many days' that Tamar waited in vain for the levirate marriage to take place.

The two well-known approaches to this problem are those of Avraham Ibn Ezra (on Bereishit 39:1) and Rashi. The former suggests that the events surrounding Tamar and Yehuda actually transpired many years before the sale of Yosef, and that the Torah records these events out of strict chronological sequence. The Chizkuni echoes Rashi's

claim that the sections are in fact recorded in their correct order but suggests instead that earlier generations had children at a very young age (i.e., seven years – see TB Sanhedrin 69b).

Both of these explanations are difficult to accept. The Chizkuni's approach assumes three consecutive generations of childbearing at the age of seven, although the generation immediately preceding and succeeding this anomaly clearly did not follow this pattern. Yaakov, for instance, begat Yehuda at the age of about eighty, and Chetzron begat Kalev (identified by our Sages with Kalev ben Yefuneh) at about the age of one hundred and seventy. How unusual therefore, to find three generations compressed into a period of twenty-two years.

The Ibn Ezra's approach is no less satisfactory and in a number of articles (see for instance, Megadim 2) I have shown that Rashi's contention that the Torah records events in chronological sequence is more reasonable. Our central difficulty thus remains unresolved.

## II) Seventy or Sixty Nine

Our Sages and all of the commentaries have pointed out that the children of Leah mentioned by name number thirty-two (Reuven and his four sons, Shimon and his six sons, Levi and his three sons, Yehuda, his three sons and two grandsons, Yissakhar and his four sons, Zevulun and his three sons, and Dina). Bereishit 46:15, however, records 'thirty-three souls.' Similarly, the Torah records that sixty-seven souls in total descended to Egypt (Leah – 33, Zilpa – 16, Binyamin son of Rachel – 11, Bilha – 7), and yet 46:26 speaks of sixty-six. The next verse then alters this number to a total of seventy by including Yosef and his two sons!

One approach, that of our Sages and Rashi, adds Yokheved to the list of those who descended, suggesting that she was born upon entry to Egypt. This would therefore bring the total of Leah's descendents to thirty-three (as verse fifteen states) and the entire number to seventy (in accordance with verse twenty-seven). Yokheved, however, is conspicuously absent from the list of names. A different approach, that of the Rashbam, suggests that the seventieth soul is none other than Yaakov himself, who is counted among Leah's family. The sixty-six souls spoken of in verse twenty-six do not include Yaakov, since it speaks of 'Yaakov's descendents.' I believe that another approach is in order.

## III) The Daughters of Yaakov

Among the seventy souls who descend to Egypt, two daughters are mentioned – Dina and Serach daughter of Asher. According to Rabbi Yehuda's view that each of

Yaakov's sons had a twin sister, why were these girls not included among the reckoning of those who descended to Egypt? He responds that in fact all of these women perished before the descent. Notwithstanding the fact that Yaakov's sons were about forty years of age at this time, apparently all of the women who were a similar age perished!

This is difficult from a statistical point of view as well. It seems somewhat unlikely that among seventy souls, sixty-eight were male and only two were female. Did Yaakov's sons only beget males? Are we to therefore assume that Yaakov's grandchildren all married Egyptian women? In a seemingly singular incident, the Torah records the lineage of the son of an Egyptian man and an Israelite woman (Vayikra 24:10). If all of the children of Israel were in fact descended from Egyptian women, then what would have made that case so exceptional? Is the difference between an Egyptian mother and an Egyptian father so significant?

#### IV) The Suggested Solution

Our approach rests on the assumption that the number seventy, which describes the total of those who descended to Egypt, is not accidental. The Torah itself emphasizes this number several times (see Shemot 1:5, Devarim 10:22). The significance of this number is associated with the following poetic passage:

When the Supreme One assigned portions to the nations and divided humanity,  
He set the borders of peoples according to the number of the people of Israel.  
For Israel is God's portion, and Jacob is His inheritance (Devarim 32:8-9).

The Torah views the descendents of Noach who were divided and scattered after the Flood as being parallel to the descendents of Yaakov who went down to Egypt. The history of humanity – nations and their cultures, wars, and accomplishments – began with seventy souls, and the transformation of the family of Israel into a nation also began with seventy souls.

This parallel carries not only a thematic weight (see, for instance, the Maharal, Gevurot Hashem, ch. 9), but a practical, judicial significance as well. The land of Israel was divided according to the number of those who descended to Egypt (see Bamidbar 26), and this included the sons of Yosef.

The poetic passage quoted earlier thus suggests that just as God divided His world among the seventy nations, so too He divided his land among the seventy families descended from Yaakov. This approach assumes a more flexible interpretation of the 'seventy souls' who went down to Egypt, and explains the difficulties raised above, as

we shall see. In order to present the material more easily, we shall begin with the final difficulty first.

#### A1) The Daughters of Yaakov

Rashi understood that if the Torah counted Dina and Serach bat Asher among the seventy, the implication is that females were also included among those who descended to Egypt. If these two alone were singled out by name, it would follow that the others perished.

We begin with an opposite assumption. Certainly Yaakov's household included many females (see Bereishit 37:35 'all of his daughters' and pertinent commentaries), and this is reasonable according to accepted statistical models. Yaakov's grandsons presumably married their cousins. Those many females were not counted among the seventy who descended to Egypt just as females were not included in any of the censuses of the people. This is perfectly reasonable if we associate inclusion in the census with inheritance of the Land, which was divided only among the males. Of course, we still have not explained the inclusion of Dina or Serach daughter of Asher.

#### B1) Sixty Nine or

Earlier, we raised the contradiction that exists between the two numberings in this section. Leah's descendents are either 32 or 33, the descendents to Egypt number either 66 or 67, and the total number of Bnei Yisrael in Egypt is either 69 or 70. Rabbi Yossi Ofer dealt with this problem admirably in volume 84 of Alon Shevut. Fundamentally, he adopted the approach of the Rashbam that the seventieth soul is Yaakov himself (as well as the thirty third member of Leah's group). Sometimes the passage includes Yaakov and at other times it does not, there being in fact two systems of numbering at work.

The limiting system sees each matriarch as having double the number of descendents as her maidservant. Leah has 32 while Zilpa has 16, and Rachel has 14 while Bilha has 7. Thus Leah has thirty-two descendents.

The more inclusive system presents the house of Leah as representing one half of the total number of those who descend to Egypt, namely 33 out of the 66. The transition figure is Yaakov himself, who sometimes is counted and at other times is not.

Based on his approach (which assumes these numerical relationships for reasons which are not the subject of our present inquiry), perhaps Dina is included in order to round out Leah's descendents to a particular number, and so too Serach who rounds out Zilpa's descendents to 16.

Serach is thus included among the seventy perhaps because of her unique qualities which are enumerated in the Midrash and for this reason she received a portion in the land. We are therefore suggesting that Dina and Serach were recorded among the seventy, but there were certainly more females in Yaakov's household.

#### C1) Chetzron and Chamul

I believe that it is possible to explain that the incidents surrounding Yehuda took place in the aftermath of the sale of Yosef, and the Torah records the events in their correct chronological sequence. During the twenty-two years that elapsed until the descent to Egypt, Yehuda begat Er, Onan and Shela. Er and Onan grew, married Tamar and perished, and Yehuda subsequently married her and begat Peretz and Zerach. The descent to Egypt took place close to the time of the birth of Peretz and Zerach, before Chetzron and Chamul were born! This would explain the compression of events within the twenty two years. What remains to be explained is the inclusion of Chetzron and Chamul among those who descended to Egypt, although they had not yet been born.

Let us see how the Torah speaks of Chetzron and Chamul, and compare it to another two grandsons: Chever and Malkiel the children of Bria:

The sons of Asher are Yimna and Yishva and Yishvi and Bria and Serach their sister, and the sons of Bria are Chever and Malkiel (46:17).

The sons of Yehuda are Er, Onan , Shela, Peretz, and Zerach. Er and Onan perished in the land of Canaan, and the sons of Peretz were (Va-yehiyu) Chetzron and Chamul (46:12).

The latter verse implies that Chetzron and Chamul come to round out the number of Yehuda's descendents to five, after the death of Er and Onan. Although Er and Onan perish before the descent to Egypt, their place among the seventy is 'held for them' until the subsequent birth of Chetzron and Chamul who replace them. Thus, Chetzron and Chamul are also counted in the book of Bamidbar among those who are slated to receive a share in the Land, and there as well Er and Onan are mentioned. This explanation is reinforced by the fact that the Torah speaks of Chever and Malkiel as the present descendents of Bria in contrast to Chetzron and Chamul who 'were' (to be) the sons of Peretz.

#### D) Summary

According to our analysis, the number of those who descended to Egypt was not seventy. The true relationship between the number of those who went down to Egypt and the number seventy is predicated on the following considerations:

- 1) The number of females who descended to Egypt is unknown, just as it is in every other census in the Torah. It is reasonable to assume that the number of females was roughly equal to the number of males.
- 2) The two females who were included – Dina and Serach – round out the number seventy. They in particular were mentioned for reasons associated with the ratio of Leah's children to those of Zilpa. In addition, they may have been singled out because of their unique qualities (as the Midrash enumerates in the case of Serach) and it is also reasonable to assume that they received an inheritance of land.

It stands to reason that at the time of the descent to Egypt, Chetzron and Chamul were not yet born. When they were born in Egypt, they retroactively took the place of Er and Onan among the 'seventy souls.'

The number seventy is accurate but in a more flexible sense, and it therefore can include two females as well as two deceased individuals who are later to be replaced. The use of the number seventy creates the parallel between the division of the land among the seventy descendents of Yaakov and the division of the world among the seventy nations who descend from Noach: 'God sets the borders of nations according to the number of the children of Israel.'

#### E) A Seeming Difficulty

A central problem remains unresolved, and no doubt the reader has already thought of it. If indeed the Torah's entire purpose is to parallel the number of those who descended to Egypt with the descendents of Noach, of what value is this parallel if in fact it is not strictly accurate? If only 66 males went down to Egypt (including Yosef and his two sons) how can we include two females (Dina and Serach), and two deceased individuals (Er and Onan) who are later to be replaced by two as yet unborn males (Chetzron and Chamul)? Certainly, the descendents of Noach also included females and deceased males who nevertheless were not counted among the seventy! How can flexible numeration make up for an imperfect parallel?

Our response would be that the central issue here is not the number of males, but rather the number of portions of land: "When the Supreme One allotted nations their inheritance...." God bequeathed seventy lands to the descendents of Noach and seventy portions of land to the descendents of the family of Yaakov. Even if the exact number of those who descended to Egypt is not seventy, the number of portions of

land is seventy. Thus, females as well as those who are to be born in the future can be included as long as they stand to inherit land. Proof for this can be demonstrated by the fact that the number of descendents of Yaakov mentioned in our parasha equals 57. Yaakov and his twelve sons bring this number up to 70. On the eve of the entry into the Land, after the passing of about two hundred and fifty years, the internal breakdown of the families counted among the seventy changes for various reasons (see Rashi on Bamidbar 26), including the fact that the tribe of Levi is removed from the census. Nevertheless, the census in Bamidbar 26 records 57 families, which when added to Yaakov and his sons again brings the number to 70. In the case of each of the tribes, all of the descendents who were not part of the family units singled out by name, inherited under the general name of the tribe, namely Yaakov's sons. In other words, although the list of families who ultimately inherit land does change, the number of seventy portions of land remains constant because it is the significant thing.

If counting Yaakov and his twelve sons as separate units from the 57 families strikes you as unwarranted, then I would suggest that the additional 13 can be made up by the exact number of Levite families counted in the parasha of Pinchas, who in fact receive an inheritance of cities in the land. In either case, the number seventy remains unchanged.

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