

A LESSON FROM THE PARASHA

Human Calculus

Rabbi Berel Wein tells a story of one person's view of Jewish population. While on vacation he got into a conversation with an intelligent upper middle class American gentile. Rabbi Wein asked him how many Jews he thought there were in the United States. The man said he would assume about 50 million, almost 10 times the actual amount!

The truth is that such a mistake should be of no surprise. Jews truly seem to be everywhere in the eyes of the average American. Whether in government, the media, business, academia, medicine, or entertainment, Jews play a role well in excess to their percentage of the population.

This is a phenomenon that has been happening since our first exile in Egypt. The Torah at the beginning of the book of *Shemos* first tells us (1:7) that the Children of Israel increased dramatically and the land was full of them. This caused Pharaoh and his people to plan for the enslavement of the Jews. Despite their best efforts, the Jews only increased—to the point where the Torah writes (1:12) “and they (the Egyptians) were disgusted by the Children of Israel.”

Let us look more carefully at the language of this verse. “But as much as they afflicted it (the Jews), so it would increase and so it would spread out.” This seems counterintuitive. Normally, affliction of a people would cause a decrease in population and here it caused an increase!

My esteemed brother-in-law Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, dean of Manhattan's Yad Avraham Institute, developed an answer by examining the language of one paragraph of the *Hagada*:

Blessed is He who keeps his pledge to Israel; Blessed is He! For G-d calculated the end of the Bondage in order to do as He said to our father Abraham at the “Covenant Between the Parts,” as is stated: “He said to Abram, ‘Know with certainty that your offspring will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, they will serve them and they will oppress them for 400 years; but also against

the nation that they will serve I will execute judgment and afterwards they will leave with great wealth.’”

In what way did G-d need to calculate the end of the slavery? When the 400 years were over, it was time for them to go. However, many of us are familiar with the fact that the Jews did not actually spend 400 years in Egypt. From the time Yaakov and his family joined Yoseph in Egypt until Moshe led them out was only 210 years. Our Sages famously explained that the 400 years began with the birth of Yitzchak. This requires us to explain that the 400 years of the verse are not qualifying the words “they will serve them and they will oppress them,” but only that Abraham's offspring will be strangers in a land that is not theirs for 400 years. This was true in that the Patriarchs did not live in Canaan as if it were theirs.

However, the Vilna Gaon and others want to explain that there was an element of 400 years to the actual slavery itself. Slavery and its accompanying suffering come in various degrees of oppression. As such, it is possible to experience 400 years' worth of suffering (had it been spread out over 400 years, it would still qualify as suffering), in a much shorter period of time. Thus, in a matter of 116 very difficult years (the length of the actual enslavement), the Jewish people had endured 400 years of moderate suffering.

There was yet another element necessary for the Jews to leave Egypt. When G-d first appeared to Moshe in the burning bush, Moshe asked G-d why the Jews deserved to be taken out of Egypt miraculously. G-d responded that they deserved to be taken out because they would come to Sinai and accept the Torah (see *Shemos* 3:11-12 and Rashi ad loc).

Many commentaries (Ramban, Rabbeinu Bachaya, Maharal) explain that that the Jews' numbering 600,000 at the time of the giving of the Torah was a necessary component of that event. They write that 600,000 represents the totality of perspectives in the Torah, each one represented by a different person and the family he leads. Even the name Yisrael (Israel) is an acronym for this idea: *Yud* for *yesh* (there



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THE RABBI WAS ASKED

ADAPTED BY RABBI DOVID TZVI MEISSNER FROM
 ME'AH SHE'ARIM BY RABBI YITZCHOK ZILBERSTEIN

Reuven and Shimon had just inherited a plot of land with two houses on it. Shimon, the younger brother, wanted to honor his older brother and told him that in the meanwhile, he can take the larger house for himself, but if it falls and needs to be rebuilt, then the whole property will be split evenly.

Reuven accepted the offer and moved into the big, but old, house. After a while,

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are), *Sin* for *shishim* (60), *Reish* for *reebo* (myriads), *Alef* for *osios* (letters), *Lamed* for *laTorah* (to the Torah). (There are actually approximately half that—see *Pnai Yehoshua* to *Kiddushin* 30a for an explanation.) Thus, it was necessary for the Jewish people to have achieved the critical mass of 600,000 in order to receive the Torah.

If the goal of the redemption from Egypt was to receive the Torah at Sinai, then the population at the time of the Exodus needed to have reached critical mass by that time. If the slavery had lasted 400 years, there would have been plenty of time to reach 600,000. Providence had deigned that they leave earlier and allowed 400 years' worth of servitude to be concentrated in 116 years. Under this smaller time frame, the Jewish nation needed to increase at a more rapid pace.

This, suggests Rabbi Kalatsky, is the meaning of the *Hagada*'s words, “G-d calculated the end of the bondage,” for it indeed was a complex calibration of two disparate issues. The rate of growth in population had to align perfectly with the harshness of the slavery. This also is the meaning of the verse, “But as much as they afflicted it (the Jews), so it would increase and so it would spread out.” Rather than being counterintuitive, it now makes perfect sense. It is precisely because the Egyptians were making it harsher that the Exodus would happen sooner and the Jews would need to reach critical mass sooner. All in order to reach the goal of receiving the Torah. 🕊

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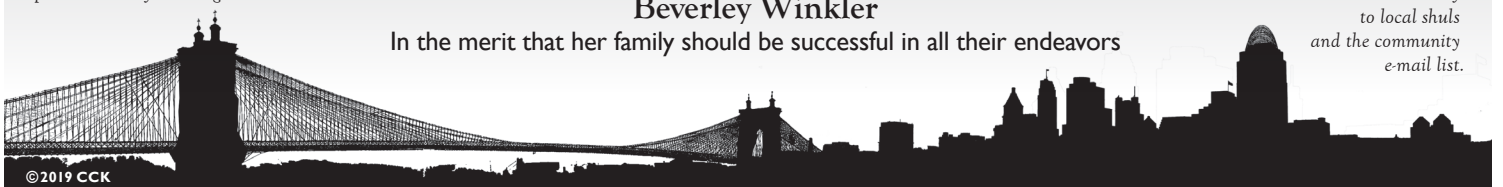
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THE RABBI WAS ASKED

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cracks began appearing in the walls of the house, and Reuven wanted to reinforce the house with new cement pillars. Shimon objected and said that the agreement was that Reuven can have the house as long as it was standing and didn't require rebuilding, but fortifying the house is tantamount to rebuilding it, which Reuven has no right to do. We should now be reevaluating and splitting the property evenly.

Q Who is correct?

A I posed this question to my father-in-law, Rav Elyashiv, who answered me that Reuven is not allowed to fortify the house. He brought proof from the Talmud (*Kesubos* 103a) and *Shulchan Aruch* (E.H. 94;1-2) which rule that one's widow gets supported from her deceased husband's assets, and she may live in his home. If the home falls, the heirs are not obligated to rebuild it. Even if she says she will rebuild it with her own money, the heirs are not obligated to accede. She may neither repair the home nor replaster it.

Here, the widow has the right to live in the home she has lived in while her husband was alive; nevertheless, she may not fortify the home to extend its life. So too, Reuven, who was given the right to live in the larger home so long as it remained standing, may not fortify the house. Shimon is really waiting to split the inheritance, but is honoring his older brother by allowing him to use the larger house in the meantime. Reuven has no right to continue maintaining the structure of the home. 🕊️

GLIMPSES OF THE KOLLEL



The Kollel off for winter break from Monday Jan. 20 until Monday Jan. 27

IT HAD TO BE HASHEM

The refugees from Lithuania have now secured passage from Vladivostok to Japan and begin the next step in their journey...

The Sea of Japan that separates Russia from Japan is one of the world's most turbulent bodies of water, and the only ship that ran between Russia and Japan on a regular basis was a small, ancient steamship known as the *Amkuza Maro*, which made the trip once a week and only when the weather was somewhat calm. Normally, there was only a small number of passengers that were interested in traveling from Vladivostok to the small Japanese port of Tsuruga on the island of Honshu. Now there was a crush of refugees that wished to sail and the *Amkuza Maro* was woefully underequipped for the voyage. The refugees were packed on to the deck, and without any shelter or facilities for most of the people on board, the ship set out on its 36-hour journey. Because of the

Mazal Tov to

to the Spetners on the upcoming wedding of their daughter Tehila to Yitzchok Ze'ev Heigh 🕊️

number of refugees, the *Amkuza Maro* would have to make several trips in order to bring everyone across. Most of the trips were generally uneventful, but during one trip a storm the likes of which the sailors had not seen in a decade battered the ship. Although in the end all groups made the trip safely, the perilousness of what they had just been through was driven home by the news of the next trip the *Amkuza Maro* had taken. It had simply broken apart under the impact of the mighty waves that crashed against it. The N.K.V.D. had sent some officers on board each trip, which also heightened the refugees' anxiety about the trip. Once the *Amkuza Maro* reached international borders though, a Soviet ship which had been following behind pulled alongside and the N.K.V.D. officers debarked. The joy felt by the refugees was unbridled. Singing and dancing, they celebrated their escape from the Russian bear, but their journey was far from over. *To be continued...* 🕊️

BEYOND ELLIS ISLAND

THE TRAILBLAZERS, TRIALS, & TRIUMPHS OF AMERICAN JEWRY

RABBI MOSHE TZVI CRYSTAL

According to studies from the first half of the 20th Century, the percentage of immigrants who returned to their homeland after a stay in America was much lower for Jews compared to other ethnicities. From 1908 through 1925, 1,018,878 Jews immigrated to America while only 52,585 left, just over 5% of immigrants. In contrast, over 55% of Italians who immigrated to America during that time returned to Italy. This comes as no surprise, as Jews often emigrated under conditions of persecution. It is interesting, though, that no statistics are available before this period. Evidence suggests that the rate of return was higher prior to the turn of the century. For instance, the growth rate of the Russian population in America was lower than expected, and Jews made up 60% of Russian immigrants. Lack of population growth between censuses could be due to many Jews returning to Russia. Further, Yiddish newspapers at the time reported on Jews trying to return to Russia, although this fact was generally swept under the rug. This was due to the efforts of American Jews who fought against immigration restrictions, arguing that Jews were not just simply taking advantage of higher wages and then returning with their money to their homeland. Understandably, the Jewish community would not have been interested in publishing statistics of the rate of return before immigration was restricted. 🕊️

SOURCE: Sarna, Jonathan D. "The Myth of No Return: Jewish Return Migration to Eastern Europe, 1881-1914." *American Jewish History*, vol. 71 no. 2, 1981, p. 256-268.

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