BS”D

*Parshas VaYigash*

We can see the world as full of random events, some good for us, some bad, and we can live our lives in this jungle doing our best to survive. Or we can live in a world where the hidden Hand of G-d acts in miraculous, albeit concealed, ways.

**The Seventieth Soul**

By Rabbi Chaim Zev Citron

The Torah lists the number of Yaakov’s descendants who went down into Egypt as 70. If you count the names, you’ll find 69 names. Furthermore, when the Torah sums up the descendants, it says 66 of Yaakov’s descendants came to Egypt, Yosef and his two sons were already in Egypt, so that makes a total of 70. Last time, I checked 66 and 3 are 69. So how do we account for the missing 70th? Let’s look more closely at some of the relevant passages. Chapter 46:8 states, “These are the children of Israel who came to Egypt, Yaakov and his sons.” The Torah goes on to list the descendants of Yaakov and Leah and concludes (46:15) that the number was 33. In actuality, only 32 names are listed. Who is the extra person?

Rav Avraham Ibn Ezra (46:23) says that that person is Yaakov himself. The text reads, “These are the children of Israel, Yaakov and his sons.” Clearly, says the Ibn Ezra, Yaakov is being counted.

Now, Rashi comes up with a different solution to the 33rd person. Although her name is not listed, we know that Yaakov’s son Levi had a daughter named Yocheved. Rashi cites the passage (Bamidbar 26:9), “Yocheved, daughter of Levi, who was born to Levi in Egypt.” Rashi comments, she was born in Egypt but conceived in Canaan. She was actually born just as the children of Israel entered Egypt. She was thus the 33rd descendant of Leah and the 70th of the total descendants.

By the way, both Rashi’s and Ibn Ezra’s views that the 70th person was either Yocheved or Yaakov are found in Midrash Rabbah.

The Ibn Ezra is very skeptical of the opinion that Yocheved was born just as the children of Israel entered Egypt. If that was the case, she would have been 130 years old when she bore her son Moshe. Of course, the Torah contains miracles, but if Moshe’s birth was miraculous, the Torah should have recorded it as such. After all, the Torah makes much of Sara Imeinu’s becoming a mother at 90, so why not of Yocheved’s at 130?

The Ramban defends the view that Yocheved was born upon entry of Yaakov’s family to Egypt.

First of all, the Ramban argues that in any case, Yocheved’s being Moshe’s mother is miraculous. Let’s say Levi fathered Yocheved 57 years after entering Egypt. That would make him 100 years old when he became her father. Yocheved would still have to be 73 years old when she bore Moshe. So you’d still have to resort to a miracle.

As far as the Ibn Ezra’s objection that the Torah should have made mention of the miraculous circumstances of Moshe’s birth, the Ramban maintains that an underlying premise of the Torah is that there are hidden miracles. Some miracles are announced by prophets, and the Torah does indeed mention them prominently. But hidden miracles that are not announced are found throughout the Torah.

For example, the Torah says that if the Jewish people serve idols, G-d will bring a famine upon them. Since when does the natural phenomenon of weather depend on moral conduct? Rather, the Torah is saying that there is a supernatural connection. It isn’t being touted as a miracle because all you see is whether there is rain and plenty of food or no rain and famine. But to maintain that this depends on our conduct is not natural. That dependence that the Torah claims is a hidden miracle.

For that matter, the belief in the efficacy of prayer is belief in hidden miracles. From a natural point of view, what happens to an individual in his time of need is influenced by physical laws. Prayer should have no effect on the physical universe. Yet the Torah maintains it does. Is that a miracle? Yes, but it is a hidden miracle. Nothing *overtly* supernatural seems to be happening when a prayer is answered. Yet, naturally there should be no connection between prayer and reality. This is another example of the premise of hidden miracles.

Thus, for the birth of the great leader Moshe Rabeinu, hidden miracles take place. G-d wanted Moshe to be born to a daughter of Levi, and so it was. There’s no need to tout it as a miracle. It was part of G-d’s design, and it happened as it was meant to be.

Getting back to Rashi, one wonders why he chose the interpretation of Yocheved being the 70th person rather than counting Yaakov himself.

Rashi actually explains his choice of interpretation. In Chapter 46:26 and 27, the passage reads, “All of the souls coming from Yaakov to Egypt…66, the sons of Yosef, two. All of the souls of the house of Yaakov that came to Egypt, 70.”

Now, the first word for “coming”-- *ba’ah--* is stressed on the last syllable, indicating the present tense. The second word “that came”-- *ba’ah--* is stressed on the first syllable, indicating the past tense.

How many were “coming” into Egypt? 66. How many came to Egypt, in other words, how many were actually in Egypt once everyone was there? 70. (We add Yosef and his two sons who were already there.) 66 left Canaan, i.e., were “coming.” There is one extra who wasn’t “coming” because she wasn’t born yet. But once the Israelites entered Egypt, once they “came” there, she is counted because she was born as they entered. That was Yocheved, daughter of Levi. Thus, 66 “coming” plus one who “came,” plus three who were there, equals 70.

I’d like to conclude going back to the Ramban’s comment on hidden miracles. We can choose what kind of world we live in. We can see the world as full of random events, some good for us, some bad. We live our lives in this jungle doing our best to survive.

Or we can live in a world where the hidden Hand of G-d acts in miraculous, albeit concealed, ways. The events in our lives are indeed often mysterious but not random. We make no claim to understand the workings of the world, but we believe they have a purpose and a meaning. We can talk to G-d, we can pray to Him. We don’t know if and how we will be answered. But one thing we know for sure. We know that He hears us. We know that He cares.