מבוא מדרשנו...

The Planning Horizon of the Forefathers

Parshat Lech Lecha relates that Avraham Avinu decided to go down to Egypt on account of the famine in the Land.

Avraham's descent to Egypt involves a number of perplexing questions, as follows.

1. Rashi points out that the famine was limited to the land of Canaan (Bereishis 12:10 s.v. *ra'av ba'aretz*). Why did Avraham choose to risk danger in Egypt and not go to his homeland or one of the other northern countries instead?

2. Avraham feared that the Egyptians would kill him and take Sarah. When he approached Egypt he told his wife, "Please say that you are my sister so that it may turn out well for me on your account, and that I may remain alive because of you." Rashi says that Avraham hoped the Egyptians would give him gifts on Sarah's account (Bereishis 12:13 s.v. *lema'an yitav li be'avuraich*). This expectation of material benefit from others is astonishing, in light of Avraham's later refusal to accept any personal reward for releasing the king of Sodom from captivity. The king of Sodom offered to give Avraham all the recaptured possessions; Avraham refused to take anything for himself, so that the king should not say "I am the one who made Avraham wealthy." Avraham rejected the offer because HaKadosh Baruch Hu had promised to make him wealthy (see Rashi Bereishis 14:23 s.v. *ve-lo tomar*).

3. When HaKadosh Baruch Hu first promised Avraham the Land of Israel, Avraham asked, “How can I really know that I will inherit it?” (Bereishis 15:8). Hakadosh Baruch’s reply was, “Know for sure that your descendants will be foreigners in a land that is not theirs for 400 years; they will be enslaved and oppressed.” (Bereishis 15:13). The punishment seems unfair: why should an entire nation suffer severely for the minor sin of an individual?

4. Parshat Toldos relates that Yizchak Avinu sought to go down to Egypt on account of a famine, but HaKadosh Baruch Hu interceded and commanded him “Do not go down to Egypt.” (Bereishis 26:2). Commenting on that verse, Rashi tells us: “His intention was to go down to Egypt as his father did during the famine; HaKadosh Baruch Hu told him ‘Do not go down to Egypt – for you are an unblemished fire-offering and the land outside of Erez Yisroel is unworthy of you.’ ”

Unlike Avraham, who was faced with a country-wide famine, Yizchak could have escaped the local famine in Gerar by moving to another part of the Land of Israel. Why, then, would Yizchak chose to leave the Land of Israel?

5. How could Avimelech have mistaken Rivka for Yizchak’s sister when she had already borne sons from Yizchak, Eisav and Yaakov? This question in particular bothered me for years.

Yaakov's descent to Egypt also involves perplexing questions.

1. Parshat Vayigash (Bereishis 45:27-8; 46:1-4) relates: *"Then they [the brothers of Yosef] related to him [Yaakov] all the words that Yosef had spoken to them, and he saw the wagons that Yosef had sent to transport him. The spirit of their father Yaakov was then revived. 'It's too much!' said Yisroel. 'My son Yosef is alive! I must go and see him before I die." Yisroel set out on the journey, taking all his possessions, and he arrived in Beer-Sheva. He offered sacrifices to the G-d of his father Yizchak. G-d spoke to Yisroel in a night vision, and said, 'Yaakov, Yaakov!" 'Yes,' he [Yaakov] replied. He [G-d] said, 'I am G-d, the G-d of your father. Do not be afraid of going down to Egypt, for it is there that I will make you into a great nation. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will also bring you back up. Yosef will place his hands on your eyes."*

These verses contain an apparent contradiction. At the outset of his journey Yaakov said he meant to go down to Egypt in order to see his son Yosef before he died, yet Yaakov only made up his mind when HaKadosh Baruch Hu urged him, saying "Do not fear to go down to Egypt." Rashi (loc. cit.) explains that Yaakov needed HaKadosh Baruch Hu's reassurance "because he regretted having to leave the Land of Israel."

2. Yaakov offered sacrifices to HaKadosh Baruch Hu when he reached Beer-Sheva on his way down to Egypt. The Torah tells us, "He offered sacrifices *to the G-d of his*

father Yizchak." Commenting on that verse, Rashi explains: "A person's obligation to honor his father is greater than his obligation to honor his grandfather."

Yaakov was a Tzadik who sought to perform even those Mitzvot for which he was not obligated. Why then did Yaakov on this occasion not honor his grandfather Avraham as well?

3. In Beer-Sheva, HaKadosh Baruch Hu introduced Himself to Yaakov by saying, "I am G-d, the G-d of your father. Do not be afraid of going down to Egypt." HaKadosh Baruch Hu did not mention Avraham. Yet in Yaakov's first prophetic dream HaKadosh Baruch Hu mentioned Avraham (Bereishis 28:13): "Suddenly he [Yaakov] beheld HaShem standing over him. [HaShem] said, 'I am HaShem, G-d of Avraham your father, and G-d of Yizchak. I will give to you and your descendants the land upon which you are lying." Rashi explained that Yaakov was obliged to give his father precedence; but we are still at a loss to understand why HaKadosh Baruch Hu would mention Avraham in the first revelation and omit him in the second.

I take note also of an incongruity in the Torah's account of the birth of Moshe Rabbeinu.

Parshat Shemos (Shemos 2:1) relates: "A man of the House of Levi went and took Levi's daughter." Rashi following the Gemara (Sota 12a) glosses the verse as follows: "*He took Levi's daughter* – He had separated himself from her because of the decree of Pharaoh, but took her back and remarried her. She, too, was transformed into a

young woman, as she was one hundred and thirty years old [at the time]. For she was born between the walls as they arrived in Egypt; the people spent [a total] of two hundred and ten years [in Egypt], and when they departed Moshe was eighty years old; therefore when she conceived Moshe she was one hundred and thirty years old. Yet the Torah still calls her 'Levi's daughter.' "

Why does the Torah allude to the miracle of Moshe's mother giving birth at the advanced age of 130, but remain silent on the circumstances of the birth of his brother Aharon which took place only three years before?

******

The Gemara (Shabbos 10b) points to the direction of an answer to our questions: "Rav said, 'A person should never favor one of his sons over the others. The coat of fine wool that Yaakov gave to Yosef weighed all of two *selaim* [less than two ounces], yet that was enough to provoke the brothers' jealousy and begin the chain of events that lead to the exile of our forefathers in Egypt." How is it that Yaakov and the brothers were held responsible, when G-d had already decreed at *Brit Bein Habetarim* (198 years earlier) that the Jews would be exiled to Egypt?

The Ari Zaal tells us that the sin of Adam Harishon was a matter of great depth and did not consist merely in eating a piece of forbidden fruit. By his act, Adam Harishon intended to spiritualize the entire cosmos, but his attempt to do so was premature. Adam's failure disintegrated his archetypal soul and scattered the sacred souls of the nascent Jewish people incorporated in his person throughout all of mankind. The generations after Adam continued to sin because the non-Jewish souls predominated; G-d responded with the punishments of the flood, the dispersion from Babel, and the destruction of Sodom and Amora. Eventually, G-d decided to restore man's initial condition by separating the sacred Jewish souls from their non-Jewish hosts through the process of exile and redemption. That process goes by stages with the spiritually most refined souls being separated first. The nation is purified in a succession of exiles: Egypt, Babylonia, Persia Media and Greece, Rome and Yishmael. When the purification process is complete Moshiach will arrive. Adam Harishon reappeared on the stage of world history in the persons of the forefathers Avraham, Yizchak and Yaakov. The forefathers each received a share of Adam's soul as a *gilgul* [reincarnation] and during their lifetimes repaired the damage caused by Adam's sin. Avraham, Yizchak and Yaakov then sought to effectively annul the decrees of exile, meant to correct the damage of Adam's sin, but now redundant.

We are now in a position to answer the questions put earlier.

Avraham Avinu planned to anticipate and effectively annul the decree of Egyptian exile which derived, as we saw above, from the sin of Adam Harishon. He therefore

chose to go down to Egypt during the famine, endure the trials there, and leave with Egyptian riches in fulfillment of the terms of the decree at Brit Bein Habetarim: "Afterwards they shall leave with great wealth" (Bereishis 15:14). That is the reason Avraham told Sarah to pose as his sister so that the Egyptians would enrich him with gifts.

Avraham's efforts to preempt the exile were successful and HaKadosh Baruch Hu suspended the decree. However, the decree of exile was reinstated when Avraham asked "How will I know that the people will inherit the Land?" in response to G-d's promise.

Yizchak in turn sought to anticipate the decree of Egyptian exile. Like his father before him, Yizchak planned to leave the Land of Israel during a famine. He sent his sons Eisav and Yaakov to a secure section in the land of Israel, and set out with his wife for Egypt when the opportunity arose. [The children's absence explains why Avimelech was able to mistake this married couple for brother and sister.] Rashi (Bereishis 26:2) comments that "Yizchak's intention was to go down to Egypt as his father had done in the days of the previous famine," which is to say that Yizchak proposed to preempt the decree of national exile through his own history, as his father had done. HaKadosh Baruch Hu told Yizchak to remain in the Land because Yizchak's spiritual credit was to be deferred until the last generation before the arrival of Moshiach. Prefiguring the history of the first, second, and third Temples, Yizchak dug three wells: the first two were contested by the Philistines, but the third well was

undisputed. The first two Temples were destroyed by foreign powers, but the third Temple will stand forever. (See Rambam Bereishis 26:20). HaKadosh Baruch Hu meant to keep Yizchak's merits in reserve in order to protect the last generation of Jews in exile before the final redemption.

Yaakov Avinu succeeded in suspending the decree of Egyptian exile in a way unknown to us. However, the strife among the brothers, which lead to the sale of Yosef, reinstated that decree.

Yaakov still held out hope that he might annul the decree by going down to Egypt to greet Yosef and then returning to the Land of Israel within his lifetime. Yaakov expressed that desire when he said, "I must go and see [Yosef] before I die." Yaakov expected that HaKadosh Baruch Hu would allow him to come back to his homeland. When Yaakov reached Beer-Sheva, a spot on earth which is linked to the portal in Heaven through which our prayers pass, he offered sacrifices to G-d in order to annul the decree of exile. Yaakov offered the sacrifices to "the G-d of his father Yizchak," because he meant to temper G-d's measure of strict justice which his father Yizchak represented. HaKadosh Baruch Hu identified Himself as "the G-d of your father" only, and not G-d of Avraham as well, because the measure of lovingkindness which Avraham represented was no longer available to annul the decree of exile. Hakadosh Baruch Hu told Yaakov that the Schina would remain with him in the exile due to begin with his descent into Egypt.

מבוא מדרשני...

The Torah supplied the details of Moshe's birth because the process of national redemption began with the history of his birth.

May it be His will that the final redemption come speedily through our merits – Amen!

Rabbi David Daniel HaCohen