

FILL THE LAND

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

The Children of Israel were fruitful, teemed, increased, and became strong - very, very much so; and the land became filled with them (Shemot 1:7)

The verse relates the transition of the Jewish settlers from a ghetto society in the restricted confines of Goshen to a cosmopolitan segment of Ancient Egyptian society. After the generation that came to Egypt with Yaakov Avinu A'H died the exile of Egypt took on a new form. The Jews who had up to now been a small group of immigrants living in isolation in Goshen began to multiply at a geometrical rate. As they also became very prosperous they began to frequent places they had not even attended when our Patriarch and his sons were still alive. The Midrash tells us that "they filled the land" does not mean that they traveled to many different places. It also does not mean that they merely expanded their places of residence to new neighborhoods. The reference is to the fact that they began to attend the stadiums and theaters of the Egyptians. They became wealthier and began to socialize and entertain themselves in the same way as the Egyptian hosts did.

The Keli Yakar points out that the verse has a grammatical inconsistency. When one wants to say "very much so" one should say "me-od me-od". The verse, however, says "Bimod me-od". He explains that "bimod" refers to material wealth as it does in Keriya Shema when we say one should devote himself to Hashem "b'kol meodecha" - "with all of your wealth". He contends that the verse means that the Jews became very wealthy and the result of their social status was that they sought new forms of entertainment and social gathering. They became regular participants in Egyptian sport and theater. Eventually they started to behave more like the host country and to resemble them in more ways than one.

This he says explains the verse "A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Yosef" (Shemot 1:8). How could it be that a new ruler could not be aware of the Viceroy who ruled for 80 consecutive years of peace and prosperity in his own land? Some explain that he merely behaved as if he did not remember the great reign of Yosef. The Keli Yakar says he did not forget Yosef nor did he forget his great family of 70 who descended with Yaakov to Egypt. However, when the Jews changed their "look" and behavior he did not recognize the new generation as the relatives of Yosef. This enabled him to initiate his plot to subjugate them to centuries of servitude and suffering.

The lessons of the Torah are timeless. It is clear to one who studies our history that when we strengthen our modes of behavior and our dedication to a Torah lifestyle that we prosper and live in surety and safety. It is only when we imitate our host country so much so that it is hard to distinguish

the Jew from the Gentile in his dress, speech and social behavior that woes befall our holy people. May this lesson gives u new clarity in who we are and how we should behave in all aspects of our lives, home, business and social as well as spiritual. We are the Chosen Ones who should serve as a beacon to the people with whom we share this planet. We should set the example rather than copy the ways and values of our neighbors.

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