



“And the land became filled with them”

The Children of Yisrael Who Were Swallowed Up by the Earth and Sprouted Like Grass Removed with Them the Neshamos that Had Reincarnated into Inanimate Objects and Plant Life

This coming Shabbas kodesh, which approaches auspiciously, we will begin reading the second book of the holy Torah, **sefer Shemos**. It chronicles a new era in Jewish history as Yaakov and his family descend into galus in Mitzrayim. These events have left their lasting impact upon the people of Yisrael until the present time (Shemos 1, 1): **“ואלה שמות בני ישראל: ואלה שמות מצרימה את יעקב איש וביתו באו”**—and these are the names of the Children of Yisrael who came to Egypt; with Yaakov, each man and his household came.

The narrative goes on to explain that the hardships of the galus in Mitzrayim evolved as a consequence of the miraculous proliferation of Bnei Yisrael (ibid. 7): **“ובני ישראל פרו וישרצו”**—Bnei Yisrael were fruitful, teemed, increased, and became strong—very, very much so. Rashi explains, based on the Midrash (S.R. 1, 8): **They would give birth to six children from a single pregnancy.** In Da’as Zekeinim, the Tosafists teach us that the sages deduced this from the fact that the passuk employs six different terms of proliferation: **“פרו, וישרצו, וירבו, ויעצמו, במאד, מאד”**.

This extraordinary proliferation caused Pharaoh, the ruler of Mitzrayim, to be extremely wary and fearful of them (ibid. 8): **“ויקם מלך חדש על מצרים אשר לא ידע את יוסף, ויאמר אל עמו הנה עם בני ישראל רב ועצום ממנו, הבה נתחכמה לו פן ירבה והיה כי תקראנה מלחמה ונוסף גם הוא על שונאינו ונלחם בנו ועלה מן הארץ... ויעבדו מצרים את בני ישראל בפרך, וימררו את חייהם בעבודה קשה בחומר ובלבנים ובכל עבודה בשדה את כל בני ישראל”** **A new king arose over Mitzrayim, who did not know Yosef. He said to his people, “Behold! Bnei Yisrael are more numerous and stronger than us. Come, let us act wisely with him, lest he become numerous,**

and it may be that if a war will occur, he, too, may join our enemies, and wage war against us and leave the land” . . . The Egyptians enslaved Bnei Yisrael with back-breaking labor. They embittered their lives with hard work, with mortar and with bricks, and with every labor of the field; all their labors that they performed with them was back-breaking labor.

The Earth Miraculously Swallowed Up the Children of Yisrael

It behooves us to introduce the comments of the Ba’al HaTurim (Bereishis 6, 11) related to this phenomenon. He points out a sort of “gezeirah shavah”: The phrase **“ותמלא”**—the land became filled—appears only twice in the entire Torah. The first time is in parshas Noach (Bereishis 6, 11): **“ותשחת הארץ לפני האלקים ותמלא הארץ חמס”**—and the earth had become corrupt before G-d; and the earth had become filled with robbery. The second time is in this week’s parsha, parshas Shemos (Shemos 1, 7): **“ותמלא הארץ אותם”**—and the land became filled with them.

The Ba’al HaTurim explains the connection between these two pesukim based on a teaching in the Gemara (Sotah 11b). Chazal teach us that HKB”H performed an incredible miracle on behalf of Yisrael, so that the Egyptians would not throw all the multitude of children begot by Yisrael into the Nile. The righteous women of Yisrael would go into the fields to give birth clandestinely. HKB”H sent down malachim from the heavens to clean the newborn infants off and arrange them.

HKB”H Himself, so to speak, prepared two loaves, one of oil and one of honey, to feed these infants, as it states (Devarim 32, 13): “וַיְנַיֵּקוּהוּ דְבַשׁ מִסֵּלַע וְשֶׁמֶן מִחֶלְמִישׁ צוּר”—**and He would nurture them with honey from a stone and oil from the hardness of a rock.** Thus, when the Egyptians came to find them and kill them, they were swallowed up by the earth and developed there. Here is the passage from the Gemara:

”וכיון שמכירין בהן מצרים באין להורגן, ונעשה להם נס ונבלעין בקרקע, ומביאין שוורים וחורשין על גבן, שנאמר על גבי חרשו חורשים וגו’. לאחר שהולכין היו מבצבצין ויוצאין כעשב השדה, שנאמר רבבה כצמח השדה נתתיך, וכיון שמתגדלין באין עדרים עדרים לבתיהן... וכשנגלה הקדוש ברוך הוא על הים הם הכירוהו תחילה שנאמר זה אלי ואנוהו.”

When the Egyptians would discover the babies, they would come to kill them; but a miracle occurred on their behalf—they were swallowed up by the ground. Then, they (the Egyptians) would bring oxen and plow on top of them, as it says (Tehillim 129, 3): “On my back, the plowers plowed, etc.” After they (the Egyptians) went away, they (the babies) would spring forth like the grass of the field, as it says (Yechezkel 16, 7): “I made you as numerous as the plants of the field.” When they grew up, they would come as flocks upon flocks to their houses . . . So, when HKB”H revealed Himself at the sea, they recognized Him first, as it says (Shemos 15, 2): “This is my G-d and I will beautify Him.”

Based on this Gemara, the Ba’al HaTurim explains the implicit meaning of the passuk as follows: “ובני ישראל פרו וישרצו—Bnei Yisrael conceived sextuplets with each pregnancy. To explain how the people of Yisrael managed to conceal such a large number of infants from the Egyptians, who sought to kill them, the passuk adds: “ותמלא הארץ אותם”—**the land became filled with them**, the incredible number of children delivered by Yisrael. How so? They were miraculously swallowed up by the ground until they grew up and emerged. This then is the relationship between the similar phraseology the Torah employs in parshas Noach and in parshas Shemos. In the generation of the mabul, the earth became filled with the stolen objects hidden there by the corrupt people of that generation. Analogously, in Mitzrayim, the earth became filled with the newborn infants of Yisrael who had been swallowed by the earth to conceal them from the murderous Egyptians.

Let us embellish this thought with the beautiful words of the Kli Yakar in parshas Vayechi. He explains the implication of the

berachah Yaakov bestowed upon Yosef in Mitzrayim (Bereishis 48, 16): “וַיְדַגּוּ לְרֹב בַּקֶּרֶב הָאָרֶץ”—**and may they flourish like fish within the land.** Rashi comments: **Like those fish that reproduce and multiply, and the evil eye does not affect them.** Accordingly, the Kli Yakar asserts that when the passuk states: “וַיְדַגּוּ לְרֹב בַּקֶּרֶב הָאָרֶץ”—it indicates that they actually proliferated “within the ground” (and not “in the land,” above ground). For, as we have learned from Chazal, they were swallowed up by the ground, so that the evil eyes of the Egyptians would not affect them. Thus, their situation was analogous to that of fish, who are hidden by the sea and escape the effects of the evil eye. As a result of this miracle, they proliferated like fish, and **“the earth became filled with them.”**

Yosef Purchased the Land of Mitzrayim to Prepare for the Salvation of the Infants of Yisrael

It gives me great pleasure to now add what is brought down in the sefer Kehillas Yitzchak in the name of a renowned “darshan” (expounder) to interpret the pesukim: **“A new king arose over Mitzrayim, who did not know Yosef. He said to his people, ‘Behold! Bnei Yisrael are more numerous and stronger than us. Come, let us act wisely with him, lest he become numerous, and it may be that if a war will occur, he, too, may join our enemies, and wage war against us and leave the land.’”** We see that even Rashi had difficulty explaining the words **“and they will leave (rise up, ascend from) the land.”** In keeping with what we have discussed, the Kehillas Yitzchak asserts that Pharaoh’s words were prophetic, but he did not realize what he had prophesied: Saying **“lest he become numerous”** predicted that Yisrael would increase in number supernaturally; when he said, **“and (they would) leave the land,”** he predicted that they would sprout and emerge from the ground like vegetation.

Let us expand on this interpretation. The Torah states that a new king arose who did not know Yosef. Now, in parshas Mikeitz, we learned that when the Egyptians approached Yosef and begged him to provide for them (ibid. 47, 20): “וַיִּקֶן יוֹסֵף אֶת כָּל אֲדַמַּת מִצְרַיִם לְפָרְעָה כִּי מָכְרוּ מִצְרַיִם אִישׁ שָׂדֵהוּ כִּי חָזַק עֲלֵיהֶם הָרָעָב וְתָהִי כָּל אֲדַמַּת מִצְרַיִם לְפָרְעָה”—**thus Yosef acquired all the land of Mitzrayim for Pharaoh, for every Egyptian sold his field, because the famine overwhelmed them; thus the land became Pharaoh’s.** We will endeavor to explain Yosef’s profound rationale for acquiring all of the land in Mitzrayim.

To explain the matter, we will refer to the Midrash (V.R. 32, 5): **Yosef descended to Egypt and safeguarded himself from immorality; in his merit, Yisrael also safeguarded themselves from immorality. Rabbi Chiya bar Abba said: The guarding against immorality alone was sufficient cause for Yisrael to be redeemed.** The Midrash teaches us that Yosef, with his extreme kedushah, paved the way for all of Yisrael to also maintain their kedushah and avoid immorality during their stay in Mitzrayim.

So, now, let us conjecture that Yosef foresaw via “ruach hakodesh” the miracle that HKB”H was going to perform to save the children of Yisrael—to have the land of Mitzrayim swallow them up after birth. Yet, he had a major concern. After all, Mitzrayim is referred to as “**ערות הארץ**”, because it was a cesspool of immorality. Yosef alludes to this by saying to his brothers (ibid. 42, 9): “**לראות את ערות הארץ באתם**”—**you have come to survey the nakedness of the land—“ervat ha’aretz.”** Hence, Yosef was concerned, because he recognized the grave spiritual danger this posed to the infants of Yisrael if they were to be swallowed up by the land and concealed in that environment of tumah.

Therefore, Yosef devised a clever scheme. He purchased all of the land for Pharaoh, so that it would be under his control and supervision. In the words of Pharaoh (ibid. 41, 40): “**אתה תהיה על ביתי ועל פיך ישק כל עמי רק הכסא אגדל ממך, ויאמר פרעה**”—**you will be in charge of my house, and by your command will all my people be sustained; only the throne will outrank you. Then Pharaoh said to Yosef, “See! I have placed you in charge of the entire land of Mitzrayim.”** In this manner, with his kedushah as the paradigm tzaddik, he was able to negate the tumah that infested the land and pave the way for Yisrael to sanctify themselves and safeguard themselves from immorality. In that merit, the ground of Mitzrayim was imbued with kedushah, its tumah was neutralized, and it became a suitable safe haven for the newborns of Yisrael.

This explains the passuk beautifully. “**A new king arose over Mitzrayim, who did not know Yosef.**” According to Rashi: **He acted as if he did not know Yosef.** He pretended that he was not aware of Yosef’s clever scheme—that Yosef had purchased the land and sanctified it with his kedushah to save the infants of Yisrael. Hence, Pharaoh said to his people: “**Behold! Bnei Yisrael are more numerous and stronger**

than us. Come, let us act wisely with him, lest he become numerous, and it may be that if a war will occur, he, too, may join our enemies, and wage war against us and leave the land.” In other words, he sought any advice or strategy to prevent the salvation of the children of Yisrael—to prevent the land from offering them protection and a safe haven.

What Did the Egyptians Hope to Accomplish by Plowing the Earth

Undoubtedly, HKB”H had many ways in which He could have concealed and saved the newborn infants of Yisrael from the murderous Egyptians. So, it behooves us to explain why HKB”H chose to save them specifically in this manner—to have them swallowed up by the earth and to proliferate there in keeping with the notion of: “**I made you as numerous as the plants of the field.**”

Furthermore, the Egyptians were known to be extremely wise, as per the passuk (Melachim I 5, 10): “**ותרב חכמת שלמה**”—**Shlomo’s chochmah surpassed the chochmah of all the people of the East and all the chochmah of Mitzrayim.** That being the case, what did they hope to accomplish by bringing oxen to plow the ground that had swallowed up the infants of Yisrael? They must have surely understood that this was a miraculous, supernatural feat; for, it is impossible for children to survive and live underground by natural means. So, what was the purpose of plowing the earth with oxen?

We will begin to shed some light on this issue by referring to the four expressions of geulah HKB”H employed in relation to “yetzias Mitzrayim” (Shemos 6, 6): “**והוצאתי, והצלתי, וגאלתי, ולקחתי**”—**I will extricate, I will rescue, I will redeem, and I will take.** According to the Midrash (B.R. 88, 5): “**מכאן קבעו**”—**חכמים ד’ כוסות של לילי פסח... כנגד ד’ גאולות שנאמרו במצרים, והוצאתי, והצלתי, וגאלתי, ולקחתי**—**the sages instituted the four cups (of wine) of the night of Pesach from here (based on this passuk) . . . corresponding to the four languages of geulah (redemption) mentioned in relation to Mitzrayim . . .** It is incumbent upon us to explain the significance of mentioning four distinct expressions of redemption; for, in reality, there was only one geulah from Mitzrayim.

It appears that we can explain the matter based on the teachings of our master, the Arizal, in Sha’ar HaPesukim (Shemos). He asserts that the neshamos of Yisrael that were

enslaved and suffered in Mitzrayim were originally part of Adam HaRishon when he sinned with the Eitz HaDa'as. As a consequence, they required tikun by means of multiple reincarnations in order to refine them and purge them completely of their filth and contamination.

First, they reincarnated into the generation of the "mabul"; however, they were still tainted, causing them to behave corruptly. Subsequently, they underwent a second reincarnation into the generation of the dispersion and a third into the populace of Sedom. Once again, they failed to correct their inherent flaws and continued their evil ways. Ultimately, they reincarnated into the neshamos in Mitzrayim to be refined and purified once and for all in the "kur habarzel"—the iron crucible or (s)melting pot. This prepared them to receive the Torah at Har Sinai.

Additionally, the Arizal explains in Sha'ar HaGilgulim (Intro. 22) that "reshaim"—wicked people—go through various stages of reincarnation. They reincarnate into inanimate objects, plant life, animal life, and finally human beings possessing the power of speech. Here are his sacred words:

The tzaddik, through his actions and the mitzvos he performs while eating and the like, possesses the power to clarify parts of inanimate objects and elevate them to the status of plant-life, to animal-life and to human beings—as we have explained in Sha'ar HaMitzvos in parshas Eikev in relation to the mitzvah of Birkas HaMazon. In reality, a wicked person, due to his actions, causes the opposite to occur; they lower rather than elevate. There are types of transgressions that cause part of a person to descend to the state of the inanimate; and there are some that cause descent to the state of plant-life; and some to the state of animal-life without the power of speech (non-human).

Accordingly, there are wicked people who reincarnate into inanimate rocks after their death, based on what sins they committed in their lifetimes. There are wicked people who reincarnate into plants, and there are some that reincarnate into animals. For, on account of their transgressions, they are comparable to animals; in some ways, they are comparable to one another and share the same status. Now, those that reincarnate in this manner, remain there for a set period of time, until the sin that caused him to reincarnate into a plant is expunged. When

that time has been completed, he ascends and reincarnates into an animal. When that time is completed, he ascends and reincarnates into an actual human being.

The Arizal explains this concept in greater depth in Sha'ar HaMitzvos (Eikev). A plant is nurtured by the earth, which is inanimate; thus, the soul that reincarnated into an inanimate object is elevated to the level of plant-life. Subsequently, when an animal comes along and consumes the plant or vegetation, the soul is elevated to the level of an animal. Thus, when a human being, with the capacity of speech, slaughters the animal properly and consumes its flesh after reciting a berachah, the constituents of the neshamah in the animal are elevated and unite with that human being; it becomes an inseparable part of his being. When he studies Torah and serves Hashem with the strength and vitality he received from the food, he accomplishes a tikun for all of those neshamos that were elevated step by step from the inanimate to the plant to the animal to the human being.

Occasionally a Neshamah Reincarnates Directly into a Human Being

We will now return to what the Arizal teaches us in Sha'ar HaGilgulim (ibid.). He contends that occasionally, a neshamah that has reincarnated into the lower levels—the inanimate and plant levels—is able to skip the animal level and reincarnate directly into a human being. Here is a translation of the pertinent excerpt:

Occasionally, it (the neshamah) ascends two levels at once. For instance, if someone who initially reincarnated into something inanimate such as dirt, and an animal comes along and eats grass which has some dirt mixed in with it—which this particular soul had reincarnated into—now, this soul reincarnates into that animal. Thus, it has risen two levels at once—namely, from the inanimate to the animal.

Or another instance: If it (the neshamah) had reincarnated into a plant, such as vegetables or fruit from trees; and a human being consumes them. Thus, that reincarnated soul rose from a plant to a human being, which are two levels at once. And, occasionally, the reincarnated soul ascends all of the levels at once—in other words from the inanimate to the human being. For instance, when a person ingests

a small amount of dirt that was mixed into a cooked food, and there was a reincarnated soul in that dirt. Thus, it ascended from the inanimate to a human being.

Now, we find that Chazal (Berachos 9b) expound on the following passuk related to “yetzias Mitzrayim” (ibid. 12, 36): **“וינצלו את מצרים, אמר רבי אמי, מלמד שעשאוה כמצודה שאין .”** **“So, they emptied out Mitzrayim”:** **Rabbi Ami said: This teaches that they transformed Mitzrayim into the equivalent of a trap containing no grain. And Reish Lakish said: They transformed Mitzrayim into the equivalent of the depths of the sea where there are no fish.** In Sha’ar HaMitzvos, the Arizal explains that this means that they clarified (refined) all of the holy neshamos that had ended up in Mitzrayim.

He asks why the galus of Mitzrayim is so unique and is mentioned more often than any of the other exiles. He answers that it is because all the essential nitzotZos of Yisrael were entangled there. They were not redeemed from there until all of the neshamos were extricated and clarified. That is the deeper significance of the words **“they emptied out Mitzrayim.”** As for the analogies cited by the Gemara, he points out that Yisrael are compared to fish (ibid. 48, 16) and they are also compared to grain (Yirmiyah 2, 3).

This explains very nicely why HKB”H mentioned four distinct expressions of geulah. He wished to allude to the fact that with the exodus from Mitzrayim all four categories of neshamos that had reincarnated there were clarified—the inanimate, the plant, the animal, and the human. Even the lowliest of neshamos—that due to the seriousness of their spiritual flaws had reincarnated into inanimate forms or plant forms—were privileged to ascend and unite with speaking human being among the people of Yisrael. Thus, it turns out that when Yisrael departed from Mitzrayim, all of the neshamos departed with them. Hence, the Torah mentions four expressions of geulah corresponding to those various neshamos.

We can now begin to shed some light on the wondrous, profound methods of the Almighty. We asked why HKB”H chose to save the infants of Yisrael with this specific miracle—having the earth swallow them up. By consuming meat in Mitzrayim, with proper shechitah and appropriate Berachos, Yisrael were able to elevate and rectify all of the neshamos that had already risen from the inanimate and plant levels to the

level of animals. However, there remained neshamos that had reincarnated into inanimate objects and plant forms that had not yet risen to the level of animals.

Therefore, HKB”H arranged to save the children of Yisrael by having the earth miraculously swallow them. Thus, when they emerged from the earth, they would unite with the neshamos that had reincarnated into inanimate objects and plant life. This explains why they did not merely come out of the ground like someone who exits a cave. On the contrary, they grew from the earth like plants of the field. As the Gemara above describes it: **They would spring forth like the grass of the field, as it says: “I made you as numerous as the plants of the field.”** In this manner, they clarified and rectified the neshamos of the inanimate and plant forms without them having to wait to be consumed by a kosher animal and then slaughtered properly and eaten with a berachah by a member of Yisrael. Instead, they were elevated instantaneously to the level of a human being by uniting with the children who had been swallowed by the earth.

This explains beautifully Pharaoh’s great fear that the children of Yisrael would rise up from the earth, as he unknowingly intimated to his people by saying: **“Come, let us act wisely with him, lest he become numerous, and it may be that if a war will occur, he, too, may join our enemies, and wage war against us and leave the land.”** It is well-known that the survival and sustenance of the klipos depends on the “nitzotzei kedushah”—holy sparks—that are trapped in their midst. Therefore, Pharaoh had good reason to fear and tremble. For, he knew that when the children of Yisrael would rise from the earth, they would take the “nitzotzei kedushah” trapped in the inanimate earth and the plant forms with them. And that is precisely what happened; they emptied out Mitzrayim like a trap containing no grain.

Animals Assist Mankind to Elevate Nitzotzei Kedushah from the Grass of the Field

Following this line of reasoning, we can now explain why the Egyptians brought oxen to plow the earth. Let us refer to an explanation of the Kedushas Levi (Balak) related to a passuk in the second paragraph of Krias Shema (Devarim 11, 15): **“ונתתי עשב בשדך לבהמתך ואכלת ושבעת”**—**and I shall provide grass in your field for your animal, and you will eat and you will be satisfied.** At first glance, this passuk is difficult to

comprehend. After all, this paragraph begins with the words (ibid. 13): "והיה אם שמוע תשמעו אל מצוותי"—**should you hark and heed My mitzvos.** So, what is the great reward being offered: **"I shall provide grass in your field for your animal, and you will eat and you will be satisfied"?**

The Kedushas Levi explains that all the food a Jew consumes l'shem Shamayim elevates the "nitzotzei kedushah" contained in those foods. However, there are also "nitzotzei kedushah" in vegetation that is not fit for human consumption. Hence, we must try to understand how a Jew can elevate those "nitzotzei kedushah" as well.

The answer is quite simple. HKB"H, in His infinite mercy and kindness, causes the animal of that person to consume vegetation containing "nitzotzei kedushah" that belong to him. Thus, those "nitzotzei kedushah" from the vegetation (grass) which is a plant form are elevated to the level of an animal. Subsequently, when the Jew comes and slaughters the animal with a proper berachah and eats its meat with a berachah l'shem Shamayim, he succeeds in elevating the "nitzotzei kedushah" that was initially in the grass and vegetation of the field.

Thus, we see that the animal becomes an intermediary or a go-between. It constitutes a link between the plant life and the human being, enabling a Jew to elevate everything to its roots of kedushah. This is the significance of the reward: **"And I shall provide grass in your field for your animal."** HKB"H arranges for an animal to consume plant life that contains "nitzotzei kedushah" related to you; then, **"you will eat, and you will be satisfied"**—HKB"H arranges for you to eat the animal that consumed those "nitzotzei kedushah." This is indeed a very special, exalted, spiritual blessing and reward.

We can now begin to appreciate why the Egyptians brought oxen to plow the land that had swallowed up the infants of Yisrael. They intended to elicit criticism of Yisrael. Since those reincarnated neshamos had sinned previously with the "cheit Eitz HaDa'as, in the generation of the mabul, and in the generation of dispersion, they did not deserve to jump in a single step up to the level of a human being. It was more fitting for them to first go up to the level of an animal, namely to the oxen that would eat the grass in the fields, in keeping with the notion of: **"And I shall provide grass in your field for your animal."** Only then, after a Jew would eat the meat of the ox, would they rise to the level of a human being. HKB"H, however, in His infinite "rachamim" and "chasadim," wanted to afford all of the neshamos in Mitzrayim a tikun, so that they could all receive the Torah. Therefore, He bypassed the normal order of elevation from the inanimate and plant, skipping directly to the level of a human being.

It is with immense pleasure and delight that we can apply this to explain why HKB"H commanded us to sacrifice a lamb as a korban and He called it a Pesach, as it is written (Shemos 12, 11): "ואכלתם אותו בחיפזון פסח הוא לה"—**you shall eat it in haste; it is a Pesach-offering to Hashem.** Rashi comments: **The korban is called a Pesach because of the skipping over and leaping.** We can interpret this comment in a way that concurs with our current discussion. As we have learned, HKB"H skipped over the level of an animal by elevating the neshamos that had reincarnated into inanimate and plant forms directly into human forms that had been swallowed by the earth and grew out of it. Therefore, to commemorate this miracle, HKB"H commanded us to offer an animal, which He named **"Pesach,"** connoting the process of skipping. This name alludes to the fact that he skipped over and bypassed the level of animal life.

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