

GROWING G-D'S CROWD

Why should we have more children?

For a bit of a change, let's talk this Shabbos about China. (No, not the china we serve our food on.)

In early 2014, the government of China made a very significant change in a very significant law. For over 30 years, the law in China was that it was illegal for a family to have more than one child. They were afraid of a population explosion—and so they denied their citizens one of the most basic human rights: the right to have as many children they want.

Officially, of course, they banned no one from having more than one child. However, the law did say that anyone with more than one child must be rich—and if so, he or she must pay for all the services that all the other citizens get for free. As such, anyone who'd bring a second child into the world would lose many of her rights, even for her first child.

But after 30 years of such a law, the Chinese regime suddenly announced that there weren't enough young people in China—which really meant that there weren't enough workers in China, resulting in a stagnating economy. On top of that, they were experiencing a growing shortage of people to tend to an aging population that was much larger than the young generation that was supposed to tend to it.

So the Chinese came to the conclusion that they need to simply

change the law.

As of now, therefore, families are permitted to have two children, but no more (but only if one of the parents is an only son or only daughter).

However, it may be hard to believe, but what actually happened is that since people in China were long accustomed to having only one child, there seems to be no rush to have more children. Experts are now saying that it will take China a lot more time to balance out its demographic problem.

But the problem of a low birthrate isn't just in China. Many Western countries also have the same problem. And it influences the workforce and many other areas, too; governments large and small are trying various methods of encouraging an increased birthrate.

But besides the reasons for which China is interested in its citizens bringing more children into the world, there are other good reasons to do so.

In Judaism, many mitzvos have their time periods during which you're supposed to do those mitzvos. For example, the mitzvah of bris milah, circumcision, is supposed to be done on the eighth day after the baby boy's birth. As the verse itself (Vayikra 12:3) states, "And on the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised."

However, when it comes to the precise time of day on the eighth day, the question is: When?

According to Halachah, the bris can be done anytime during that day. But then we can ask: If you can do it equally conveniently in the morning or the afternoon, which is better? Does it not make a difference what time you do it at? Or is there a time at which doing a bris is best?

Now, in Halachah there is a concept captured by the phrase, “Zerizim makdimin l’mitzvos”—hasty ones come early to mitzvos. What that means is that a Jew who loves doing mitzvos, G-d’s will in this physical universe, will be early and do the mitzvah at the earliest possible opportunity.

For example, the mitzvah of lulav, which must be done on the holiday of Sukkos, has a

“mitzvah-time” of all day on Sukkos. However, we are told of tzadikim who would literally stay up all night in anticipation of dawn and the very earliest possible second when they could do the mitzvah of lulav on Sukkos.

The Talmud (Tractate Pesachim 4a) tells us that such behavior is derived from Avraham Avinu, our Patriarch Abraham.

When G-d commanded Avraham to perform the Akeidah, the Binding of Yitzchak upon an altar, the Torah states: “And Avraham rose early in the morning.” He was motivated to do the mitzvah the very first thing—even though it was emotional a very hard mitzvah to do. (Of course, as we all know, he didn’t end up slaughtering Yitzchak; it was just G-d’s final test of his devotion.)

But the Sages also tell us that we learn about doing mitzvos as

early as possible from another Torah source, one that is connected to the holiday of Passover.

In the Torah portion of Bo, when the Torah speaks about eating matzah, the Torah warns: “And you shall guard the matzos,” which Rashi explains to mean “that they don’t come to fermentation.” In plain English, that means that the matzos need to be physically made as rapidly as possible so that the dough doesn’t rise.

However, since the word “matzos” and the word “mitzvos” in Hebrew are spelled with the exact same letters in the exact same way (kind of like “polish” and “Polish”), Rashi continues explaining that “one should not read it ‘matzos’ but rather, ‘mitzvos’—just as we do not allow the matzos to ferment, so too do we not allow the mitzvos to ‘ferment’; instead, if one comes into your hand, do it immediately!” (Shmos 12:17)

And with that being so, regarding the question of when to do the bris on the eighth day, the answer is, “zrizin makdimin l’mitzvos”—at the first possible opportunity there is to do the mitzvah, it should be done. In the case of bris, then, that would be first thing in the morning, as is indeed commonly done.

But here we come to another consideration.

Shlomo HaMelech (King Solomon) writes in Mishlei (the Book of Proverbs) (14:28): “The King’s glory is in a multitude of people”—meaning that the glory of a king is seen when you have lots of people coming and gathering in his honor. And so it is with daily life—when you want to know if a leader is popular, especially during election season, take a look at how many

people are attending his rallies. The more those numbers grow, the more important a leader he will be considered to be.

And the Sages say that the same concept applies to the King of all kings, to G-d Himself—that it lends greater honor and glory and respect to G-d to do His mitzvos with the largest possible crowds.

We also find this consideration with the mitzvah of blowing shofar.

On Rosh Hashanah, we sound the shofar before (and as part of) the Musaf prayer services. And the Talmud (Tractate Rosh Hashanah 32b) asks, why do we not do it early and blow the shofar during the Shacharis morning services? Do we not have the rule of “zrizin makdimin l’mitzvos”?

But the Talmud answers that since by Musaf time, which is later in the day, there will be more people in the synagogue when it’s more likely that you could do the mitzvah “with a multitude of people,” it outweighs the consideration of “zrizin makdimin l’mitzvos” (although the Talmud ultimately arrives at a different reason).

What’s more, we find this halachah in connection with the reading of the Megillah, too.

A person who has a kosher Megillah, the Scroll of Earnest that we read on Purim, at home, and knows how to chant it properly with all the notes, can read the Megillah at home without having to go to synagogue to hear it. The halachah is that you actually don’t need a minyan, a group of ten men, before you can read

the Megillah (unlike reading from a Torah scroll). Still the halachah states that a person should take pains to get to synagogue anyway despite all the kids there who will be making noise and bothering him. Why so? Because “The King’s glory is in a multitude of people.”

And if that be the case, we have the same dilemma when it comes to a bris: What’s more important—to do it in the early morning even if only a small crowd will show up? Or should the bris be held in the evening when people are coming home from work—and then, certainly more Jews will be able to join at the bris and fulfill Shlomo HaMelech’s rule: “The King’s glory is in a multitude of people.”

Thus, the question essentially is: What’s more important? My personal need to express my love for the mitzvah by doing it at the first chance? Or to overcome myself and postpone the mitzvah for the evening, when more Jewish people can join in the mitzvah, because doing so adds to “the king’s honor,” the respect we have for G-d?

So here again, we see that even in the doing of the mitzvos themselves we have the question of what the right thing to do is—that even in doing mitzvos, one can be self-centered or other-centered, either doing the mitzvah when it’s best for him, or doing it when the most fellow Jews can also participate.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the Rebbe established that it’s better to postpone a bris so that more Jews can have the merit of participating in such a mitzvah (Shulchan Menachem Vol. V, pg. 141).

Not only that, but in this week's Torah portion, we read about the service of the Kohein Gadol, the High Priest, in the Beis Hamikdah (Holy Temple) on Yom Kippur, and how the high point of Yom Kippur was when the Kohein Gadol entered the Kodesh HaKodashim, the Holy of Holies.

On the verse (Vayikra 16:3) "With this shall Aaron enter the Holy...", the Midrash (Shmos Rabbah 38:8) asks, "With which merit would Aaron enter the Holy of Holies... the merit of circumcision would enter with him."

On that, the Rebbe says that the mitzvah of circumcision is similar to entering the Holy of Holies (Toras Menachem 5702, Vol. I, pg. 140) and therefore, when it is possible to allow Jews to taste a bit of the Holy of Holies, one certainly needs to postpone the bris so that more Jews will get something of the experience that the Kohein Gadol himself had when he would enter the Holy of Holies.

So when we talk about encouraging a higher birthrate, it's possible to say that in addition to all the great economic and social reasons for more kids, we also have the reason Shlomo HaMelech gave us: "B'rov am hadras melech"—the King's glory is in a multitude of people.

Ultimately, the more people we have in G-d's physical universe, the more people He is King over. And there's no comparing a king of six billion people with a king of seven billion people.

This is especially true when every individual has his or her personal contribution that he or she can make to mankind, and when G-d is personally proud of every single human being that

He has created. Thus, it follows that every single new human being adds to G-d's Glory—meaning that every new baby born increases “G-d's multitudes” over what was present even the previous moment.

Ultimately, therefore, it's impossible to describe the pride and joy that G-d gets each time a Jewish baby is born.

And so, just as we are happy when someone has a baby, so too and all the more so is G-d happy. Good Shabbos!