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Lech Lecha

“And He brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then He said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” And he believed in Hashem; and He counted it to him for righteousness.” Bereishis 15:5-6

This week’s Torah portion contains a very significant prophecy. God assures Avraham that he will have children, and that his offspring will increase in number until they rivaled the very stars in the heavens. God continues by telling Avraham that his children will be slaves in a “land not their own”, where they will be brutally enslaved. However, He assures Avraham that his descendants will ultimately be redeemed, and that the nation that enslaved them will be judged severely.

In between these two prophecies, an interesting phrase is inserted: “*And he believed in the LORD; and He counted it to him for righteousness.*” The Torah notes that Avraham’s unwavering faith stood as yet another point in his favor. This, comments the Chasam Sofer, is appropriate: faith, *emunah*, is the source of all our strength. The Red Sea was split in the merit of faith, and the final redemption of Israel will occur in the merit of faith.

Why, though, the Chasam Sofer wonders, is Avraham given credit for this *particular* element of faith? It is, after all, only natural for one’s descendants to multiply. Once the initial hurdle of Avraham’s *own* offspring is resolved, it requires little faith to assume that many generations later, Avraham will have many descendants.

The Chasam Sofer explains that generally, things that are plentiful are not particularly special. Grass, for example, grows almost everywhere. We have no trouble stepping on it! Valuable things, however, such as rare fruits, tend to be few in number and treated with great care. An exception to this rule is the stars. The stars are both numerous and

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significant, nuclear powerhouses blazing with energy. When God told Avraham that his offspring would be numerous like the stars, He was communicating to him this message as well: Avraham's descendants would be both numerous and unique, each individual a "star" in his or her own right.

If the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men believe and adore; and preserve for many generations the remembrance of the city of God which had been shown! But every night come out these envoys of beauty, and light the universe with their admonishing smile. - Ralph Waldo Emerson

Shabbat Shalom
Rabbi Asher Coleman

