

PARSHAS BESHALACH - DANIEL EHREICH

Beshalach is the climax of a four sedra-long saga that culminates in the Bnei Yisroel finally leaving Egypt where they had been enslaved for longer than two centuries. A year had passed since Hashem informed Moshe that the time had arrived for the redemption, and all three parts of the promise He had made to Avrohom had been fulfilled.

"וגם את הגוי אשר יעבדו דן אנכי ואחרי כן יצעו ברכוש גדול"

1. I will also judge the nation that will enslave you
2. And after that you will go out...
3. ...with abundant spoils

The events of the preceding sedras lay the foundation for the establishment of a nation that would be servants not to Paraoth but to Hashem. Indeed the incidents that unfolded taught us fundamental lessons that would underpin our national conscience and transform our collective psyche into one amenable to the forthcoming revelation. Paraoth had recognised that Hashem was Just (Shemos 9:27). We had seen how he became trapped by his own choices until he couldn't escape the consequences of his actions (Shemos 7:3, Rashi & Sforno "Va'ani Aksheh", Rambam Hilchos Teshuva 6:3 & Shemoneh Perokim Perek 8). And we saw how Hashem played with Paraoth (Shemos 10:2) and undermined any residual vestige of authority that we may have attributed to him.

In anticipation of the imminent exodus we armed ourselves ("והמושים עלו בני ישראל מארץ מצרים") in preparation for the impending physical and spiritual journey, and we lovingly and kindly, followed Hashem into the wilderness, as it says in Yirmiyah 2:2:

"זכרתי לך חסד נעורייך אהבת כלולותיך לכתך אחרי במדבר..."

"I remember the kindness of your youth, the love of your bridal days. You followed me into the wilderness..."

On reflection the use of the word "kindness" is surprising considering whence we came and where we were going. And what exactly were we armed with?

There are a number of interpretations of the word והמושים.

1. Rashi option 1 – "Armed [with weapons]", similar to Yehoshua 1:14. This would seem to be the straightforward explanation. This is also the translation employed by Targum Onkelos.
2. Rashi option 2 – "Mechumashim" – from the root "five"; only one fifth of Bnei Yisroel left Egypt, as the remaining four who were undeserving of redemption had died during the plague of Darkness.
3. Targum Yerushalmi – "Armed with good deeds". This suggests we were armed in the spiritual sense although he doesn't specify what the deeds were. This is difficult as the hagodoh describes us just the day before as "ve'at erom v'eryoh (Yechezkel 16:7)" – devoid of good deeds and unworthy of redemption which is why we had to be given the two mitzvos of *dam pesach* and *dam miloh* (cf. Shemos 12:6 and Rashi). What had changed in 24 hours?
4. Targum Yonoson Ben Uziel – "Kol chad im chamsha taflin" – each one with five children. This is faithful to the simple root "chamesh" meaning "five", although it's a curious number as we are familiar with the medrash (Shemos Raboh 1:8) which explains that the Jewish women bore "shisha bekeres echad" – six children per pregnancy which is what sustained the rapid population growth (Shemos 1:7).

Each of these explanations draws on a root meaning "arms" or a derivative of "five" yet they arrive at significantly different conclusions. Rav Yosef Zvi Salant, author of Be'er Yosef performs the seemingly impossible by offering an explanation that aligns all these opinions while simultaneously answering all our questions. If only one fifth went out because four fifths of Bnei Yisroel died (Rashi option 2), this is surely referring only to adults who were responsible for their actions. In that case, for each surviving parent there were four sets of orphans whose parents died. Therefore each person leaving Egypt left not with five children but with five sets of children – their own and four others (Targum Yonoson Ben Uziel). This explains how yesterday we were devoid of merit but today we emerged "armed with good deeds" (Targum Yerushalmi).

Now we can understand the meaning of חסד נעורייך, the "kindness of your youth". It doesn't mean the kindness we showed in our youth but the kindness we displayed to the youth, the four sets of orphans that we adopted.