

Parshas Beshalach

This week's Parsha is Beshalach, the initial journey of the Jews through the wilderness toward the splitting of the Yam Suf. The first posuk uses fascinating language to describe the circuitous route the Jews took upon leaving Egypt. The first posuk of the Parsha states, "And when Pharaoh sent the people Hashem did not lead them by way of the land of the Pelishtim, because it was near, for Hashem said, perhaps the people will reconsider when they see a war, and they will return to Egypt." The word for lead used is Nacham, and the word for reconsider is Yinachem. Both are explained in Rashi for their translations- Nacham to lead and Yinachem, reconsider. Both have the root word Noach, which means calmness or tranquillity. Further, Rashi explains the words "Because it was close" (Ki Karov Hu), using the word "V'Noach Lashuv" it would have been easier to return to Egypt, using the same root word of Nun and Ches, and he states there are many Aggadic Medrashim on the topic, without detailing them. Bartenurah on the Torah clarifies that Rashi is pointing out the grammatical context for the wording in the Posuk instead of providing a deeper subtext explanation.

I don't believe there is a coincidence for using the same root word to describe what is happening here, especially given the possible burning question, why would the Jews have turned around? Didn't they witness the plagues and miracles on their behalf for redemption? It doesn't seem right to believe that the Jews would have a change of heart based on faith. For which

the posuk predetermines the answer, which is that they will see war and want to return.

Let me explain the following. When Pharaoh back in Parshas Shemos wanted to begin dehumanizing the Jews and created a narrative to the Egyptians people around the Jews, it was because of a purported war that the Jews were an enemy. Pharaoh said, we must be innovative, lest the Jews band with our enemies and turn against us and drive us from our land. This seems contrary to the reason Hashem gave, which is that they will see war (with an enemy) and return to Egypt, their enslavers. Is Egypt a friend or foe? Why would this even be a concern? If anything, the reason should have been, lest the nation sees war and get frustrated, "are there no graves in Egypt that we could have died there and not in the wilderness?" (As they stated in 14:11 after they understood Egypt to be chasing them.)

I suggest the following answer, and this is the reason for the multiple uses of the root word for tranquillity, also to be used to mean lead and regret. We know Hashem is the only reason the Jews made it out of Egypt. It is because of the promise to Avraham that we would initially go to Egypt but be redeemed. Everything that took place was by divine design, but more than this contravened the natural order. Only Hashem could have saved us. But taking a nation out of a land that had its comfort is no easy task, and the reality of a spectrum of personality types must be considered in the redemption. To describe G-d in the first posuk, Elokim is used, which is the method of describing G-d in nature. It was natural for the Jews who just were swept out of the nation of their captors to be uncomfortable.

It would be natural to return to their captor because it became a comfortable space. Therefore, Hashem led the way for them in a way shrouded in the context of providing tranquillity. Lest they regret, i.e., seek tranquillity in what was comfortable to them, i.e., even their enslavers, who used the pretext of a purported war to enslave them. Hashem didn't want the Jews to see Egypt as a comforting and tranquil place but rather the new Wilderness, which was heretofore unknown to them, and into which they were thrust. Now, the whole narrative of the Egyptian redemption is a distant memory in the psyche of us Jews today; instead, the description is a pretext for the redemption we will experience. Golus is comfortable. Being told we will be redeemed from this seems like a distant and perhaps unattainable feat. But know, Hashem considers this in the redemption, and the swiftness for which it will happen, will also be done in a way that we don't look back at Golus as the comfortable tranquillity.

Later in the posuk 13:21, the tetragrammaton name of Hashem is used to describe the pillar of fire and cloud that led and protected the Jews. Meaning the above nature name of Hashem is used. Hashem has the power and will provide an unnatural experience for redemption and the path through the wilderness. That path will be guided and protected by Hashem on the highest level and not in nature.

Because of this circuitous route, and avoidance of war, a few days later when the Jews heard the Egyptians were chasing them. They protested that they might die; it concretized the removal of Egypt as the place of solace (in 14:12 didn't we tell you that we would stay in Egypt to die), but

rather as a place they could have been killed. Meaning their complaint about coming to the wilderness to die is a form of protest, but on the basis that Egypt was just as problematic a place to be killed, not Egypt would have been our protector. Moshe answers, "do not fear, stand strong, and see the salvation of Hashem that He will perform today, for you have seen Egypt, but you will never see them again...." Rashi explains 14:13, today is the day you will have seen them, but you will no longer continue to see them. This solidified the redemption. Egypt (i.e., Golus) will be a distant memory and will not be home. The future is your salvation and the giving of the Torah.

We must understand the reality of humanity that it is easy to be subsumed by our captors and enjoy the solace Golus seems to offer. We must push ourselves beyond that comfort, knowing it is there, for when Mashiach will be revealed (to some, it is about opening our eyes), we will know it, experience it, and live it.

Good Shabbos