Jewish Tribune – Beshalach

**Chinuch, Responsibility and Reverence**

The possuk in this week’s sedrah tells us:

 וַחֲמֻשִׁים עָלוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם

And one fifth of the Bnei Yisroel went up from the land of Egypt (Shemos 13,18)

Rashi’s famous second explanation is that only one fifth of Klal Yisroel left Mitzrayim and that four fifths died during the plague of darkness.

Rabbi Bernstein ztl quoted the Be’er Yosef (Rav Yosef Salant) who noted that two of the Targumim on these words offer seemingly conflicting interpretations. The Targum Yonasan ben Uziel says: וכל חד עם חמשא טפלין**,** each one came out with five children. On the other hand, the Targum Yerushalmi says מזיינין בעובדא טבא, they came out armed with good deeds.

Aside from the differing interpretations, both Targumim are each difficult to understand.

Let’s start with the Targum Yonasan ben Uziel. If the idea that each one came out with five children refers to the fact that Klal Yisroel proliferated quickly, it should say six children, not five! After all, Chazal say “**ששה בכרס אחד**” – Jewish mothers gave birth to six children at a time.

And when the Targum Yerushalmi says מזיינין בעובדא טבא, they came out armed with good deeds, what good deeds is this referring to? Don’t we say on Seder night that we came out empty of mitzvos? As the Medrash (Shemos Rabbah, 1,35) that we quote in the Haggadah, says:

**ואת ערום ועריה, בלא מעשים טובים**

And you were naked and bereft of good deeds

The Be’er Yosef explains as follows. When four out of five died in the darkness, this referred to the adults, not the children. Children are not culpable until adulthood. If that is so, who took care of these children?

The reality on the ground must have been hugely difficult. Hundreds of thousands of children left without parents!

Rav Salant therefore says that each one of the five families that survived adopted the children of the other four families and raised them with their own children. They effectively looked after five sets of children.

And that remarkable act of chesed is what the Targum Yerushalmi is referring to. Those are the good deeds that they were armed with.

So the two Targumim are not divergent and in conflict, but they actually support each other.

It always bothered me that according to this novel explanation that Klal Yisroel did this amazing chesed, how come we say at Seder night that Klal Yisroel were naked of all mitzvos and HKBH had to give them mila and korbon pesach? Surely they had this astonishing act of chesed!?

A few years ago, I had the opportunity to spend a Shabbos in Gateshead with a group of Hasmonean students. I asked this question to Rav Avrohom Gurvitz. He gave me a wonderful answer. Even Bnei Noach have a mitzva of chesed and Klal Yisroel were naked of mitzvos that Bnei Yisroel would be obligated in. When I later repeated this to Rav Zimmerman, then the Gateshead Rov, he added that the source for this is the Netziv in his haskomo to Chafetz Chaim’s “Ahavas Chesed”.

Two key messages emerge from this. First, is a sense of responsibility. Four sets of children are parentless – you have been blessed and spared, now take them on.

Secondly, the beauty and benefit of exposure to Gedolei Yisroel. Questions answered, sources found.

A few years ago, my dear friend, R’Danny Fluss spoke in public and referred to his late parents and how they displayed tremendous respect to Talmidei Chachomim. He recalled how when the Gateshead Rosh Yeshiva would come to London to collect for his yeshiva, Danny’s late father would always take the last appointment of the night so that he could give the Rosh Yeshiva a lift to the train station, spending precious time with him and forging a relationship. Anyone who knows Danny, knows what an outstanding “Moikir Rabonnon” he is and how he lives and breathes his father’s legacy.

From a chinuch perspective, these are two fundamental messages to pass on to children and talmidim. Responsibility and respect to Talmidei Chachomim. A sense of achrayus to Klal Yisroel and the importance of exposure and reverence for Gedolei Yisroel and Talmidei Chachomim.

Important messages from our parsha, and timely and timeless messages for our times.

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