

שמות פרק יא

(ה) ומת כל בכור בארץ מצרים מבכור פרעה הישב על כסאו עד בכור השפחה אשר אחר הרחים וכל בכור בהמה:

(ו) והיתה צעקה גדלה בכל ארץ מצרים אשר כמהו לא נהיתה וכמהו לא תסף:

(ז) ולכל בני ישראל לא יחרץ כלב לשנו למאיש ועד בהמה למען תדעון אשר יפלה יקוק בין מצרים ובין ישראל:

(ח) וירדו כל עבדיך אלה אלי והשתחוו לי לאמר צא אתה וכל העם אשר ברגליך ואחרי כן אצא ויצא מעם פרעה בחרי אף: ס

זבחים קב.:

"ויחר אף ה' במשה" –

רבי יהושע בן קרחה אומר: כל חרון אף שבתורה נאמר בו רושם, וזה לא נאמר בו רושם.

ר"ש בן יוחי אומר: אף זה נאמר בו רושם, שנאמר "הלא אהרן אחיך הלוי" – והלא כהן הוא?!

הכי קאמר: אני אמרתי אתה כהן והוא לוי; עכשיו, הוא כהן ואתה לוי.

וחכמים אומרים: לא נתכהן משה אלא שבעת ימי המלואים בלבד.

ויש אומרים: לא פסקה כהונה אלא מזרעו של משה, שנאמר (דברי הימים א כג) "ומשה איש האלקים בניו יקראו על שבט הלוי", ואומר (תהלים צט) "משה ואהרן בכהניו ושמואל בקוראי שמו".

מאי "ואומר"?

וכי תימא לדורות הוא דכתיב, ואומר "משה ואהרן בכהניו".

וכל חרון אף שבתורה נאמר בו רושם? והכתיב (שמות יא) "ויצא מעם פרעה בחרי אף", ולא א"ל ולא מידי?! אמר ר"ל: סטרו ויצא.

ומי אמר ר"ל הכי? והכתיב (שמות ז) "ונצבת לקראתו על שפת היאור", ואמר ר"ל: "מלך הוא והסביר לו פנים"; ורבי יוחנן אמר: "רשע הוא והעזו פניך בו"?! איפוך.

א"ר ינאי: לעולם תהא אימת מלכות עליך, דכתיב (שמות יא) "ויורדו כל עבדיך אלה אלי", ואילו לדידיה לא קאמר ליה.

רבי יוחנן אמר מהכא: (מלכים א' יח) "ויד ה' היתה אל אליהו וישנס מתניו וירץ לפני אחאב".

Talmud Zevachim 102a

"G-d's anger was stoked (*vayichar af*) against Mosheh" –

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Karchah says: All stoked angers (*charon af*) in the Torah have an impact attributed to them, but this one has no impact attributed to it.

Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai says: This one too has an impact attributed to it, as Scripture says "Is there not Aharon your brother the Levite" –

But was he not a Kohen?

The verse means this: I said that you would be kohen and he Levite; now, he will be kohen and you Levite.

The Sages say: Mosheh was only ordained a kohen for the Seven Inauguration Days of the Tabernacle.

Some say: The status of kohen was only removed from Mosheh's descendants, as Scripture writes "Mosheh the man of the L-rd – his sons will be ascribed to the tribe of Levi", and it also says "Mosheh and Aharon among His kohanim, and Shmuel among those who call His Name".

Why is the second prooftext necessary?

So that were you to say that the first verse only refers to later times, and implies nothing about Mosheh himself, the second verse would prove the point.

Is it really true that all stoked angers in the Torah have an impact attributed to them? But Scripture writes "He went out from being with Par'oh with his anger stoked", and yet he said nothing at all to Par'oh?!

Said Resh Lakish: He slapped him and left.

Did Resh Lakish really say that? But Scripture writes "You must stand to greet him on the bank of the river", and Resh Lakish said "He is a king, so greet him politely", whereas Rabbi Yochanan said: "He is an evildoer, so treat him with arrogance"!?

Reverse the positions of Resh Lakish and Rabbi Yochanan.

Said Rabbi Yannai: One must always have the terror/awe of the government upon him, as Scripture indicates by writing "All these servants of yours will come down to me" – but Mosheh did not tell Par'oh that he too would come down to him (even though eventually he did).

Rabbi Yochanan derived the same point from a different verse: "The arm of Hashem was toward Eliyahu, and he girded his loins and ran before Ach'av".

Earlier this week I posted on LookJed an extended discussion of contemporary modes of teaching Tanakh, available [here](#), which concluded with the suggestion that we seek to reclaim Chazal's methodologies and approaches to Tanakh. In one of a variety of public and private responses, Dr. Avi Walfish, a very valuable and creative scholar, wrote that

"Aryeh further suggested that we learn to 'reclaim the methodology of Hazal'. While I sympathize with his goal, I cannot agree with the statement as presented. I don't believe that midrash follows a methodology and, even if it does, I do not think that this methodology is replicable by contemporary readers, informed as they are by the hermeneutical issues involved in the gaps among author, text, reader, and reading communities."

There are many, many fruitful ways in which I disagree with Dr. Walfish's stimulating response, beginning with his *lesheetato* reduction of "methodologies" to "methodology" and equation of "Chazal's approach to Tanakh" with midrash, and I hope to begin exploring several of them in next week's installment. This week, as an introduction to that beginning, I want to explore a Talmudic passage of Scriptural interpretation.

The relevant passage from this week's parashah is Shemot 11:8, in which Mosheh describes the coming Plague of the Firstborn, and informs Par'oh that this plague will indeed force Egypt's final surrender. Par'oh's reply is not given, but Mosheh leaves his presence "*bachari af*", literally perhaps "with steaming nostrils". With the exception of Ibn Caspi, who apparently takes the meaning here as "with great amusement", there seems a consensus that this is a metaphorical description of great anger.

On Zevachim 102a, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Karchah makes the literary claim that the idiom "chari af" in Tanakh is, with one exception, always accompanied in the text by a practical demonstration of anger, while Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai denies even the one exception. The Talmud wonders why our verse is not cited as an exception. Now one might argue that the Plague itself was the practical expression of Mosheh's anger, but Resh Lakish contends that Mosheh actually slapped Par'oh across the face before leaving.

My point here is that Resh Lakish derives the slap from a rigorous philological claim, namely that "chari af" does not describe an internally contained emotional state, but rather one that finds external expression. Another example of this mode of rabbinic reading is the treatment of the word "zeh", which is consistently taken as referring to an external object rather than to an internal representation. This is, for example, the reason that we hold up the matzot at the seder while saying "baavur zeh". Readers with other examples are encouraged to send them in.

But the Talmud does not see Resh Lakish as responding in isolation to a philological issue. It notes instead that this detail likely reflects a general position that Mosheh did not relate to Par'oh with deference and respect, but rather with arrogant contempt. This, in turn, is seen as reflecting not simply a literary position, but rather a moral position, namely that one should not give honor to the wicked simply because they occupy positions of authority (at least so long as they have no capacity to meaningfully retaliate for disrespect). Both Resh Lakish's literary and his moral position are disputed by Rav Yochanan, who argues that Mosheh treated Par'oh with the deference appropriate to his position, and that indeed all those in power, no matter how wicked, should be given formal honor and deference.

Rav Yochanan cites the story of Eliyahu running before Ach'av's chariot to demonstrate his moral position, but Resh Lakish would have no difficulty responding that Eliyahu did so only during Ach'av's moment of repentance, however brief that was. As

explained above, Rav Yochanan might believe that the Plague itself was the practical expression of *charon af*, and therefore has no need to hypothesize a slap.

Now it is important not to get attached to the notion of a slap per se, and thus see Resh Lakish's interpretation as speculative invention. Resh Lakish would be equally satisfied with a claim that Mosheh spit in Par'oh's face, or stuck his tongue out at him, so long as he felt that such a claim was consistent with Mosheh's character. What Resh Lakish is really saying is that the proper *translation* of "and he left Par'oh presence *bachari af*" is "And he left Par'oh's presence with a *demonstration* of anger", in other words that the verse is describing how Mosheh appeared to the Egyptians, not how he felt. (One might use this route to reach Ibn Caspi's interpretation that the anger was completely feigned, but it is not clear to me that Resh Lakish contends that *chari af* refers *only* to the practical expression of anger, rather than to anger which finds practical expression).

One might preliminarily conclude from here that Chazal's methodology included rigorous philology, contextual literary analysis, and the presumption of moral consistency throughout Tanakh. It is worth exploring whether R. Shimon bar Yochai simply disagrees as to the interpretation of the suggested exception to the meaning of "*charon af*", or whether he instead takes the principled position that a single exception suffices to undermine the claim that a word carries a particular connotation. It may also be worth exploring whether Rav Yochanan's and Resh Lakish's positions here are reflective of their characters, of their communal roles, their politics, or of the role of authority in their own relationship; however, if it is discovered that they are, this must not yield the conclusion that their interpretations here are eisegetic impositions rather than exegetical outcomes.

Shabbat shalom!
Aryeh Klapper

Note: You can find past divrei torah on Bo [here](#) and [here](#).