

תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף סג עמוד א

אמר ליה אביי לרב דימי ואמרי לה לרב אויא ואמרי לה רב יוסף
לרב דימי ואמרי לה לרב אויא ואמרי לה אביי לרב יוסף מאי
טעמא דרבי אליעזר דאמר תכשיטין הן לו דכתיב +תהלים מה+
חגור חרבך על ירך גבור הודך והדרך אמר ליה רב כהנא למר
בריה דרב הונא האי בדברי תורה כתיב אמר ליה אין מקרא יוצא
מידי פשוטו אמר רב כהנא כד הוינא בר תמני סרי שנין והוה
גמירנא ליה לכוליה תלמודא ולא הוה ידענא דאין מקרא יוצא מידי
פשוטו עד השתא

Said Abayyei to Rav Dimi:

some report: to Rav Avya;

and some report: Abayyei to Rav Yosef:

What is the rationale of Rabbi Eliezer when he says that (a man may carry weapons in public spaces on Shabbat because) they are considered ornamental for him (and therefore are regarded as clothing, worn rather than carried)? Because Scripture writes “Belt your sword on your thigh, O Hero, your splendor and your glory”.

Said Rav Kehana to Sir son of Rav Huna: But that (verse) refers to the study of Torah!?

He said to him: No Scripture exits the bounds of its pshat.

Said Rav Kehana: I was eighteen years old, and I had learned the entire Talmud, and I did not know that no Scripture exits the bounds of its pshat until now.

What does Rav Kehana’s statement teach us?

That one should first learn, and afterward abstract.

רשב"ם בראשית פרק לז:ב

אלה תולדות יעקב –

ישכילו ויבינו אוהבי שכל

מה שלימדנו רבותינו כי "אין מקרא יוצא מידי פשוטו" –

אף כי עיקרה של תורה באת ללמדנו ולהודיענו ברמיזה הפשט ההגדות וההלכות והדינים על ידי אריכות הלשון ועל ידי שלשים ושתים מידות של ר' אליעזר בנו של ר' יוסי הגלילי ועל ידי שלש עשרה מידות של ר' ישמעאל,

והראשונים מתוך חסידותם נתעסקו לנטות אחרי הדרשות שהן עיקר, ומתוך כך לא הורגלו בעומק פשוטו של מקרא,

ולפי שאמרו חכמים "אל תרבו בניכם בהגיון", וגם אמרו "העוסק במקרא מדה ואינה מדה; עוסק בתלמוד אין לך מדה גדולה מזו", ומתוך כך לא הורגלו כל כך בפשוטן של מקראות, וכדאמ' במסכת שבת הוינא בר תמני סרי שנין וגרסינ' כולה תלמודא ולא הוה ידענא דאין מקרא יוצא מידי פשוטו – וגם רבנו שלמה אבי אמי מאיר עיני גולה, שפירש תורה נביאים וכתובים, נתן לב לפרש פשוטו של מקרא, ואף אני שמואל ב"ר מאיר חתנו זצ"ל נתווכחתי עמו ולפניו, והודה לי שאילו היה לו פנאי היה צריך לעשות פרושים אחרים לפי הפשטות המתחדשים בכל יום.

ועתה יראו המשכילים מה שפירשו הראשונים:

"אלה תולדות יעקב" – אלה מקראות ומאורעות שאירעו ליעקב.

והנה זה הבל הוא,

כי כל 'אלה תולדות' האמור בתורה ובכתובים – יש מהם שמפרשים בני האדם, ויש מהם רבים שמפרשים בני

בנים,

כאשר פירשתי ב"אלה תולדות נח":

למעלה בפרשת בראשית כת' "ויהי נח בן חמש מאות שנה ויולד נח את שם ואת חם ואת יפת", ואחרי כן מפרש כי העולם חטאו ונח מצא חן, ואחרי כן מפרש "אלה תולדות נח" – בני בניו, היאך? כי שלשה בנים היו לו, וציוה הק' להכניסם בתיבה י"ב חודש, ובצאתם "ויולדו להם בנים אחרי המבול", עד שעולים לשבעים בנים, שהיו שבעים אומות, כדכת' "מאלה נפרדו וגו'".

וכן בעשו – פרשה ראשונה מפרש בני עשו שנולדו לו במקום אביו, ואחרי כן "וילך אל ארץ וגו' וישב לו בהר שעיר" וכל הפרשה, וכת' "אלה תולדות עשו אבי אדום בהר שעיר" וכל פרשה שנייה זאת בבני עשו, וכשם שמצינו בעשו שפירש שבניו נולדו במגורי אביו קודם שהלך אל ארץ מפני יעקב, ובני בניו נולדו בהר שעיר, כן ביעקב –

למעלה כת' "ויהיו בני יעקב שנים עשר וגו'", ומפרש לבסוף "אלה בני יעקב אשר ילד לו בפדן ארם ויבא [יעקב] אל יצחק אביו וגו'", הרי פיר' בניו של יעקב והיכן נולדו כאשר עשה בבני עשו, ועתה כותב "אלה תולדות יעקב" – בני בניו, שהיו שבעים, והיאך נולדו. כיצד? יוסף בן שבע עשרה שנה ונתקנאו בו אחיו ומתוך כך ירד יהודה מאת אחיו והיו לו בנים בכזיב ובעדולם שלה ופרץ וזרח, ונתגלגל הדבר שיוסף הורד מצרימה ונולדו לו במצרים מנשה ואפרים ושלח יוסף בשביל אביו וביתו עד שהיו שבעים.

וכל זה היה צריך משה רבנו לכתוב שעל זה הוכיחם "בשבעים נפש ירדו אבותיך וגו'":

These are the *toladot* of Yaakov –

Discern and understand, ye lovers of discernment, that which our Masters have taught us that “No scripture exits the bounds of its pshat” – even though the root of Torah comes to teach us and inform us through the “hints of the pshat” the *haggadot* and the *halakhot* and the *dinin* via overextensive formulations and through the thirty two exegetical principles of Rabbi Eliezer son of Rabbi Yose the Galilean and through the thirteen exegetical principles of Rabbi Yishmael, and the Early Ones owing to their piety were engaged and turned following the derashot, which are the root, and owing to that they were not accustomed to the depth of the pshat of Scripture, and also owing to the Sages having said “don’t expose your children overmuch to higayon”, and also their saying “One who engages intensely with Scripture – this is a measure and not more; One who engages intensely with Talmud – there is no measure greater than this.”, and owing to this they were not so accustomed to the pshat of Scriptural verses, as it says in Masekhet Shabbat: “I was eighty years old and learned the entire Talmud, but I did not know that no Scripture exits the bounds of its pshat” –

also our master Shlomoh, father of my mother, enlightener of the eyes of the exile, who interpreted Torah, Prophets, and Writings, gave attention to interpreting the pshat of Scripture, and even I, Shmuel son of Rabbi Meir his son in-law – to mention the righteous is to bless them! – disputed with him and before him, and he conceded to me that if he had had the time, he would have needed to make other interpretations in accordance with the pshatim that are originated every day.

Now – see O discerning ones what the Early Ones interpreted:

“Eileh toldot Yaakov” – there are the happenings and occurrences that occurred to Yaakov”.

But behold this is just hot air, because every “eileh toldot” in Torah, Prophets, and Writings – some of them are interpreted as referring to a man’s sons, and many of them are understood as referring to grandchildren,

as I interpreted in re “eileh toldot Noach”: above in Parashat B’reishit Scripture writes “And Noach was a man of five hundred years, and Noach sired Shem, Cham, and Yafet”, and afterward it explains that the world sinned but Noach found grace, and afterward it explains “eileh toldot Noach” – his grandchildren. How? Because he had three sons, and the Holy commanded that they be entered into an ark for 12 months, and when they came out, “sons were born to them after the Flood”, until they came up to seventy sons, who were seventy nations, as Scripture writes “[and] from these separated etc.”

Similarly regarding Esav –

the first paragraph explains the sons of Esav who were born to him in the place of his father, and afterwords “He went to (a) land etc. and he settled himself in Mount Seir” and the rest of the paragraph, and Scripture writes “Eileh toldot Esav, father of Edom, in Mount Seir”, and the whole second paragraph deals with Esav’s sons. Just as we found re Esav that it makes explicit that his sons were born in the environs of his father before he went to (a) land because of Yaakov, and his grandchildren were born in Mount Seir,

so too re Yaakov –

Scripture writes above that “And the sons of Yaakov were twelve”, and makes explicit at the end “these are the sons of Yaakov who was born to him in Paddan Aram, and Yaakov came to Yitzchak his father etc.”, so it listed the children of Yaakov and where they were born just as it did with Esav’s children. Now it writes “Eileh toldot Yaakov” – his grandchildren, who were seventy, and where they were born. How? Yosef was seventeen years old, and his brothers became jealous of him, and owing to that Yehudah went down among his brothers and had children in Ksiv, and Adulam, Sheilah, Peretz, and Zerach, and the matter resulted so that “Yosef was brought down to Egypt” and there were born to him in Egypt Menasheh and Ephraim, and Yosef sent to get his father and household until they became seventy. All this Mosheh our master had to write, because about this he rebuked them: “With seventy souls your ancestors etc.”

We turn again this week to Rashbam, this time to the programmatic essay that precedes his commentary on “Eileh Toldot Yaakov”. I have always found this piece extremely difficult reading, with apparent sentence fragments and/or run-on sentences, misplaced modifiers, and the like, and rereading this week I noticed the gender confusion of the famous phrase (hapshatot hamitchadshim). I also compared Rashbam’s very parallel commentary on Genesis 1:1, without resolving any of the key ambiguities, and was glad to find Dr. Martin Lockshin’s translation in the Gann library – I only own the volume on Exodus, which he was kind enough to give me many years ago - some of what I write will be in dialogue with his notes, and perhaps he’ll honor us by continuing the discussion.

Rashbam here draws a contrast between his own purpose – revealing the “depths of the pshat of the text” – and those of his predecessors, who, as a result of piety and in consonance with a set of rabbinic admonitions, dealt instead with “the hints of the pshat”. He is generally read as locating Rashi as a transition figure, who shared Rashbam’s intent but – despite helpful disagreements from Rashbam himself – did not quite succeed in writing a “depth pshat” commentary, and conceded as much¹.

Much has been made of Rashbam’s concession that his work does not relate to the “ikkar” of the text². I want to point out, however, that the significance of this concession is overstated, at least here and in Genesis 1:1. Here’s why: Rashbam’s concession is meaningful in relationship to his post-Talmudic predecessors *when interpreting a text which can be ascribed a different meaning via a different hermeneutic*, for example Exodus 13:9, where Rashbam claims that the “deep pshat” of “as a sign on your hand” is “as if they were written on your hand”, whereas (although he does not say this himself) the “hints of pshat” meaning is that we should wear actual tefillin. But here and in Genesis 1:1, Rashbam is not arguing that his predecessors’ interpretations are correct in a different system; rather, he is arguing that his predecessors were completely wrong – hot air, *hevel!!* – but that their incompetence is perhaps excusable *because owing to their piety they never learned how to properly interpret Torah*, because the “deep pshat” method is not necessary to understand the statements and derashot of the Talmudic rabbis, all of which are true.

With this understanding, we can turn to Rashbam’s Talmudic proof-text, the statement of Rav Kehana on Shabbat 63a that “By age 18 I have learned all of Talmud, but yet I never knew until now that Scripture never exits the bounds of its pshat”. Professor Lockshin contends that Rashbam is being interestingly circular, in that Raphael Loewe has shown that the meaning of the word “pshat” here, in contrast to his own meaning, is³ “the meaning of traditionally accepted as authoritative or at any rate familiar, however far from the primary sense of the words it might be”, whereas Rashbam needs to legitimate precisely those “deep pshat” interpretations that differ from traditionally accepted or familiar readings.

¹ I am not convinced that this is precisely what Rashbam records, and obviously we cannot be certain in any case that Rashi was not merely placating a precocious but persistent grandson.

² As Dr. Lockshin points out, Rashbam nowhere explains why one should ignore those rabbinic admonitions, and focus on a non-ikkar method of Torah study.

³ Raphael Loewe, “The ‘Plain’ Meaning of Scripture in early Jewish Exegesis”, p. 167, in Papers of the Institute of Jewish Studies, ed. J.G. Weiss, Jerusalem 1964

I confess to not understanding Loewe's definition of pshat at all in this context. The Talmudic passage, as correctly understood by Ramban in his comments to Sefer haMitvot Shores 2, is discussing whether a metaphor can be adduced as evidence for a literal truth. Abayyei argued that a verse which refers to Torah learning as a sword and as ornamental can demonstrate that swords are ornamental; Rav Kehana initially disagrees, but learns that metaphors have to be true to life – if the Torah is described as a sword and as ornamental, then there must be ornamental swords. In other words: The familiar, authoritative meaning of that verse is that the sword is Torah, and the “pshat” is that it is literally a weapon. This is exactly the opposite of Loewe's understanding, although it is true that the “pshat” here is – as absolutely everyone understands – not the primary intention of the verse.

It is nonetheless true that the “pshat” here exactly parallels what Rashbam rejects in the name of “deep pshat” regarding tefillin (perhaps this is why Rashbam needs to refer to what he does as “deep” pshat). However, it is further important to realize here that Rashbam cites Rav Kehana not to make a substantive point, but rather a sociological description – he only wishes to show that even in the time of the Talmud it was possible to be highly educated without having engaged in Scriptural interpretation for its own sake. Thus the later commentaries are merely the equivalent of the 18 year old Rav Kehana, and their attempts at direct Biblical interpretation, far from being given deference as “ikkar”, can be dismissed.

In summary – I contend that Rashbam believes that his “deep pshat” methodology is in full accordance with the methodology of the Talmudic sages, as evidenced by their claim “No Scripture exits the bounds of its pshat”. However, he acknowledges that this methodology was taught later in the educational process, and was not necessary to understand the “ikkar” of Torah, as evidenced by Rav Kehana not hearing that expression until after learning all of Talmud. He contends that his post-Talmudic predecessors lost the methodology entirely, and he is reclaiming it. As a result he is entitled to entirely disregard all post-Talmudic interpretations, while maintaining loyalty to Talmudic interpretations even when they reflect a different exegetical method.

If this is accepted, then Rasham's “pshatot hamitchadshim” refers to rediscovery, not creativity, and does not say anything about “pshat” as an inherently dynamic process.

This is probably too long already, but I need to say that the interpretation Rashbam calls “deep pshat” here deserves its own treatment, and perhaps we'll continue the discussion next week or in a different context.

Shabbat Shalom

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