

בראשית פרק לב

(כה) ויותר יעקב לבדו ויאבק איש עמו עד עלות השחר:
(כו) וירא כי לא יכל לו ויגע בכף ירכו ותקע כף ירך יעקב בהאבקו עמו:
(כז) ויאמר שלחני כי עלה השחר ויאמר לא אשלחך כי אם ברכתני:
(כח) ויאמר אליו מה שמך ויאמר יעקב:
(כט) ויאמר לא יעקב יאמר עוד שמך כי אם ישראל כי שרית עם אלהים ועם אנשים ותוכל:
(ל) וישאל יעקב ויאמר הגידה נא שמך ויאמר למה זה תשאל לשמי ויברך אתו שם:
(לא) ויקרא יעקב שם המקום פניאל כי ראיתי אלהים פנים אל פנים ותנצל נפשי:
(לב) ויזרח לו השמש כאשר עבר את פנואל והוא צלע על ירכו:
(לג) על כן לא יאכלו בני ישראל את גיד הנשה אשר על כף הירך עד היום הזה כי נגע בכף ירך יעקב בגיד הנשה:

רשב"ם בראשית פרק לב:

(כה) ויותר יעקב לבדו - כלומר שהעביר כל אשר לו, שלא היה עוד לעבור אלא הוא לבדו, ורצה לעבור אחריהם, כי לברוח דרך אחרת שלא יפגשנו עשו נתכוון:
ויאבק - מלאך עמו שלא יוכל לברוח ויראה קיום [הבטחתו] של הק' שלא יזיקהו עשו:
(כו) כי לא יכול לו - המלאך. ורצה לעבור ולברוח בעל כרחו:
(כז) כי עלה השחר - וכיון שהאיר היום מעתה יש לילך לדרכיך:
כי אם ברכתני - שתשלחני מאתך בשלום, שלא אהיה נזוק במה שנתאבקתי עמך, כי עתה עלה השחר. אז ידע יעקב שהוא מלאך:
(כט) כי שרית - . . . ומה שלקה יעקב ונצלע לפי שהקב"ה הבטיחו והוא היה בורח. וכן מצינו בכל ההולכים בדרך שלא ברצון הק' או ממאנים ללכת, שנענשו. במשה כת' שלח נא ביד תשלח, ויחר אף י"י במשה. ולפי הפשט אעפ"י שאמרו חכמים בכל מקום חרון אף עושה רושם וכאן מה רושם יש? הלא אהרן אחיך הלוי עתיד היה להיות לוי ואתה כהן ועכשיו הוא יהיה כהן ואתה לוי, אך לפי הפשט לפי שהיה מתעצל ללכת כת' ויהי בדרך במלון ויפגשהו [י"י] ויבקש המיתו. וכן ביונה שנבלע במעי הדגה. וכן בבלעם ויחר אף אלהים כי הולך הוא ונעשה חיגר, כדכת' ותלחץ [את] רגל בלעם, וילך שפי, חיגר כמו ושופו עצמותיו:
(לב) והוא צולע על ירכו - עתה כשהיה השמש [זורח] ראוהו צולע על ירכו. כמו ויהי בבקר והנה היא לאה, כי עד עכשיו לא נודע שהיא לאה:
(לג) על כן לא יאכלו - לזכרון גבורתו של יעקב ונס שעשה לו הק' שלא מת:

Bereishit 32:25-33

And Yaakov was left over, by himself, but a man wrestled with him until dawn rose.

He saw that he was not able to overcome him, so he touched the hollow of his thigh, and the hollow of Yaakov's thigh dislocated during his wrestling with him.

He said: Send me away, for the dawn has risen;

He said: I will not send you away except if you have blessed me.

He said to him: What is your name?

He said: Yaakov.

He said: Not Yaakov will your name still be said, but rather Yisroel, because you have striven-for-mastery with Elo-him and with people, and you have overcome.

Yaakov asked, saying: Please tell your name!

He said: Why is it necessary for you to ask my name?

He blessed him there.

Yaakov called the name of the place Peniel, because I have seen Elo-him face-to—face and my life was saved.

The run shone for him as he passed by Penuel, with him limping on his thigh.

Therefore The Children of Israel will not eat the *gid hanasheh*, which is in the *kaf* of the *yarekh*, until this day, because he touched the *kaf* of Yaakov's *yarekh*, the *gid hanasheh*.

Rashbam

And Yaakov was left over, by himself – meaning that he had crossed over everything that was his, so there was nothing left to cross over other than he by himself, and he wished to cross over after them, because his intention was to flee in a different direction so that Esav would not meet him.

But there wrestled – an angel – with him so that he would not be able to flee, and he would see the fulfillment of the promise of the Holy, that Esav would not harm him.

That he could not overcome him – the angel, and he wished to cross and flee against his will.

Because the dawn has risen – and since there is daylight, now you can go on your way.

Except if you bless me – that you send me from you in peace, that I will not be harmed by having wrestled with you – now that there was daylight, Yaakov knew that he was an angel.

Because you have striven-for-mastery – and that which Yaakov was struck and lamed was because The Holy Blessed One promised, and yet he was fleeing.

We find the same with all those who go on the way against the will of the Holy, or refuse to go - that they are punished.

a) Regarding Mosheh, who said 'Please send whom you send (anyone but me)', "and Hashem's wrath was kindled", and according to the pshat, even though the Sages said "In all places, when Divine wrath is kindled it engraves its mark, but here what mark is engraved? 'Behold Aharon your brother the Levite' – he would have been Levite and you Kohen; now he will be Kohen and you Levite", according to the pshat it (the engraved mark) was that because he was procrastinating to go, Scripture writes "And it was on the way, in the inn, and Hashem met him and sought to cause his death".

b) And similarly Yonah, who was swallowed up in the entrails of the fish.

c) And similarly Bil'am, 'The wrath of G-d kindled because he was going', and he became a clubfoot, as Scripture writes "and she forced Bil'am's leg against the wall..."

And he was limping on his thigh – now, when the sun was shining, they saw him limping on his thigh,

analogous to "It was in the morning and behold she was Leah" for until then it was not known that she was Leah.

Therefore they will not eat – as a memory to the power of Yaakov and the miracle that the Holy performed for him, that he did not die.

This week's devar Torah is by way of teshuvah. For many years I have used the above Rashbam as example of the weakness of the "pshat" approach that takes its inspiration from his critique of Rashi. I thought that a reading that has the angel appear only to prevent Yaakov from fleeing, and that, unlike Rashi, does not see the angel as a foreshadowing of his confrontation with Esav, and unlike Nechamah Leibowitz and many in her wake – see especially Avivah Zornberg's treatment - does not see the angel as a representation of the Esav aspect within Yaakov, misses the mood of the text. "Yaakov was alone, but a man wrestled with him" – the obvious contradiction seems to me to tell us that we're in a surreal realm within his consciousness.

But I had not appreciated the extent to which Rashbam brilliantly situates this story within a complex of parallel Biblical texts, and the one striking advantage of his reading – he has a remarkably straightforward explanation of why Yaakov is injured, and the pattern he points out, of injury as the result of refusal to obey Divine travel plans, is certainly plausible.

Now I still think the story as Rashbam retells it is wildly anticlimactic, and its assertion that the angel essentially succeeded in his mission of preventing Yaakov from fleeing seems to me very hard to fit with the renaming, or even with his own explanation of the gid hanasheh prohibition as commemorating Yaakov's gevurah. And I note that Rashbam's own theory is built off a midrashic pattern, that kindled Divine wrath always has physical consequences. I also wonder if the differences between angels and human beings are really more visual than tangible, such that one can fight an angel all night without realizing but recognize its nature immediately by daylight.

But perhaps there is a way of integrating Rashbam into the interpretational matrix of Rash's approach, of suggesting that Yaakov's impulse to flee reflected an uncertainty about his identity.

Developing such an approach would require us to revisit core questions about this episode as a whole – for example, was Esav on his way to meet Yaakov when Yaakov's messengers met him, or did he set out in response to those messengers?

It should also be noted that Rashbam's reading has the perhaps incidental effect of undermining a classic traditional narrative about Jews' relationship with Gentiles. There are many stories of rabbis reading Rashi on this parashah before meeting important Gentile leaders, and thereby internalizing an approach which sees the avoidance of confrontation as the primary desired outcome in Jewish relationships with the Gentile world. But if Rashbam is correct, Yaakov probably erred by seeking to avoid confrontation – he should have marched forth with confidence.

I want to mention that it was wonderful to visit with alums over the past few days in Philadelphia/Penn and Princeton, and I hope to have many more such interactions, and encourage you to come up with ideas. Anyone accessible to Newton Sunday night is of course strongly encouraged to attend the parlor meeting at the Cohn-Teitelbaum house.

Shabbat Shalom!

Aryeh Klapper

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