

שמות פרק יט

- (א) בחדש השלישי לצאת בני ישראל מארץ מצרים ביום הזה באו מדבר סיני:
(ב) ויסעו מרפידיים ויבאו מדבר סיני ויחנו במדבר ויחן שם ישראל נגד ההר:
(ג) ומשה עלה אל האל-הים ויקרא אליו יקוק מן ההר לאמר כה תאמר לבית יעקב ותגיד לבני ישראל:
(ד) אתם ראיתם אשר עשיתי למצרים ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים ואבא אתכם אלי:
(ה) ועתה אם שמוע תשמעו בקלי ושמרתם את בריתי והייתם לי סגלה מכל העמים כי לי כל הארץ:
(ו) ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש אלה הדברים אשר תדבר אל בני ישראל:

אונקלוס לשמות פרק יט

(7) אתון חזיתון דעבדית למצראי ונטילית\ונטלית\ואטלית יתכון כד על גדפי נשרין וקריבית יתכון לפולחני:

רש"י לשמות פרק יט

ואשא אתכם - זה יום שבאו ישראל לרעמסס, שהיו ישראל מפוזרין בכל ארץ גושן, ולשעה קלה כשבאו ליסע ולצאת נקבצו כלם לרעמסס.
ואונקלוס תרגם ואשא, ונטלית יתכון, כמו ואסיע אתכם, תיקן את הדבר דרך כבוד למעלה:
על כנפי נשרים - כנשר הנושא גוזליו על כנפיו, שכל שאר העופות נותנים את בניהם בין רגליהם, לפי שמתיראין מעוף אחר שפורה על גביהם, אבל הנשר הזה אינו מתירא אלא מן האדם, שמא יזרוק בו חץ, לפי שאין עוף אחר פורה על גביו, לכך נותנן על כנפיו, אומר מוטב יכנס החץ בי, ולא בבני. אף אני עשיתי כן, (שמות יד יט) ויסע מלאך האלהים וגו' (שם כ) ויבא בין מחנה מצרים וגו', והיו מצרים זורקים חצים ואבני בליסטראות והענן מקבלם:
ואבא אתכם אלי - כתרגמו:

Exodus 19:1-6

In the third month since the exodus of Israel from Egypt – on that very day, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai.

They travelled from Refidim, and they came to the Wilderness of Sinai, and they camped in the Wilderness. Israel camped there, opposite the mountain.

Moshe went up toward the divinity. Hashem called to him from the mountain, saying:

“Thus you must say to the House of Jacob, and tell the Children of Israel:

‘You have seen that which I did to Egypt; and I took you on the wings of eagles, and I brought you to Me. Now – if you will indeed hearken to My voice, and observe My covenant, then you will be for me the treasure from among all peoples, for the whole land is Mine. And you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’

These are the words which you must speak to the Children of Israel.”

Targum Onkelos to Exodus 19:4

You have seen that which I did to Egypt; and *va'esa* you as if on eagles' wings, and I brought you to My worship.

Rashi to Exodus 19:4

Va'esa you – this refers to the day Israel came to Rameses – for Israel were scattered throughout the land of Goshen, and in a trivial timespan, when they came to travel to leave, they were all gathered to Rameses.

But Onkelos translated *va'esa* as (variant text), meaning “and I caused you to travel” – he “improved” the matter so as to provide honor above.

On the wings of eagles – like an eagle that carries its fledglings on its wings – for all the other birds put their children between their legs, because they are afraid of another bird

that flies above them, but the eagle is afraid only of human beings, lest they shoot an arrow at him, because no bird flies above him, so he puts them on his wings, saying: "better that the arrow enters me, than entering my child". So too I have done so – "And the angel of the Divinity traveled . . . and it came between the camp of Egypt", and the Egyptians were shooting arrows and catapult-stones, and the cloud received them. And I brought you to me – should be understood as Onkelos translated.

The current issue of Hakirah (thanks Dov:)) features the latest round of a debate between Rabbi Natan Slifkin and Rabbi Saul Zucker on the question of whether Rashi was a corporealist. I confess a suspicion that both sides, as they occasionally recognize, are somewhat off the mark. The magical midrashic word k'b'yakhol (= as if it were possible) means that traditional Jewish thinkers are not really obligated to make clear to others, and perhaps not even to understand themselves, whether statements about G-d are intended as metaphor or literally, or what degree of separation is needed between metaphor and nimshal. Furthermore, the Rambam's definition of forbidden corporealism, which includes the ascription of emotion to G-d, ends up, as Shlomo Pines pointed out, making all speech about G-d impossible. Any Maimonidean speaking about G-d, therefore, simply assumes that everything said is with the stipulation k'b'yakhol. I tend to think as a result that one can almost never demonstrate corporealism or incorporealism – at best one can demonstrate self-perception as corporealist or noncorporealist, and these self-perceptions are often not in accord with others' definitions.

One particular battleground for this controversy is Rashi to Shemot 19:6, discussing the metaphor “on the wings of eagles”¹. The components of this Rashi are as follows:

- a) The specific event referred to is the miraculously rapid assembly of the Jews from all over Goshen to Rameses immediately prior to the Exodus
- b) a citation of Onkelos, who is described as altering something for the Honor of Above.
- c) The metaphor “wings of eagles” as referring to the eagle carrying its young above its body rather than below, because it has no fear of birds attacking from above it
- d) The eagle is being protective, because it is interposing its body between human archers and its young
- e) The nimshal of d) is that G-d moved His angel and cloud between the Jewish and Egyptian camps on the night before the Splitting of the Sea
- f) a statement that Onkelos correctly translated the following phrase as “I brought them to My worship”.

Certain problems and questions are immediately apparent:

- 1) a) and e) refer to different events
- 2) Why is d) important? All the other birds equally interpose their bodies against what they see as the greatest danger to them
- 3) What is the nimshal of c)?
- 4) How does Onkelos' alteration affect the Honor of above?
- 5) Is Rashi endorsing Onkelos, or is he rather explaining why Onkelos here should not be understood as a translation?

At least several of these questions likely depend on what it is that Onkelos is altering. There seem to be a variety of texts here, including ונטלית, ונטלית, and ואטלית, and Rashi understands this as a shift from ואסיע to ואשיע.

Everyone I've read focuses on the binyan, assuming that the shift is from “I carried you on wings” to “I caused you to be carried on wings”². But why would this shift be necessary for the Honor of Above? Perhaps the image of G-d carrying people is demeaning, but that image appears as well in Devarim 1:11, where Onkelos translates it as carrying³ and in Devarim 32:11, where the image is also of an eagle carrying its young, and as best I can tell Onkelos has no issue⁴.

Rabbi Zucker connects this with the other place that Rashi cites Onkelos as altering for the Honor of Above, Shemot 33:22 -

¹ I find somewhat the attempt at zoological accuracy embodied in the alternate translation “on the wings of vultures” – regardless of the question of what bird a nesher was (BDB allows eagle), the metaphor is ruined by the associations “vulture” carries in English. On this, and on the scientific accuracy of the image of birds carrying their young generally, see Rabbi Slifkin at <http://zootorah.blogspot.com/2009/05/on-eagles-wings.html>

² It is not clear to me why, if this is the real point, Rashi says this is like ואסיע rather than ואשיע.

³ using the shoresh סבר, which, based on his using it only there and to Devarim 1:12 and 11:12, seems to refer specifically to human parents carrying their children

⁴ It is tempting to suggest, but there is no evidence, that Rashi was referring to Onkelos' interjection of כדעל to make clear that the eagle's wings are metaphorical rather than real.

“and I will make My hand a roof” – from here we learn that destroyers have permission to destroy. But Onkelos translated “I will protect with My word” – a paraphrase for the Honor of Above, that He does not need to roof over him with an actual hand”,

- and concludes that the change in both places is intended to prevent the implication that there are forces in the world that resist G-d. This is an interesting theory, although

- a) Rashi uses “for the Honor of Above” in non-Targum contexts where there are no such implications, and
- b) the issue of protection is not relevant if we see the travel on eagles’ wings as related to the assembly at Rameses, as Rashi first suggests, rather than to the night before the Splitting of the Sea, as he concludes.

Accordingly, I suggest that Rashi interprets against the Targum’s change in both places, and uses the explanation ‘for the Honor of Above’ not to endorse the need to make the change⁵, but rather to explain why Onkelos should not be understood as a translation. Thus in Shemot 33:22 he wishes to insist that Moshe actually was in danger absent G-d’s protection, albeit only because the Damagers are acting under His general mandate, and here he wishes to emphasize that G-d (k’byakhol?) suffered on behalf of Israel by blocking the Egyptian weaponry⁶. Thus his primary interpretation here is the second midrash, a claim which is supported by his citing it exclusively in his commentary to Devarim 32:11.

In this light, perhaps the overall metaphor should be understood as follows: Most ‘gods’ need to protect their nations from other gods. Hashem however, “flies above” all “other gods”, i.e. His people had no need to fear any Egyptian ‘divinities’. What they did have to fear was human beings, attackers from below rather than from above their Protector, and G-d protected us from them by placing Himself (k’b’yakhol?) in their way.

Shabbat Shalom!

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⁵ Or to oppose it, and therefore this tells us nothing about his position on corporealism

⁶ Again, this is unrelated to any position on corporealism – for instance, the Torah explicitly says that it is an angel rather than G-d who moves to block the Egyptian weaponry.