

Finding the Courage to Confront: A Closer Look at Yaakov's Lifelong Struggle to Become Yisrael (Parsha Shiur for Torah in Motion on Parashat Vayishlach)

Source Sheet by Jonny Gordon

The main text for tonight's shiur is the Chumash!

Please make sure you have one handy, as we'll be moving back and forth through the narrative — from Parashat Toldot through Vayechi — while exploring the arc of Yaakov's life.

Below are supplementary sources (*mefarshim*, and *midrashim*) that we may reference during the shiur. We won't get to all of them inside, but feel free to use them afterward to deepen and extend your learning!

רש"י על בראשית ל"ב:כ"ה:א'

ויותר יעקב. שָׁכַח פָּכִים קְטָנִים וְחָזַר עֲלֵיהֶם (חולין צ"א):

Rashi on Genesis 32:25:1

AND YAAKOV WAS LEFT ALONE — He had forgotten some small jars and he returned for them (Chullin 91a).

רש"י על בראשית ל"ב:כ"ה:ב'

ויאבק איש. מְנַחֵם פִּי' וַיִּתְּעַפֵּר אִישׁ, לְשׁוֹן אָבָק, שֶׁהָיוּ מַעֲלִים עִפּוֹר בְּרִגְלֵיהֶם ע"י נְעֻנוּעַם. וְלִי נִרְאָה שֶׁהוּא לְשׁוֹן וַיִּתְּקֶשֶׁר, וְלְשׁוֹן אֲרָמִי הוּא, בְּתֵר דְּאֲבִיקוֹ בִּיה, וְאֲבִיק לִיה מִיבָק – לְשׁוֹן עֲנִיבָה, שֶׁכֵּן דְּרָךְ

שְׁנַיִם שָׁמַתְעֲצָמִים לְהַפִּיל אִישׁ אֶת רֵעֵהוּ, שָׁחֹבְקוּ וְאוֹבְקוּ בְּזָרוּעוֹתָיו.
וּפָרְשׁוּ רַז"ל שֶׁהוּא שָׁרוּ שֶׁל עֲשׂו (בראשית רבה):

Rashi on Genesis 32:25:2

יש AND A MAN WRESTLED — ויאבק איש

Menachem (ben Seruk) explains: “a man covered himself with dust”, taking the verb as connected in sense with אבק “dust”. It would mean that they were raising the dust with their feet through their movements.

I, however, am of the opinion that it means “he fastened himself on”, and that it is an Aramaic word, as (Sanhedrin 63b) “after they have joined (אביקו) it”, and (Menachot 42a) “and he twined (the “Fringes”) with loops”. It denotes “intertwining”, for such is the manner of two people who make strong efforts to throw each other — one clasps the other and twines himself round him with his arms. Our Rabbis of blessed memory explained that he was Esav’s guardian angel (Genesis Rabbah 77:3).

רש"י על בראשית ל"ב:כ"ז:ב'

ברכתני. הוֹדָה לִי עַל הַבְּרָכוֹת שֶׁבִּרְכַּנִּי אָבִי, שֶׁעָשׂו מְעַרְעֵר עָלֵיהֶן:

Rashi on Genesis 32:27:2

ברכתני [EXCEPT] YOU BLESS ME — admit my right to the blessings which my father gave me and to which Esav lays claim.

רש"י על בראשית ל"ב:כ"ט:א'

לא יעקב. לא יאמר עוד שֶׁהַבְּרָכוֹת בָּאוּ לִּי בְּעֶקְבָה וְרַמְיָה כִּי אִם
בְּשִׁרְרָה וְגִלּוּי פָנִים.

Rashi on Genesis 32:29:1

לא יעקב [YOUR NAME SHALL] NO MORE BE CALLED YAAKOV [BUT YISRAEL] (literally, “not Yaakov — supplanting — shall any more be said to you”) — It shall no longer be said that the blessings came to you through supplanting and subtlety but through noble conduct (שררה) and in an open manner.

רש"י על בראשית ל"ב:כ"ט:ב'
ועם אנשים. עשו וְלָבָן:

Rashi on Genesis 32:29:2

AND WITH MEN —Esav and Lavan.

רשב"ם על בראשית ל"ב:כ"ג:א'
ויקם בלילה הוא - נתכוון לברוח דרך אחרת לפיכך עבר הנחל
בלילה כמו שמצינו בדוד בברחו מפני אבשלום...

Rashbam on Genesis 32:23:1

ויקם בלילה ההוא , he crossed the river at night because he intended to change direction to avoid a meeting with Esav. We find that David did something similar when he was fleeing from his son Avshalom...

רשב"ם על בראשית ל"ב:כ"ה:א'
ויותר יעקב לבדו - כלומר: שהעביר כל אשר לו שלא היה עוד לעבור
אלא הוא לבדו ורצה לעבור אחריהם, כדי לברוח דרך אחרת שלא
יפגשנו עשו נתכווין.

Rashbam on Genesis 32:25:1

ויותר יעקב לבדו , after he had transferred all his belongings to the other side of the river, so that the only one still to be brought across was he himself. The

reason that he wanted to cross only after everyone else had already crossed was that he intended to flee in a different direction so as to avoid a face to face encounter with Esav.

רשב"ם על בראשית ל"ב:כ"ה:ב'

ויאבק - מלאך עמו שלא יוכל לברוח ויראה קיום דברו של הקב"ה שלא יזיקהו עשו.

Rashbam on Genesis 32:25:2

ויאבק, an angel engaged him in a physical fight, his purpose being to prevent Yaakov from fleeing. Only in this way could G'd's promise to Yaakov that Esav would not harm him be fulfilled.

רשב"ם על בראשית ל"ב:כ"ו:א'

כי לא יכול לו - המלאך ורצה לעבור ולברוח בעל כרחו.

Rashbam on Genesis 32:26:1

כי לא יכול לו, the angel did not succeed in preventing Yaakov from crossing and fleeing.

רשב"ם על בראשית ל"ב:כ"ז:ט:א'

ומה שלקה יעקב ונצלע, לפי שהקב"ה הבטיחו והוא היה בורח. וכן מצינו בכל ההולכים בדרך שלא ברצון הקב"ה, או ממאנים ללכת שנענשו. במשה כתיב: שלח נא ביד תשלח ויחר אף יהוה במשה...

Rashbam on Genesis 32:29:1

As to the fact that in spite of his victory, Yaakov was injured in that struggle, this was a punishment for his attempt to flee, in spite of his having been

assured by G'd that He would help and protect him. We find other examples of great people who pursue a path that does not conform with G'd's will that as a result they experience punishment for ignoring G'd's will. As soon as Moshe refused the mission and told G'd to send someone else, (Exodus 4,13) we find that G'd became angry at him...

רד"ק על בראשית ל"ב:כ"ו:ב'

וכל המעשה הזה אפשר שהיה במראה הנבואה בחלום, אע"פ שמצא עצמו צולע בהקיץ, היה לו זה מאת האל להיות בו זה לאות לפי שהיה פושע במחשבתו אחר כמה הבטחות אשר עשה עמו האל מדה כנגד מדה להיות פוסח בגופו; כי אע"פ שהיה בוטח באל בכל לבו אלא שחשב שמא יגרום החטא, אעפ"כ אחר כמה הבטחות לא היה לו להרהר ולחוש לעשו ולקראו כמה פעמים אחי ולשלוח לו מנחה גדולה ולהשתחות לו כמה פעמים, ובזה חטא, ושלם לו האל בזה העולם ולקה בגופו עונש מחשבתו; ואם תרצה תאמר כי המעשה הזה היה בהקיץ ממש, ולא היה לו אלא דמיון לבד שנדמה לו ולא היה... כי כל זה היה יכול להיות בדמיון, אבל זה היה בנגיעה ואי אפשר בלא גוף, לפיכך נאמר שלבש גשמיות לשעתו על דרך מופת, וזהו שנגע בכף ירך יעקב והיה צולע, כי זה היה נגיעה ממש.

Radak on Genesis 32:26:2

The entire episode must be viewed as a dream he had, even though on the morrow he found himself limping. This was a sign from G'd, a reprisal of a kind, for the doubts he had expressed about the various promises G'd had made him. G'd now punished him by making him unable to rely on parts of his body that he was in the habit of relying on. True, Yaakov trusted G'd with all his heart, but he was in a constant state of worry that the promises he had received would not come true due to some sin he had committed. Considering that G'd's promise had been repeated on different occasions, proving that in the interval Yaakov had not forfeited his claim to them, he should no longer have doubted that G'd would not keep His promise for whatever reason. His

servile behaviour towards Esav, including the many times he called him adoni, “my lord,” implied a lack of trust in the validity of G’d’s promises to him. Neither should he have sent him such an elaborate gift, nor should he have prostrated himself before him repeatedly. By doing so he committed a sin and G’d punished him in this life by afflicting his body, retribution already for planning to do this. If you prefer, you may understand this story as something taking place while Yaakov was awake but that he day dreamed the event and that the man appeared to him in this dream but that was a figment of his imagination... However, the difficulty with such an interpretation in our example is the physical contact not only described in the narrative, but the evidence of an injury sustained by Yaakov which could hardly have resulted from some hallucinatory encounter. It is difficult to reconcile the Torah’s historical note that in commemoration of Yaakov’s injury the Jewish people do not eat the organ of an animal that corresponds to the one which was injured in Yaakov’s body during that encounter.

בראשית רבה ע"ז:ב'

רבי חוניא אמר נדמה לו בדמות רועה, לזה צאן ולזה צאן, לזה גמלים ולזה גמלים, אמר לו העבר את שלך ואחר כך אני מעביר את שלי. העביר יעקב אבינו שלו אמר נחזור ונחמי דלמא אנשינן כלום, מן דחזר (בראשית לב, כה): ויאבק איש עמו.

...

ורבנן אמרי לארכי־ליסטים נדמה לו, לזה צאן ולזה צאן, לזה גמלים ולזה גמלים, אמר לו העבר את שלי ואני אעביר את שלך...

Bereshit Rabbah 77:2

Rabbi Chunya said: He appeared to him in the image of a herdsman; this one had flocks and that one had flocks, this one had camels and that one had camels. He said to him: 'Cross yours and then I will cross mine.' Yaakov crossed his. He said: 'Let us return and see, whether, perhaps, we forgot something.' When he returned, “a man wrestled with him.”

...

The Rabbis say: He appeared to him as the leader of robbers; this one had flocks and that one had flocks, this one had camels and that one had camels. He said to him: 'Cross mine and I will cross yours.'

ילקוט שמעוני על התורה קל"ב:ב'

וַיֹּאבֶק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ. יֵשׁ אֲמָרִים מִיכָאֵל הָיָה. אָמַר לִיה מִיכָאֵל, וְמָה אָנִי שָׂאֲנִי אֶחָד מִן הַשָּׂרִים הָרְאשׁוֹנִים כֹּךְ עָשִׂיתָ לִּי, וְאַתָּה מִתְיָרָא מֵעֲשׂוֹ?!?

Yalkut Shimoni on Torah 132:2

“And a man wrestled with him’ — some say it was Michael. Michael said to him: ‘Look at what you have done to me, and I am one of the foremost ministers — yet you are afraid of Esav?’”

אבן עזרא על בראשית ל"ה:י'

(א) לא יקרא שמך עוד יעקב. לבדו כי גם ישראל:

Ibn Ezra on Genesis 35:10

(1) YOUR NAME SHALL NOT BE CALLED ANYMORE YAAKOV. You shall no longer be called only Jacob but also Israel.

ירמיהו ט"ג:

אִישׁ מִרְעֵהוּ הַשְּׂמֵרוֹ וְעַל-כָּל-אָח אֶל-תִּבְטָחוּ כִּי כָל-אָח עֶקְוֹב יַעֲקֹב וְכָל-רֵעַ רֵכִיל יִהְיֶה:

Jeremiah 9:3

Each of you, beware of your friend!

Trust not even your kinsfolk!

For every sibling takes advantage,

Every friend deals basely.

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