

# Zera Shimshon

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## Chapter VI: Toldot (Gen. 25:19-28:9)

### Essay 8. Why one can't know the day of his death

**פסוק** "הגה־נא זקנתי לא ידעתי יום מותי", קשה שֶהִיָּה לוֹ לומר "הגה־נא זקנתי" ותו לא, דאיך תיסק אדעתין שֶהִיָּה יודע יום מיתתו אם הוא מהשבֵּעה דְבָרִים הַמְכּוּסִים מִבְּנֵי אָדָם כַּדְאֲמַרִּינּוּ בַפֶּרֶק ד' דְפֶסְחִים.

There is a verse: Isaac said to Esau: **“I am old now, and I do not know how soon I may die.”**<sup>1</sup> A difficulty is that [Scripture] should have said, **“I am old now,”** and nothing else, for how would it enter one’s mind that he would know the day of his death, if this is one of the seven things concealed from man, as it says in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of tractate Pesachim?<sup>2</sup>

וְנִשְׁ לומר דְהוּאִיל שְׁלִיזְחַק נְגִלָה לוֹ הַק"ץ שֶהוּא גַם כֵּן מִהַשְׁבֵּעָה דְבָרִים הַמְכּוּסִים, וְהִיָּה מְבַקֵּשׁ לְהוֹדִיעוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹ אֱלֹא שְׁנַעֲלָם מִמֶּנּוּ, (וְעַיִן לְקַמֵּן פְּרִשְׁתַּת וְנִחִי עַל פְּסוּק "רְאִיבֹן בְּכָרִי אַתָּה") וְסִלְקָא דְעַתְדָּא אֲמִינָא מְדַהָּא יָדַע, הָא נְמִי הִיָּה יוֹדַע, מִשׁוּם הִכִּי קִמְשַׁמַּע לֵן "לא ידעתי יום מותי".

**It can be said that Isaac knew the time of the end of the Exiles,<sup>3</sup> which is also one of the seven things concealed, and he had requested to inform Esau, but it was concealed from him. (See below, parashat Vayechi, essay 11, on the verse, “Reuben, you are my first-born”<sup>4</sup> as to why Isaac wanted to tell this to Esau). It might enter my mind that if he knows this, the time for the end of the Exiles, that he should also know that, the day of his death. Because of this possibility, and to prevent such a misunderstanding, [Scripture] says, “and I do not know how soon I may die.”**

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. 27:2.

<sup>2</sup> Pesachim 54b: “The Sages taught: Seven matters are concealed from people, and they are: The day of death; and the day of consolation [from one’s concerns]; the profundity of justice [i.e., ascertaining the truth in certain disputes]; and a person also does not know what is in the heart of another; and a person does not know in what way he will earn a profit; and when the monarchy of the house of David will be restored to Israel; and when the wicked Roman monarchy will cease to exist.”

<sup>3</sup> Dan. 12:4.

<sup>4</sup> Gen. 49:3.

ובאמת שאגדה זו של שבועה דברים המכוסים צריכה ביאור וטעם לשבח כמו שנתחבב לקמן בסמוך, ומכל מקום נתחיל לדקדק מהו הטעם שיום המיתה יהיה מכוסה מבני אדם, ואין לומר שאם לא היה יום המיתה מכוסה מבני אדם היו חוטאין כל ימיהם ובסוף ימיהם היו עושים תשובה, שהרי לא זכה פוחתין לו אליבא דכולי עלמא, והיה יכול לגזור להם מיתה ולהודיע להם שאם יחטאו יתקצרו ימיהם ופתאום יבא שברם, כמו שהודיע לאדם הראשון "כי ביום אכלה מנו מות", שאפילו עכשיו שהוא נעלם מבני אדם עם כל זה אמרינו במסכת שבת פ"ק ב', יודעים הרשעים שדרךן למיתה אלא שיש להם חלב על כסלם.

**Actually, this Aggadah of the seven concealed things needs an explanation and a good reason, as we will write below, in the adjacent essay 9. In any case, we will begin to check the reason that the day of death is concealed from man.**

**Do not say that if the day of death was not concealed from man, that they would enjoy their designated lifespan, but be sinners all their days, and at the end of their days, they would repent. This is rejected, for if one is not deserving, [G-d] reduces [his lifespan], as everyone agrees.<sup>5</sup> Thus, He could have decreed the time of their death to them, but informed them that if they sinned, their days would be cut short, and suddenly they would be destroyed. This is as the first man was informed, "as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die."<sup>6</sup>**

**For even now, when we understand that [the day of death] has been concealed from man, nevertheless it is said in tractate Shabbat, the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter, "the wicked know that their path [leads] to an earlier death than they would otherwise enjoy, [but] they have fat on their kidneys [that prevents that realization from entering their hearts]."<sup>7</sup>**

וניש לומר שאם לא היה יום המיתה מכוסה לא היה יכול נמי להתקיים ברשעים לא זכה פוחתין לו, ואף בצדיקים לפעמים הקב"ה רוצה לסלק את הצדיק מן העולם קודם שיחטא כמו שעשה לחנוך, והנשמה שנמתן לו הקב"ה נתנה בתורת שאלה, וכמו שכתב מהרש"א בפ"ק כ"ג [ג] דשבת משל למלה שחלק בגדי מלכות לעבדיו, פקחים שבהם קפלוהו וכו', פתאום בקש המלה וכו'.

**It can be said, as will be explained in the next paragraph, that if the day of death had not been concealed, it wouldn't have been possible to enact the above procedure even for a wicked person, that if he does not merit his designated lifespan, [Heaven] would reduce it. We see that even for the righteous, sometimes the Holy One, Blessed be He, desires to remove the righteous man from the world before he will sin, as He did with Enoch.<sup>8</sup> The Holy One, Blessed be He, gave the soul as a loan, as the Maharsha wrote in the 23<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Shabbat regarding the proverb of the king who distributed his clothes to each of his servants. The wise ones folded [the clothes] and placed them in a box to protect them, whereas the foolish ones went and worked in them. After a period of time, the king suddenly requested that his garments be returned to him. The wise ones returned them to him pressed, as they were when the servants**

<sup>5</sup> Yevamot 50a.

<sup>6</sup> Gen. 2:17.

<sup>7</sup> Shabbat 31b.

<sup>8</sup> Rashi to Gen. 5:24, based on Gen. Rabbah 25:1.

received them, and the foolish ones returned them dirty. The king was happy to greet the wise ones and angry to greet the foolish ones.<sup>9</sup>

ובדין השואל מצינו בשלחן ערוך חזון משפט סימן שמ"א השואל מחבירו כלי או בהמה סתם הרי המשאיל תובעו בכל עת שירצה, שאלו לזמן קצוב כיון שמשך ונזכה בו אין הבועלים יכולים להחזירו מתחת ידו עד תום ימי השאלה עכ"ל. ואם הנה מודיע לנו זמן מיתתנו לא הנה יכול לתבוע נשמתנו עד תום ימי השאלה, ומשום הכי הוא משאיל לנו הנשמה וזמן סיומתו סתם כדי שיוכל לתובעה בכל עת שירצה, וניחא ליה להקב"ה שהנשמה שאולה בנדנו, כדי שיהנה שחר ועונש בעולם, שמעתה אין לנו טענה לומר, "כי יצר לב האדם רע מנעריו", איהו דנורא ואנו דבשרא, כי אין טענת אונס בשואל לפטור.

**In the Law of Borrowing, we find in the Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat, siman 341, se'if 1: "If one borrows a vessel or animal without specification as to the length of time, the owner may claim it any time he wants. However, if he borrowed it for a set time, once the borrower pulls the item and takes possession of it, the owner cannot take it back from him until the loan period has concluded." Thus, if [G-d] had informed us of the time of our death, He would not have been able to claim our souls until the end of the borrowed days. Because of this, He lent us the soul and our lifespan, without informing us of our lifespan, in order that He would be able to claim it at whatever time He desired. It's fine that the Holy One, Blessed be He, would leave the borrowed soul in our hands, in order that there be reward and punishment in the world, for now we have no claim to say, "the inclination of the heart of man is evil from his youth,"<sup>10</sup> as He is fire, and we are mere flesh,<sup>11</sup> for there is no claim of compulsion for a borrower to exempt himself from liability.**

ובזה מתורצת קושיא אחרת, שאם האמת שהקב"ה מעיד בעצמו, "ונאשר הרעתי", וכמו שאמרו ז"ל אלמלא שלש מקראות נתמוטטו רגלי שונאיהם של ישראל, למה דן אותנו בתטאינו, הלא אנוסים אנו? אלא נדאי שאפילו על האונס חייב, שהרי השואל חייב באונסין, וזהו נמי מה שאמרו ז"ל כיון ש[יצא] רוב שנותיו של אדם ולא חטא, שוב אינו חוטא, דאיתא התם סע"ף ג' הניח להם אביהם פרה שאולה משתמשים בה כל ימי שאלתה, ואין חייבין באונסיה. אבל חייבים עליה כשומר שחר.

**In this way, another difficulty is resolved. The truth is that G-d Himself testifies, "And those I have treated harshly" (Micah 4:6),<sup>12</sup> and as [the rabbis] of blessed memory said, "Had it not been for these three verses, the legs of the enemies of Israel, [a euphemism for Israel itself], would have collapsed."<sup>13</sup> The three verses include Micah 4:6 and also "Behold, like clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, house of Israel" (Jer. 18:6), and "I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and I will give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek. 36:26). The implication is that G-d influences a person's decisions.**

<sup>9</sup> Shabbat 152b.

<sup>10</sup> Gen. 8:21.

<sup>11</sup> Kiddushin 81a.

<sup>12</sup> Micah 4:6.

<sup>13</sup> Berachot 32a.

If so, if He meant to excuse us, **why did He judge us for our sins, for weren't we compelled to sin by G-d's influence over our decisions? Rather, certainly even one who is compelled is liable [for punishment for sinning], for the borrower is liable for loss for whatever cause. It is brought there, se'if 3,** [that in the case of children whose] **father [died and] left them a cow [that he had] borrowed, they may use it for the entire duration of its loan.** [Nevertheless, if it died,] **they are not liable [to pay if its death was caused by] an unavoidable accident [despite the fact that a borrower is liable for damage caused by an unavoidable accident.** This is because liability for accidental damage pertains only to the actual borrower, i.e., the deceased father].<sup>14</sup> **But they are liable for it as if they were a paid watchman.**<sup>15</sup>

ומי שעברו עליו רוב שנותיו, הפסח הראשון שהיה לו בבחירתו שבו היה יכול לעמוד נגד היצר הרע והאונסים, כפר תש ונלאה נהרי הוא כאילו מת. וזה המעט שנשאר, פנים חדשות באו לכאן. והוא כמו ריושה שנפלה לו מהפסח הראשון שקבר חלף והלך לו, וזה הפסח שנשאר לו עתה, אי אפשר לו ליקח הנשמה בתורת שאלה, שאין בידו לשומרה פראוי ואינו מן הדין שהיה חייב באונסים, שהרי אין עוד בעולם זה הפסח שהשאל לו הקב"ה הנשמה. נהרי זה דומה לבנים שלא לקחו הם הפרה בשאלה ולא נשתעבדו עליה על האונסים ומשום הכי אינם מתחייבים. ולכן מן השמים מגינים עליו כדי שלא יחטא באונס שאז לא היה חייב. אמנם אם היה חוטא ברצונו היה חייב, כמו היתומים שחייבים בגניבה ואבידה שקרובים קצת לפשיעה.

Regarding **one for whom most of his allotted years have passed, the initial power that he had in his youth that allowed him to stand against the evil inclination and the compulsions, has already weakened and become exhausted, and he is as if he had died.** Regarding **the little time that is left to him, a new entity has arrived,**<sup>16</sup> i.e., he is viewed as new person, not the same person that he was in his youth. **This remaining time is like an inheritance that fell to him from the initial power that has already passed and left him.** Thus, he is to be considered as an inheritor of his father's borrowed items, whose liability is not that of a borrower, but rather of a paid watchman.

Because of **this weakened power that remains to him now, it is not possible for [G-d] to take the soul according to the Law of the Borrower, for [the man] doesn't have the power to watch [his soul] properly.** Thus, he cannot even be punished as a paid watchman. **According to the law, he should not be liable for punishment for unavoidable mishaps, for there no longer exists in the world this strength that he had when the Holy One, Blessed be He, lent him the soul. This is similar to the children who didn't take the cow as a loan and the obligation for unavoidable mishaps didn't materialize, and because of this, they are not liable. Therefore, [the majority of years that have passed without sin] protect him from Heaven, so that he does not sin out of unavoidable mishap, so that then he will not be liable. However, if he had sinned by his own will, he would be liable, like the orphans mentioned above, who were liable for theft and loss, as this was not unavoidable, but rather was similar to negligence.**

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<sup>14</sup> Bava Kamma 112a.

<sup>15</sup> Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat, 341:3.

<sup>16</sup> Bava Kamma 96b.