

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XII: Vavechi (Gen. 47:28–50:26)

Essay 5. Joseph's disinterested kindness

פסוק "ועשית עמדי חסד ואמת". פרש רש"י חסד ואמת, חסד שעושים עם המתים הוא חסד של אמת, שאינו מצפה לתשלום גמול. הקשו המפרשים שהרי רש"י עצמו כתב לקמן על פסוק "ואני נתתי לך שכר אחד על-אחיך", לפי שאמה טורח להתעסק בקבורתי, וגם אני נתתי לך נחלה שתקבר בה עכ"ל. אם כן, אינו עוד חסד של אמת, שהרי שילם לו גמולו שנתן לו נחלה, ועיין ברא"ם ובפיה תואר.

There is a verse: “And the time approached for Israel to die, and he summoned his son Joseph and said to him, ‘If I have found favor in your eyes, please place your hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly [חסד של אמת] [*chesed shel emet*] with me; please do not bury me in Egypt.’”¹ **Rashi explained:** “‘Kindly and truly’—The kindness shown to the dead is “kindly and truly,” i.e., true, disinterested kindness, as one cannot hope for payment of a reward.”²

The commentators questioned this in light of what Rashi himself wrote below on the verse, “Then Israel said to Joseph, ‘I am about to die; but G-d will be with you and bring you back to the land of your ancestors. And now, I assign to you one portion [שכם] [*Shechem*] more than to your brothers.”³ Rashi wrote: “Because you will take the trouble to engage in my burial, I give you an inheritance in which you will be buried.”⁴ If so, then this is no longer disinterested kindness, for [Jacob] paid [Joseph] a reward by giving him an inheritance. See the Re'em⁵ and the *Yafeh To'ar*.⁶

ונראה לומר שיעקב לא צנה ליוסף אלא שלא יקברהו במצרים, אלא שיוסף רצה להוסיף על המצנה ולהיות הוא עצמו מתעסק בקבורתו וכדלקמן בסמוך. ונגד מה שהבטיחו שלא יקברהו במצרים, זה היה חסד של אמת, שלא ניתן לו שום תשלום גמול.

It seems to say that Jacob commanded Joseph only to not bury him in Egypt, but that Joseph wanted to add to the commandment and to involve himself in his burial, as we see

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¹ Gen. 47:29.

² Rashi on Gen. 47:29, based on Gen. Rabbah 96:5.

³ Gen. 48:21–22.

⁴ Rashi on Gen. 48:22.

⁵ Rabbi Elijah Mizrahi (c. 1455 – c. 1526) (“Re'em”), Talmudist, posek, and mathematician, best known for *Sefer ha-Mizrahi*, a supercommentary on Rashi's commentary on the Torah.

⁶ Rabbi Samuel ben Isaac Ashkenazi Jaffe (d. late 16th century), rabbi of the Ashkenazi community of Constantinople. *Yafeh To'ar* was his commentary to the Midrash Rabbah: Genesis (Venice, 1597–1606); Exodus (Venice, 1597); and Leviticus (Constantinople, 1648).

below in the adjoining essay.⁷ In contrast, what he promised him, that he wouldn't bury him in Egypt, this was true disinterested kindness, for no payment of reward was given to him.

וְכַשְׁהֵיחָד יַעֲקֹב בְּסוּף יָמָיו וַרְאֵה מַה שְּׁעָתִיד לֵהְיוֹת, שְׁנַאֲמַר "הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי מֵת וְהִנֵּה אֱלֹהִים עִמָּכֶם וְהִשִּׁיב אֶתְכֶם אֶל-אֲרָץ אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם", וַרְאֵה שְׁעָתִיד יוֹסֵף לְהִתְעַסֵּק בְּקַבּוּרָתוֹ, אִזְ אָמַר לוֹ, "וְנֹאֲנִי נִתְּתִי לְךָ שְׂכָרְךָ אֶחָד עַל-אֲחִיד", בְּשִׁבִיל שְׂאִתָּה טוֹרֵחַ לְהִתְעַסֵּק בְּקַבּוּרָתִי כְּדֵי לְהַגְדִּיל כְּבוֹדִי אִף אֲנִי אֶתֵּן לְךָ שְׂכָרְךָ לְהַגְדִּיל כְּבוֹדְךָ, כְּדֹאֲמַרְיִנִי בְּמִדְרָשׁ וּבִגְמָרָא פָּרַק קָמָא דְסוּטָה שְׁלִפִי שְׁגַנְבוּהוּ מִשְׁכָּרְךָ הוֹצָרְכוּ לְהַתְזִירוֹ לְשְׂכָרְךָ, וַרְאוּי שְׂתִּהְיֶה שְׁלוֹ לְגַמְרֵי כְּדֵי שְׂיִהְיֶה קַבּוּר בְּנִתְּלָתוֹ דְּנֹקָא, שְׁהָרִי "וְהִשִּׁיב אֶתְכֶם" מִשְׁמַע שְׁכָל בְּנֵי יִתְזָרוּ לְאֲרָץ יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּשִׁיפְקוּד אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל.

But at the end of his life, Jacob saw what would happen in the future, thus he said, “I am about to die; but G-d will be with you and bring you back to the land of your ancestors.”⁸ He saw that Joseph would involve himself in his burial, then he said to him, “ ‘And now, I assign to you one portion more than to your brothers.’ Because you are toiling to involve yourself in my burial in order to increase my honor, I will give you [the city of] Shechem to increase your honor.”

This is as it says in the Midrash Gen Rabbah 85:3 and in the Gemara, the first chapter of tractate Sotah 13b, that as [Joseph] was kidnapped from Shechem,⁹ he is required to be returned to Shechem. It is fitting that it should be his possession completely, in order that he should be buried specifically in his inheritance.¹⁰ Thus the phrase “and bring you back” has the meaning that all of his children will return to the Land of Israel when he conquers Israel.

וּבְרִאֲמַת כְּדֵי הִנֵּה שְׂאִתָּה עֲצָמוֹת הַשְּׁבִיטִים עָלוּ עִם יוֹסֵף כְּמוֹ שְׂאֲמָרוּ ז"ל, וּמִנְשָׂה הַעֲלָם מִמִּצְרַיִם כְּדִכְתִּיב "וַיִּקַּח מִנְשָׂה אֶת-עֲצָמוֹת יוֹסֵף עִמּוֹ", וְלָמָּה זָכָה יוֹסֵף שְׂיִתְעַסֵּק בּוֹ מִנְשָׂה, אֲלֵא וְדָאִי מִפְּנֵי שְׂיִוִּסֵּף זָכָה בְּעֲצָמוֹת אָבִיו וְכוּ'.

Indeed it was so that even the bones of the [other brothers]¹¹ went up to Israel with the bones of Joseph, as [the rabbis] of blessed memory said.¹² Moses went away from Egypt, as it is written, “and Moses took the bones of Joseph with him.”¹³ Why did Joseph merit that Moses would be involved with him? Certainly it was because Joseph merited to bury the bones of his father.¹⁴

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⁷ *Zera Shimshon*, Chapter XII, Vayechi, essay 6.

⁸ Gen. 48:21.

⁹ Gen. 37:12 ff.

¹⁰ Gen. 33:19: “The parcel of land where [Jacob] pitched his tent he purchased from the kin of Hamor, Shechem’s father, for a hundred *kesitahs*.” Joshua 24:32: “The bones of Joseph, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem, in the piece of ground which Jacob had bought for a hundred *kesitahs* from the children of Hamor, Shechem’s father, and which had become a heritage of the Josephites.”

¹¹ Literally, “tribes.”

¹² Gen. Rabbah 100:11 notes that Gen. 50:25 reads: “So Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, ‘When G-d has taken notice of you, you shall carry up my bones from here with you.’ ” As he commanded his brothers to take his bones “with you,” that meant that their bones too would be leaving Egypt.

¹³ Ex. 13:19.

¹⁴ Mishnah Sotah 1:9; Sotah 9b.