

# Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

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

### Essay 7. Why would Jacob want Israel to suffer exile?

**מדרש** רבה "אל-נא תקברני במצרים"—בשבילך נרדתי למצרים, בשבילך אמרתי "אמונתה הפעם" עכ"ל. קשה מה ענין אלו הדברים להכריח שלא יקברהו במצרים, ולמה הוצרכו דוקא שתי טעמים אלו?

There is a **Midrash Gen. Rabbah** (96:5) on the 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 with me; **please do not bury me in Egypt.**”<sup>1</sup> The Midrash interprets: “**For your sake, I went down to Egypt. For your sake, I said, ‘Now I can die,** after having seen your face, that you are still alive.’”<sup>2</sup>

**A question is how do these matters force [Joseph] not to bury [Jacob] in Egypt? I Also, why do we especially need these two reasons?**

Question 1: How does, “For your sake, I went down to Egypt” force Joseph’s hand?

Question 2: How does, “Now I can die, after having seen your face,” force Joseph’s hand?

ונקדים מה שפרש רש"י ע"ה על פסוק "ויקרא לבנו יוסף", לפי שהיה ספק בידו לעשות. עוד כתב הש"ך ששמן הדיו היה שילף יוסף לארץ כנען לאביו ולא יבא אביו למצרים אצל יוסף. אלא לפי שהיה מלך לא היה יכול לעזוב המלכות, וזהו פשט הפתוב "שמני אלהים לאדון לכל-מצרים רדה אלי", כלומר דוקא בשביל ששמני וכו' אני אומר לך "רדה", הא לאו הכי הייתי, אני בא אצלה. עוד כתב הזרע ברך חלק ב' בפירוש זה בשם הזוהר שאם היה יעקב נקבר במצרים לא התחיל [] השעבוד לעולם. ועוד איתא במפרשים שבנכות יוסף שגדר עצמו מן הערונה, נגדרו כל האנשים.

**We will advance what Rashi, may he rest in peace, interpreted on the verse, “ ‘and he summoned his son, Joseph’—Because he was the one who had means to do it.”**

**Also, the Shach<sup>3</sup> wrote that according to the law, Joseph should have gone to the Land of Canaan, to his father; and his father shouldn’t have come to Egypt to be with Joseph. Rather, as he was king, i.e., viceroy, he wasn’t able to leave the kingdom, and that is the plain meaning of the Scripture, “ ‘G-d has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me without**

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. 47:29.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. 46:30.

<sup>3</sup> Rabbi Mordechai Ha’Cohen of Safed (1523–98), *Siftei Cohen on Torah* (Venice 1605).

delay.’”<sup>4</sup> That is as if to say, “It is specifically because G-d has made me lord of all Egypt that I say to you, ‘come down to me;’ if I were not [in charge], then I would be coming to you.”

Also, the author of the *Zera Berach*<sup>5</sup> wrote, in section 2 of this parasha, in the name of the Zohar, that if Jacob had been buried in Egypt, the servitude of the Israelites in Egypt never would have happened. Rather, his presence would have blessed the Israelites, and they wouldn’t have come to be treated as slaves.

Also, the commentators brought that in the merit of Joseph, who guarded himself from lewdness, all the people were guarded off from such sin.<sup>6</sup>

וְנָהוּ בַיָּאוֹר הַמִּדְבָּר, אָמַר יַעֲקֹב מִן הָרְאוּי הִיָּה שֶׁתִּבָּא אִתָּה אַחֲרַי לְאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא שָׁאֲנִי אָבֹא אַחֲרַיָּךְ לְמִצְרַיִם, וְלִפִּי שֶׁהֵייתָ מֶלֶךְ הַיּוֹצֵרֶתִי אֲנִי לְבֹא אַחֲרַיָּךְ. וְלִכְּנֹן אֲנִי אוֹמֵר לָךְ הוֹאִיל שֶׁאִתָּה מֶלֶךְ וְיֵשׁ סִפְקָ בְּיָדֶיךָ, "אֵל-נָא תִקְבְּרֵנִי בְּמִצְרַיִם", וְנָהוּ, בְּשִׁבְלֶיךָ יִרְדְּתִי לְמִצְרַיִם.

This is the interpretation of the Midrash, and the answer to question 1: Jacob said, “It was proper that you should come after me to the Land of Israel, and not that I should follow you to Egypt. But since you were a king, I was required to come after you. Therefore, I say to you: Since you are a king and have the means to do it, ‘please do not bury me in Egypt.’” That’s the meaning of, “for your sake, I went down to Egypt.”

וְאִם תֹּאמַר שֶׁאִתָּה רוּצָה לְקַבְּרֵנִי בְּמִצְרַיִם כְּדִי שֶׁלֹּא יִתְחִיל הַגְּלוּת, הֲלֹא אֲדַרְבָּא אֲנִי אֲמַרְתִּי "אֲמוּתָה הַפְּעֵם" כְּשֶׁרָאִיתִי פְּנֵיךָ, כְּלוּמַר כְּשֶׁרָאִיתִי בְּזוֹהַר פְּנֵיךָ שֶׁלֹּא חָטָאת בְּעִרְוַת וְיִדְעָתִי כִּי בְּנִכּוּתָךְ יִהְיוּ נִיצוּלִים כֹּל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲמַרְתִּי "אֲמוּתָה הַפְּעֵם" כְּדִי שֶׁיִּתְחִיל הַגְּלוּת מִיָּד. שֶׁהָרִי טַעַם הַגְּלוּת הוּא מִפְּנֵי שֶׁאֵי אֶפְשָׁר לְזַכּוֹת בְּנִחְלַת אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל אִם לֹא עַל יְדֵי יִיסוּרֵי דְהֵינּוּ הַגְּלוּת, אִי נִמְי שֶׁלֹּא הָיוּ יְכוּלִים לְקַבֵּל הַתּוֹרָה עַד שֶׁיִּזְדַּקְכוּ בְּפוּר הַבְּרִזָּל כְּגוֹדֵעַ. וְיַעֲקֹב הִיָּה רוּצָה לְמַהַר זְמַן קַבֵּל הַתּוֹרָה וְנִחְלַת אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל וּמִשׁוּם הַכִּי הִיָּה רוּצָה לְמַהַר תִּחְלַת הַגְּלוּת.

The answer to question 2: “If you’ll say that you want to bury me in Egypt, so that the exile does not begin, to the contrary I say, ‘Now I can die,’ when I saw your face. That is as if to say: When I saw by the glow of your face that you have not sinned in sexual immorality, and I knew that thanks to you, all Israel would be saved, I said ‘now I can die,’ in order that the exile will begin immediately.”

In other words, Scripture says, “Now I can die, after having seen your face, that you are still alive.” It could have said, “after having seen that you are still alive.” The apparently superfluous words, “your face,” teaches us something, viz, that Jacob recognized from the glow of Joseph’s face that he had remained righteous.

As for the reason for Jacob wanting the people to go into exile, it is because it is impossible to merit possession of the Land of Israel, if not for suffering, namely the exile. For otherwise they would not be able to receive the Torah, until they were quenched in the “iron

<sup>4</sup> Gen. 45:9.  
<sup>5</sup> Rabbi Berachia Berech ben R’ Yitzchak Izaak Shapiro, Zera Berech (Krakow 1646), commentary on the Torah.  
<sup>6</sup> Song of Songs Rabbah 4:12.

**blast furnace,”<sup>7</sup> as is well known. Jacob wanted to hasten the time of receiving the Torah and possessing the Land of Israel, and that is why he wanted to hasten the beginning of the Exile.**

ובשִׁלְמָא אִם לֹא הָיָה יוֹסֵף גּוֹדֵר עֲצָמוֹ מִן הָעֶבְרִיָּה, יוֹתֵר טוֹב הָיָה שֶׁלֹּא יִתְחִיל הַגְּלוּת, כְּדֵי שֶׁלֹּא יִטְמְעוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִצְרַיִם וַיְהִי נִאֲבָדִים בְּאִיסוּר הָעֶרְוֹת, שֶׁהָרֵי מִצְרַיִם שְׂטוּפֵי זִימָה הֵם. וְלֹא גָּאֵל הַקָּב"ה יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם אֶלָּא בְּשִׁבִיל שֶׁהָיָה גְּדוּרִים מִן הָעֶרְוָה וְרֵאוּיִים לְהַשְׂרָאת שְׂכִינָה דְּכַתִּיב "שִׁשָּׁם עָלוּ שְׂבָטֵימָם" נְכוּי, וְלִכֵּן אָמַר, בְּשִׁבִילָהּ "אֲמוּתָהּ הַפָּעַם", וּבְשִׁבִיל אוֹתוֹ הַטַּעַם מִמֶּנּוּ, "אֵל-נָא תִקְבְּרֵנִי בְּמִצְרַיִם".

**Granted, if Joseph had not guarded himself from the sin, it would have been better that the exile not begin, so that Israel would not be assimilated into Egypt and be lost in the prohibition of sexual immorality, for the Egyptians are full of lewdness.<sup>8</sup> The Holy One, Blessed be He, only redeemed Israel from Egypt because they guarded themselves from lewdness and were worthy of the inspiration of the Shechinah in the wilderness and at Mount Sinai, as it is written, “That is where the tribes go up—the tribes of the L-rd—as a testimony unto Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the L-rd.”<sup>9</sup>**

Rabbi Avin bar Rav Adda says that Rav says: [Concerning] anyone who marries a woman who is not suited for him, when the Holy One, Blessed be He, rests His Divine Presence [upon the Jewish people], He testifies with regard to all the tribes [that they are His people], but He does not testify with regard to he [who married improperly], as it is stated: “The tribes of the Lord, as a testimony to Israel”. When is it a testimony to Israel? When the tribes are the tribes of the Lord [but not when their lineage is flawed].

- Kiddushin 70b

**Therefore, he said, “For your sake, ‘now I can die,’ and precisely for this reason, ‘please don’t bury me in Egypt.’ ”**

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<sup>7</sup> Deut. 4:20; Jer. 11:4.

<sup>8</sup> Rashi on Gen. 12:19, based on Midrash Tanchuma, Lech Lecha 5.

<sup>9</sup> Ps. 122:4.