

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

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

Essay 8. Jacob explains Rachel's burial to Joseph

Genesis chapter 47 describes that Jacob asked Joseph to promise not to bury him in Egypt. Chapter 48 describes a later discussion between the two:

And Jacob said to Joseph, “El Shaddai appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and He blessed me, and said to me, ‘I will make you fertile and numerous, making of you a community of peoples; and I will assign this land to your offspring to come for an everlasting possession.’ Now, your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, shall be mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine no less than Reuben and Simeon. But progeny born to you after them shall be yours; they shall be recorded instead of their brothers in their inheritance. I [do this because], when I was returning from Paddan, Rachel died, to my sorrow, while I was journeying in the land of Canaan, when still some distance short of Efrat; and I buried her there on the road to Efrat”—now Bethlehem.

- Gen. 48:3–7

פסוק "וַאֲנִי בָבְאִי מִפְּדֹן", פִּירֵשׁ רַשִּׁי, אָף עַל פִּי שְׁאֲנִי מְטָרִים עָלַיָּךְ הַהוֹלִיכֵנִי לְהַקְבֵּר וְכוּ' וְלֹא כִּךָ עָשִׂיתִי לְאַמֶּךָ וְכוּ'. קִשָּׁה לְמָה לֹא אָמַר זֶה יַעֲקֹב מִיָּד לְעֵיל כְּשֶׁאָמַר "וַיִּנְשָׂאֲתָנִי מִמִּצְרַיִם וַיִּקְבְּרֵתֵנִי" וְכוּ'? וְאֵז הָיָה לוֹ לֵאמֹר "וַאֲנִי בָבְאִי" וְכוּ' כְּדֵי לְהוֹדִיעוֹ שֶׁעַל פִּי הַדִּיבּוֹר קִבְּרָה שָׁם.

Regarding the verse: **“When I was returning from Paddan, Rachel died . . . and I buried her there on the road to Efrat”** (Gen. 48:7), **Rashi explained: “Although I trouble you to take me for burial in the land of Canaan [specifically in the cave of Machpelah in Hebron], and I did not do this for your mother, even though she died near Bethlehem [which is only 13 miles (22 km) from Hebron].”** I.e., Rachel was buried in the Land of Israel, but not in Hebron. **A difficulty is why didn’t Jacob say this about Rachel’s death immediately in the above exchange in Genesis chapter 47, when he said to Joseph, “When I lie down with my fathers, take me up from Egypt and bury me in their burial-place” (Gen. 47:30)? For then he could have said, “When I was returning from Paddan,” in order to inform [Joseph] that he buried [Rachel]**

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there instead of in Hebron **because of a Divine revelation**, and not because of his own personal choice or with any intended slight toward Rachel, G-d forbid.¹

וַיֵּשׁ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּדֶרֶךְ הַיַּבֵּשׁ לְעֵיל, וְלֹא לְעֵיל, שֶׁהָרִי פָתַח הַרְמַב"ן בְּפָרִשַׁת תּוֹלְדוֹת שֶׁהִטְעַם שֶׁנִּשְׂא יַעֲקֹב שְׁמֵי אֲחֵיות מִשׁוּם שֶׁהִמְצִיחַ לֹא הָיוּ שׁוֹמְרִים אוֹתוֹן הָאֲבוֹת אֲלָא בְּאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל, שֶׁהִקְב"ה נִקְרָא אֱלֹהֵי הָאֶרֶץ, אֲבָל בְּחוּץ לְאֶרֶץ הַנְּהַגְתָּה עַל יְדֵי שָׂרִים עַכ"ל. וּמִשׁוּם הֵכִי מִתְחַלְלָה הָיָה כֹּחַ יוֹסֵף לְתַרְצֵן שֶׁמִּשׁוּם טַעַם זֶה מִמֶּשׁ מִתָּה רָחֵל בְּכַנְיָסְתָהּ לְאֶרֶץ וְלֹא נִקְבְּרָה בְּעִיר אֲלָא בְּדֶרֶךְ כְּמוֹ שֶׁפָתַח הָרַ"ם וְעֵי"ש.

One can say that precisely here in Genesis chapter 48, where Jacob is discussing the fact that he had been in the Land of Canaan, **it was fitting to say this and not above** at Genesis 47:30. **For as the Ramban wrote on parshat Toldot (Gen. 26:5 on the words “and kept my charge”), the sense is that Jacob married two sisters because these commandments² were only observed by the patriarchs in the Land of Israel, for G-d is called the G-d of the Land [of Israel],³ but abroad it is led by human princes**, who did not forbid such a marriage.⁴ That is, if the law against marrying two sisters only applied to the patriarchs in the Land of Israel, it is relevant to mention Rachel’s death in chapter 48, where Jacob’s presence in the Land of Israel is discussed. It was not relevant earlier, in chapter 47, discussing his own request for burial in Hebron. **This is why, Joseph could initially justify that it was for this reason Rachel actually died when she entered the Land**, i.e., so that Jacob would not be married to two sisters while inside the Land of Israel, **and that therefore she was not buried in the city but on the way, as the Re'em⁵ wrote, and see there.**

אֲבָל אַחַר זֶה כְּשֶׁאָמַר יַעֲקֹב לְיוֹסֵף "וְעַתָּה שְׁנֵי-בָנֶיךָ הַנּוֹלָדִים" וְכוּ' "פְּרָאוּבֵן וְשִׁמְעוֹן" וְכוּ' "יִקְרָאוּ בְּנֵהֶם". וְאִמְרִינוּ בְּמִדְרָשׁ רַבָּה עַל פְּסוּק "וַיְהִי בִשְׁפֹן יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֶרֶץ הַהוּא", בְּכוּרֵת מִמֶּנּוּ נִיטְלָה מִמֶּנּוּ, שִׁיּוֹסֵף נָטַל שְׁנֵי חֲלָקִים בְּאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל. וְלֹא נִיטְלָה מִמֶּנּוּ לֹא בְּכוּרֵת הַיּוֹסֵפִין וְלֹא שְׂאֵר הַבְּכוּרוֹת דְּקָתִיב "בְּכֹר יַעֲקֹב רְאוּבֵן". וְלָמָּה נִיטְלָה זֹאת הַבְּכוּרָה לְיוֹסֵף? כְּתִבּוּ הַמְּפָרְשִׁים שֶׁהִטְעַם הוּא לְפִי שֶׁהִטְפִּיחַ הָרַאשׁוֹנָה שֶׁהוֹצִיא יַעֲקֹב בְּלֵאָה הִיטָּה מִחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ בְּרָחֵל.

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³ Gen. 24:3, “I will make you swear by the L-rd, the G-d of heaven and *the G-d of the earth*, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell.” The word “אֶרֶץ” can be interpreted as “earth” or “land,” or specifically “the Land [of Israel].” Deut. 12:1 teaches, “These are the statutes and the ordinances that you shall observe to do in the Land that the L-rd, the G-d of your fathers, has given you to possess it, all the days that you live upon the earth.” Kiddushin 37a notes a Baraita that “to do in the Land” might lead people to think that the mitzvot were only incumbent in the Land of Israel, and therefore Scripture also says “all the days that you live” so that people will know that the mitzvot apply even outside the Land of Israel.

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mine no less **than Reuben and Simeon**. But progeny born to you after them shall be yours; **they shall be recorded** instead of their brothers **in their inheritance**” (Gen. 48:5–6). It says in **Midrash Gen. Rabbah (82:11) on the verse, “While Israel stayed in that land, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, his father’s concubine; and Israel found out” (Gen. 35:22), the birthright of wealth that should have belonged to Reuben as firstborn, was taken from him such that Joseph took two parts in the Land of Israel. But the firstborn of the family lineage was not taken from him, nor other birthrights, as it is written, “Jacob’s first-born Reuben” (Gen. 46:8). Also, why was this birthright of wealth given to Joseph? The commentators wrote that the reason was because the first drop of semen that Jacob emitted into Leah, was from his thinking of Rachel.** That is, Rachel was Jacob’s first love, and he had intended her to be his bride, and intended her first child to be his firstborn. Due to Laban’s deception, Leah instead ended up being Jacob’s first wife, and thus Reuben became his firstborn. When Joseph was born many years later to Rachel, it was as though the damage caused by Laban was somewhat corrected, and Jacob viewed Joseph as deserving a special status, even if not technically the birthright of the firstborn.

ואם רחל לא הייתה מותרת לו אלא בחוץ לארץ ומטעם זה מתה בדרך, בנדאי שלא היה נותן ליוסף זאת הבכורה של נחלת ארץ ישראל אלא איזו בכורה אחרת. הואיל שיוסף נולד מרחל שהייתה אסורה לו בארץ, אלא נדאי מדנתן לו מתנה זו דוקא שמע מינה שאין זו הסברה עיקר, אלא רחל הייתה מותרת לגמרי ליעקב, או משום שעל פי הדיבור נשאה או משום דגר שנתגייר בקטן שנוולד דמי. ומעתה היה ליוסף מקום להתרעם למה לא הוליקה להקבר בעיר של ארץ ישראל, ומשום הכי דוקא כאן אמר לו יעקב "נאני בבאי מפדן", וכו'.

If Rachel had not been allowed to [Jacob] except abroad, and for that reason she died on the way, then surely, he would not have given Joseph this birthright of the Land of Israel, but instead he would have given him some other birthright. Since Joseph was born of Rachel, who was forbidden to him in the Land of Israel, according to this theory, it is certain that from [Jacob’s] giving this gift to him we specifically hear that this is not the principal view; rather Rachel was completely permitted to Jacob, even in the Land of Israel. Other possible explanations as to how Jacob could marry Rachel after he married Leah are **that he married her because of a Divine revelation, or because** according to the Maharsha, the four matriarchs were converted to Judaism, and the Talmud tells us that **a convert who just converted is like a child just born,**⁶ in that she retains no connection to her past life, and thus it’s as though Rachel and Leah were not sisters, and thus Jacob could marry both women. **From here, Joseph had room to complain as to why she wasn’t led to be buried in a city of the Land of Israel, and because of this, it is precisely here that Jacob said to him, “When I was returning from Paddan,”** i.e., after G-d had appeared to Jacob, “Rachel died . . . and I buried her there on the road to Efrat”; i.e., Jacob did so because of a Divine revelation.

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⁶ Yevamot 48b.

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Regarding the verse: **“When I was returning from Paddan, Rachel died . . . and I buried her there on the road to Efrat”** (Gen. 48:7), **Rashi explained: “Although I trouble you to take me for burial in the land of Canaan [specifically in the cave of Machpelah in Hebron], and I did not do this for your mother, even though she died near Bethlehem [which is only 13 miles (22 km) from Hebron].”** I.e., Rachel was buried in the Land of Israel, but not in Hebron. **A difficulty is why didn’t Jacob say this** about Rachel’s death **immediately** in the **above** exchange in Genesis chapter 47, **when he said** to Joseph, **“When I lie down with my fathers, take me up from Egypt and bury me in their burial-place”** (Gen. 47:30)? **For then he could have said, “When I was returning from Paddan,” in order to inform [Joseph] that he buried [Rachel]**

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וַיֵּשׁ לְיוֹסֵף דְּדֹנְקָא הַכָּא שְׂרִיף לְדוֹמֵר זֶה וְלֹא לְעֵיל, שְׁהָרִי פֶתַח הַרְמַב"ן בְּפָרְשַׁת תּוֹלְדוֹת שֶׁהִטְעַם שְׁנַשְׂא יַעֲקֹב שְׂמֵי אֲחֵיּוֹת מִשׁוּם שֶׁהִמְצִיחַ לֹא הָיוּ שׁוֹמְרִים אוֹתוֹן הָאָבוֹת אֱלֹא בְּאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל, שֶׁהִקְב"ה נִקְרָא אֱלֹהֵי הָאֶרֶץ, אֲבָל בְּחוּץ לְאֶרֶץ הַנְּהַגְתָּה עַל יְדֵי שָׂרִים עַכ"ל. וּמִשׁוּם הֵכִי מִתְחַלְּהָ הִנֵּה כֹּחַ יוֹסֵף לְתָרְץ שְׁמִשׁוּם טַעַם זֶה מִמָּשׁ מֵתָה רְחֵל בְּכַנְיָסְתָהּ לְאֶרֶץ וְלֹא נִקְבְּרָה בְּעִיר אֱלֹא בְּדֶרֶךְ כְּמוֹ שֶׁפָּתַח הַרְא"ם וְעִי"ש.

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אֲבָל אֲחֵר זֶה כְּשֶׁאָמַר יַעֲקֹב לְיוֹסֵף "וְעֵתָה שְׁנֵי-בָנַי הַנּוֹלָדִים" וְכוּ' "כִּי-רֹאשׁוֹן וְשֶׁמֶעוֹן" וְכוּ' "יִקְרְאוּ בְּנִיחָתָם". וְאִמְרִינוּ בְּמִדְרָשׁ רַבָּה עַל פְּסוּק "נִיְהִי בְשֵׁפֶן יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֶרֶץ הַהוּא", בְּכוּרֵת מִמֶּנּוּ נִיְטָלָה מִמֶּנּוּ, שִׁיּוֹסֵף נִטַּל שְׁנֵי חֻלְקִים בְּאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל. וְלֹא נִיְטָלָה מִמֶּנּוּ לֹא בְּכוּרֵת הַיּוֹסֵפִין וְלֹא שֶׁאֵר הַבְּכוּרוֹת דְּקָתִיב "בְּכֹר יַעֲקֹב רְאוּבֵן". וְלָמָּה נִיְתְּנָה זֹאת הַבְּכוּרָה לְיוֹסֵף? כְּתָבוּ הַמְּפָרְשִׁים שֶׁהִטְעַם הוּא לְפִי שֶׁהִטְפִּיף הָרֹאשׁוֹנָה שֶׁהוּצִיא יַעֲקֹב בְּלֵאָה הִיָּתָה מִחֻשְׁבָּתוֹ בְּרַחֵל.

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⁵ Rabbi Elijah Mizrahi (c. 1455– 1525 or 1526), Talmudist and mathematician.

mine no less **than Reuben and Simeon**. But progeny born to you after them shall be yours; **they shall be recorded** instead of their brothers **in their inheritance**” (Gen. 48:5–6). **It says in Midrash Gen. Rabbah (82:11) on the verse, “While Israel stayed in that land, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, his father’s concubine; and Israel found out” (Gen. 35:22), the birthright of wealth that should have belonged to Reuben as firstborn, was taken from him such that Joseph took two parts in the Land of Israel. But the firstborn of the family lineage was not taken from him, nor other birthrights, as it is written, “Jacob’s first-born Reuben” (Gen. 46:8). Also, why was this birthright of wealth given to Joseph? The commentators wrote that the reason was because the first drop of semen that Jacob emitted into Leah, was from his thinking of Rachel.** That is, Rachel was Jacob’s first love, and he had intended her to be his bride, and intended her first child to be his firstborn. Due to Laban’s deception, Leah instead ended up being Jacob’s first wife, and thus Reuben became his firstborn. When Joseph was born many years later to Rachel, it was as though the damage caused by Laban was somewhat corrected, and Jacob viewed Joseph as deserving a special status, even if not technically the birthright of the firstborn.

ואם רחל לא הייתה מותרת לו אלא בחוץ לארץ ומטעם זה מתה בדרך, בנדאי שלא היה נותן ליוסף זאת הבכורה של נחלת ארץ ישראל אלא איזו בכורה אחרת. הואיל שיוסף נולד מרחל שהייתה אסורה לו בארץ, אלא נדאי מדנתן לו מתנה זו דוקא שמע מינה שאין זו הסברה עיקר, אלא רחל הייתה מותרת לגמרי ליעקב, או משום שעל פי הדיבור נשאה או משום דגר שנתגייר בקטן שנוולד דמי. ומעתה היה ליוסף מקום להתרעם למה לא הוליקה להקבר בעיר של ארץ ישראל, ומשום הכי דוקא כאן אמר לו יעקב "נאני בבאי מפדן", וכו'.

If Rachel had not been allowed to [Jacob] except abroad, and for that reason she died on the way, then surely, he would not have given Joseph this birthright of the Land of Israel, but instead he would have given him some other birthright. Since Joseph was born of Rachel, who was forbidden to him in the Land of Israel, according to this theory, it is certain that from [Jacob’s] giving this gift to him we specifically hear that this is not the principal view; rather Rachel was completely permitted to Jacob, even in the Land of Israel. Other possible explanations as to how Jacob could marry Rachel after he married Leah are **that he married her because of a Divine revelation, or because** according to the Maharsha, the four matriarchs were converted to Judaism, and the Talmud tells us that **a convert who just converted is like a child just born,**⁶ in that she retains no connection to her past life, and thus it’s as though Rachel and Leah were not sisters, and thus Jacob could marry both women. **From here, Joseph had room to complain as to why she wasn’t led to be buried in a city of the Land of Israel, and because of this, it is precisely here that Jacob said to him, “When I was returning from Paddan,”** i.e., after G-d had appeared to Jacob, “Rachel died . . . and I buried her there on the road to Efrat”; i.e., Jacob did so because of a Divine revelation.

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⁶ Yevamot 48b.