Zera Shimshon

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Chapter LIV: Vezot haBracha (Deut. 33:1–34:12)

Essay 8. The burial of Moses

"[יָּקְבֹּר אֹתוֹ בַגַּיִ". צָרִידְּ עִיּוּן לְמָה דַּוְקָא לְמֹשֶׁה רָצָה הקב"ה לְקְבּוֹר אוֹתוֹ הוּא בְּעַצְמוֹ לְבַדּוֹ. וְיֵשׁ לוֹמַר דְּאָמְרִינַן בְּּפֶּרֶק ז' דְּסַנְהֶדְּרִין דְּקְבוּרָה מִשׁוּם כָּפְרָה וּמִשׁוּם בִּזְיוֹנֵי, כְּמוֹ שֶׁהְכְרִיחוּ שָׁם הַתּוֹסָפוֹת דְתַרְנַיִיהוּ אִיתַנְייהוּ, וְהָעִיקֵּר הוּא מִשׁוּם כְּפָרָה כְּשֶׁהוּא רוֹאָה שָׁמוֹרִידִין אוֹתוֹ וּמַשְׁפִּילִין אוֹתוֹ יֵשׁ לוֹ צַעַר כְּמוֹ שֶׁפֵּרָשׁ רַשִּׁ"י ע"ה שָׁם.

"[G-d] buried him in the valley in the land of Moab, near Beth-peor; and no one knows his burial place to this day." It requires investigation why it was specifically for Moses that the Holy One, Blessed be He, wanted to bury him by Himself, alone. It can be said, as it is stated in the 7th chapter of tractate Sanhedrin (46b), that burial is both for atonement and to prevent disgrace. This is as Tosafot proves there, that both reasons apply. The primary reason is for atonement, as when he sees himself being lowered and degraded, he experiences suffering, as Rashi, of blessed memory, explained there.

וְהָנֵּה מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ עָלָיו הַשָּׁלוֹם דְּכְתִיב בֵּיה "בְּכָל־בֵּיתִי נָאֶמָן הוּא", וְעוֹד נִקְרָא "אִישׁ הָאֵלֹהִים", וְזָכָה לַעֲלוֹת בַּשָּׁמַיִם שְׁלוֹשָׁה פְּעָמִים אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם. אֵין רָאוּי שֶׁיְּהָיֶה צָרִיךְ לַכַּפָּרָה, וּמִשׁוּם הָכִי קַבְרוּ הקב"ה בְּעַצְמוֹ כְּדִי לְהוֹדִיעֵנוּ וּמָה אִירְכַּת לֹא הָיְתָה לַכַּפָּרָה. וְאָתֵי שַׁפִּיר לְפִי זָה מַאי דְּאָמְרִינֵן בְּסוֹטָה אַף הוּא עַצְמוֹ אֵינוֹ יוֹדֵעַ הֵיכָן קָבוּר, דְּמַה בָּא לְהוֹדִיעֵנוּ וּמָה אִירְכַּת לֵיה לַמֵּת לֵידֵע מָקוֹם קְבוּרָתוֹ, אֶלָּא כְּלוֹמֵר שֶׁהוּא לֹא הִרְגִּישׁ כְּלֶל צַעַר הַקְבוּרָה שֶׁלֹא רָאָה קְבְרוֹ וְלֹא מְקוֹמוֹ לְפִי שֶׁלֹא הָיָה צָרִיךְּ לַבַּכַּרָה. לַכַּפָּרָה.

Now, regarding Moses, our teacher, of blessed memory, it is written about him, "He is trusted throughout My house," and further, he is called "a man of G-d." He merited to ascend to the heavens three times for 40 days each. It is not fitting that he would require atonement. Therefore, the Holy One, Blessed be He, buried him by Himself, to demonstrate that his burial was not for the sake of atonement. This is fine according to what was said in tractate Sotah (14a), that even he himself does not know where he is buried. What does this come to inform us, and why would the deceased care about knowing the location of his grave? Rather, it means that he did not feel any pain from burial, as he did not see his grave or its location, because he did not require atonement.

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¹ Deut. 34:6.

² Num. 12:7.

³ Deut. 33:1.

וּמַאי דְתָנַן סוֹף פֶּרֶק קַמָּא דְסוֹטָה לֹא עַל מֹשֶׁה בִּלְבֵד אָמְרוּ אֶלָּא עַל כָּל הַצַּדִּיקִים שֻׁנָּאֱמַר "וְהָלַךְ לְפָנֶיךְ צִדְקֶךְ כְּבוֹד ה' יַאַסְפָּךְ". וְהַקְשָׁה שָׁם הַקּוֹל הָרֶמֶ"ז שֶׁהְרֵי כָּל גּוּפָא דְּמַתְנִיתִין אָתָא לְהַשְׁמִיעֵנוּ שָׁהקב"ה נוֹתוְ מִדָּה בְּנֶגֶד מִדָּה וּבִשְׁבִיל שֶׁמֹשֶׁה יַּאַסְ הַפוֹל הָרֶמֶ"ז שֶׁהָרֵי כָּל גּוּפָא דְּמַתְנִיתִין אָתָא לְהָשְׁר הַצַּדִּיקִים מוֹדֵד לָהֶם הקב"ה כָּךְ אִם כֵּן זַכָּה בָּעֲצָמוֹת יוֹסֵף מִשׁוּם הָכִי נִתְעַסֵּק בּוֹ הקב"ה. וְהַשְׁתָּא דַּחְזֵינֵן דְּאַף לְכָל שְׁאַר הַצַּדִּיקִים מוֹדֵד לָהֶם הקב"ה צִּיִקִים, מְנָלוְ דְּמֵה שֶׁנְתְעַסֵּק בּוֹ הקב"ה הָיָה מְשׁוּם מִדָּה בְּנֶגֶד מִדָּה, דִּילְמָא לֹא הָיָה אֶלָּא מְשׁוּם זְכוּתוֹ כְּמוֹ שֶׁהוּא בִּשְׁאָר צַדִּיקִים, וְעִיי"ש הַּירוּצוֹ.

Regarding what we learned in a Mishnah at the end of the first chapter of tractate Sotah:

Not only with regard to Moses did [the Rabbis] say [that G-d takes part in his burial], but with regard to all the righteous, as it is said: "Your righteousness shall go before you and the glory of the L-rd shall gather you in" (Isaiah 58:8).

- Mishnah Sotah 1:9; Sotah 9b

The Kol Remez raises a difficulty there, noting that the entire point of the Mishnah is to teach us that the Holy One, Blessed be He, acts measure-for-measure, and because Moses merited to take care of Joseph's bones, therefore the Holy One, Blessed be He, took care of him. But now that we see that the Holy One, Blessed be He, deals in this way even with other righteous individuals, how do we know that the Holy One, Blessed be He was involved with Moses specifically due to measure-for-measure? Perhaps it was merely due to his merit, as it is with other righteous individuals. See there for his answer.⁴

לְדִידֵן נִרְאֶה לוֹמֵר שֶׁלְּשָׁאַר הַצַּדִּיקִים מוּכְרָח הקב"ה לְהָתְעַסֵּק בָּהֶם בְּעַצְמוֹ וּלְקֵיֵּים בָּהֶם "כְּבוֹד ה' יַאַסְכֶּךּ", אֲבָל לְמֹשֶׁה לֹא הָיָה מוּכְרָח לַצְשׁוֹת בָּךָ אִי לָאו מִשׁוּם מִדָּה בְּעָבֶד מִדָּה. וְהַטַּעֵם שֶׁהָרֵי יָדִעְנוּ שֻׁהַבֵּיק יְסוֹד עוֹלָם, וּכְשָׁנוֹטְלוֹ הקב"ה בִּשְׁבִיל עוֹנוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל הוּא מַזִּיק לָעוֹלְם. וְאַף אָם נֵימָא דְּשָׁמֵיִם וָאָרֶץ אֵינָם עוֹמְדִים אֶלֶּא בִּזְכוּת יִשְׂרָאֵל, סוֹף סוֹף הוּא חָב לְבָנִיו וּלְתַלְמִידִיו שָׁהֵם זַבָּאִים שֶׁהָיוּ שׁוֹתִים בַּצְּמָא אֶת דְּבָרָיו.

For us, it seems one could say that with regard to other righteous individuals, G-d is compelled to personally attend to them and fulfill the verse, "the glory of the L-rd shall gather you in." But for Moses, it was not necessary for G-d to do so, were it not for the principle of measure-for-measure. The reason for this is that we know that the righteous person is the foundation of the world, and when the Holy One, Blessed be He, takes him due to the sins of Israel, it harms the world. Even if we say that Heaven and earth only stand by the merit of Israel, in the end, [the death] of a righteous person harms his children and his students, who are righteous, and who eagerly drank in his teachings.

2

⁴ Rabbi Moses ben Mordechai Zacuto (ca.1620 – 1697), Kol HaRemez (Amsterdam in 1719).

נְאֲנֵן קַיָּימָא לָן בִּמְצִיעָא (דַּף י') וּבִכְּתוּבוֹת (דַּף פ"ד) הַתּוֹפֵס לְבַעַל חוֹב בִּמְקוֹם שֶׁחָב לַאֲחֵרִים, לֹא קַנָה, וַאֲפִילּוּ הַבַּעַל חוֹב עְּשָׂאוֹ שֶׁלִיחַ לְתַפּוֹס. וְכֵן הִיא מַסְקָנַת הַשֻּׁלְחָן עָרוּדְּ חֹשֶׁן מִשְׁפָּט (סִימָן ק"ה), וְאַף עַל גַּב שֶׁמֵרִשִׁ"י דְּמְצִיעָא אֵינוֹ נִרְאָה כָּדְ, יַשְׁאוֹ שֶׁל מְקוֹם יָכוֹל לְתְפּוֹס יַשׁ לְתָרֵץ בְּעַד רַשִׁ"י כִּי הֵיכִי דְּלָא יִסְתּוֹר דִּידֵיה אַדִּידִיה. וְאִם כֵּן אֵיךְ הַמַּלְאָךְ הַמְּנֶת שֶׁהוּא שְׁלוּחוֹ שֶׁל מְקוֹם יָכוֹל לְתְפּוֹס הַצִּדִיק לְהַקב"ה בִּשְׁבִיל מַה שֶׁחָיָבִים יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְהַלֹּא הוּא חָב וּמַזִּיק לְכָל הָעוֹלָם כֵּלוֹ. וּמְשׁוּם הָכִי מוּכְרָח שֶׁהקב"ה בְּעַצְמוֹ יַאַסְפָהוּ אֵלָיו.

We hold in Bava Metzia (page 10a) and in Ketubot (page 84b): "One who seizes [property on behalf] of a creditor in a case where it is to the detriment of others does not acquire it, even if the creditor appointed him as an agent to seize it. This is also the conclusion of the Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat (siman 105, se'if 1), and even though Rashi in Bava Metzia does not seem to indicate this, as he maintains that the law applies only to an agent acting on his own to benefit the creditor, one could reconcile Rashi's position in a way that he does not contradict himself, for in Ketubot he discusses an appointed agent rather than one acting on his own.

If so, how can the Angel of Death, who is the Omnipresent's agent, seize the righteous man of the Holy One, Blessed be He, for the debts of Israel, since this would harm and damage the entire world? Because of this, it is necessary that the Holy One, Blessed be He, Himself gather the righteous to Himself, as a creditor can himself seize and acquire property, even to the detriment of others.

ְּוָהָכִי דָּיֵיק שַׁפִּיר קְרָא "וְהָלַךְּ לְפָנֶיךּ צִדְקֶךְּ כְּבוֹד ה' יַאַסְפֶּךְ", כְּשֶׁאֵין לְצַדִּיק שׁוּם סִיבָּה עַל מִיתָתוֹ שֶׁהוֹלֵךְ צִדְקוֹ לְפָנֶיו וְלֹא הָיָה לוֹ לְמוּת אָז צָרִיךּ דַּוְקָא שֶׁכְּבוֹד ה' יַאַסְפֶּהוּ, מָה שֶׁאֵין כֵּן בְּמֹשֶׁה שֶׁהוּא לֹא מֵת בִּשְׁבִיל עָוֹן דּוֹרוֹ שֶׁהְרֵי כָּל הַחוֹטְאִים שֶׁבְּדוֹרוֹ כְּכָר מֵתוּ בְּמִדְבָּר, וּבְנֵיהֶם הָיוּ כֵּלָם צַדִּיקִים וַחְסִידִים שֶׁזָּכוּ לִירַשׁ אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל. וְאָם כֵּן לֹא הָיָה מוּכְרָח הקב"ה לְהָתְעַסֵּק בּוֹ בְּעִצְמוֹ, וְלָמָה עָשָׂה כָּךְ, אֶלָּא וַדָּאי שֶׁזֶּה הָיָה מִדָּה כְּנֶגֶד מִדָּה, אִי נָמֵי שֶׁלֹּא רָצָה שֶׁיִּתְעַסְּקוּ בּוֹ שׁוּם בְּרִיָּה לְפִיּ שֶׁקְבוּרְתוֹ לֹא הָיְתָה מִשׁוּם כְּפָרָה.

This is precisely the meaning of the verse, "Your righteousness shall go before you and the glory of the L-rd shall gather you in." When the righteous person has no cause for his death, as his righteousness precedes him, and there is no reason for him to die, then it must be that the glory of the L-rd Himself gathers him.

This, however, was not the case with Moses, as he did not die because of the sins of his generation. That's because all the sinners of his generation had already died in the wilderness, and their children were all righteous and pious, meriting to inherit the Land of Israel. If so, it was not necessary for the Holy One, Blessed be He, to personally attend to his burial. Why, then, did He do so? Surely, it was a case of measure-for-measure.

Alternatively, He did not want any other being to attend to [Moses], because his burial was not for the purpose of atonement.

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