



לע"נ אהרן צבי בן יהושע ז"ל

BURIAL AS A PARADIGM FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

"אני נאסף אל עמי קברו אותי אל אבותי"

"I shall be gathered to my nation, bury me with my forefathers." (Bereishit 49:29)

In Parshat VaYechi, the Torah describes our patriarch Yaakov's passionate plea to be buried in the land of his forefathers (*Bereishit* 47:29). Indeed, the Torah details the fervency of Yaakov's request with two seemingly puzzling narratives. First, Yaakov appeals to Yosef individually (*ibid.*); later, Yaakov again makes the same request regarding burial to all of his children (*Bereishit* 49:29).

Yaakov's Burial Request to Yosef, Individually

In the first episode, the Torah describes the following sequence (*Bereishit* 47:29–31):

- (1) Yaakov asks that Yosef create a covenant with him (similar to that which was made between g-d and Avraham (see *Radak*, *Bereishit* 47:29)) and that Yosef guarantee that he will ensure that Yaakov is buried among his forefathers;
- (2) Yosef confirms that he will facilitate his father's wishes;
- (3) Yaakov requests that Yosef promise that he will indeed uphold his word.

Here, our Sages are perplexed as to why Yosef was singled out and by the seeming redundancy of Yaakov requests. Why was there a necessity for both a covenant and a promise? Why did a single promise not suffice (*Kli Yakar*, *Bereishit* 47:31)?

Yaakov's Burial Request to His Children, Generally

In the second episode, prior to his impending passing, Yaakov famously blessed each of his children (*Bereishit* 49:2). Following said blessings, Yaakov instructed each of his children to bury him among his forefathers in the Cave of Machpeilah which is situated in the field of Efron, which Yaakov's grandfather, Avraham, had purchased for the burial of his family (*Bereishit* 49:29–32). Here, our Sages question why Yaakov referred to the burial place as the "field of Efron" given that Efron had relinquished ownership of the field 170 years earlier (*Abarbenel*, *ibid.*).

Yaakov Promulgates the Dual Purpose of Jewish Burial

The Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 46b) teaches that the purpose of Jewish burial is twofold. First, burial is the most dignified method of honoring the deceased; this is referred to as "*Kavod Ha'Meitim*" - honoring the deceased. Second, a burial place affords the deceased's loved ones and future generations the opportunity to visit the gravesite so as to remind

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themselves from whence they came and of the deceased's positive qualities and attributes so that they themselves can continue to perpetuate such merits; this is referred to as "*Kavod Ha'Chaim*" – honoring the living. Rambam (*Hilchot Avel*, 12:1) explains that this second purpose of giving future generations a means to be inspired by the deceased's legacy is of utmost importance such that even if the deceased requests to forego the honor of burial, such wishes are not adhered to as doing so would deprive future generations of the means to visit the deceased's burial place and, as such, would constitute a violation of *Kavod HaChaim* (see also, *Kesef Mishnah* *ibid.*).

While others who lived before Yaakov had also buried those who had passed away, their primary motivation in doing so was to honor the deceased – *Kavod HaMeitim*. Yaakov, however, recognized the primacy of *Kavod HaChaim* and the importance of burial and its impact on future generations and Jewish continuity. Indeed, Yaakov first promulgated the principle of *Kavod Ha'Chaim* when he buried his wife, Rachel, and erected a monument on her place of burial. The Torah describes Rachel's burial as follows: "Yaakov set up a monument over her grave; it is the monument of Rachel's grave *until this very day*" (*Breishit* 35:20). This description alludes to the significance of Rachel's burial and its effect on future generations "*until this very day*." *Malbim* explains that, in accordance with Yaakov's emphasis on *Kavod Ha'Chaim*, this practice has been adopted by the Jewish people throughout the generations as its purpose is to serve as an everlasting reminder, especially for future generations, of the deceased's final resting place as well as his/her positive attributes and legacy (*Malbim* *ibid.*).

Yaakov's emphasis on *Kavod HaChaim* and his concern for future generations may explain why he described the Cave of Machpeilah as being situated in the field of Efron. Yaakov wanted to underscore that his burial was not just about his own honor after passing, it was primarily about future generations and the continuity of the Jewish legacy which began when Avraham first purchased the Cave of Machpeilah from Efron. By referencing Avraham's purchase from Efron, Yaakov was imploring each future Jewish generation to understand its glorious heritage and the significance of being a link in an unbroken chain of such heritage. Thus, future generations would be reminded to embody the Jewish ideals of those who came before them.

The importance of *Kavod HaChaim* also explains why Yaakov singled Yosef out and highlights the distinction between a covenant and a mere promise. Whereas a promise is a guarantee that one individual makes to another, the fulfillment of said guarantee impacts only the individual promisee i.e. the person to whom the promise is made. Conversely, a covenant – such as the one that g-d entered into with Avraham – is a guarantee that one makes, the fulfillment of which impacts future generations.

Notwithstanding the fact that Yosef was in a unique position of power as Pharaoh's viceroy, Yosef had been estranged from his father Yaakov for 22 years. Yaakov, first and foremost, wanted to remind Yosef that his burial was not simply about honoring Yaakov as an individual but about the impact it would have on his descendants and the Jewish future. Yaakov was careful to reiterate that despite Yosef's absence from the family, he was still a critical part of the Jewish future and it was incumbent upon him to be cognizant of his own Jewish legacy. It is, therefore, not surprising that Yosef not only made painstaking efforts to fulfill and facilitate Yaakov's wishes (*Rasbi, Bereishit* 50:6), he also made a similar request regarding his own burial at the end of his life (*Bereishit* 50:25).

The Eretz HaChaim Kollel

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