
פרשת ויחי

פרק מט פסוק לג

וַיִּכַּל יַעֲקֹב לְצַנֹּת אֶת־בְּנָיו וַיֵּאָסֶף רַגְלָיו אֶל־הַמַּטָּה וַיִּגָּע וַיֵּאָסֶף אֶל־עַמּוּיוֹ:

רש"י

וַיִּגָּע וַיֵּאָסֶף. וּמֵיָתָה לֹא נֶאֱמָרָה בּוֹ, וְאָמְרוּ רז"ל, יַעֲקֹב אָבִינוּ לֹא מָת.¹

מוזג

יַעֲקֹב אָבִינוּ לֹא מָת.

Translation:

Yaakov Avinu did not die.

Explanation:

Whether this Musag is to be understood that Yaakov did not die in a physical sense or in a spiritual sense is the subject of debate among the commentators². In any case the Musag teaches us that Tzaddikim even after death remain somewhat physically alive.³ This is because in their lifetimes they have sanctified their physical bodies and dedicated all they do and all they own to the service of Hashem. Their bodies thus become spiritual beings which never die. This was particularly true of Yaakov Avinu who more than the other Avos was involved in, and challenged by, the physical world, but was able to successfully infuse קדושה into all he did. In this merit the Jewish people will be redeemed from exile.

Looking in the Pasuk:

The Gemoroh Rashi quotes is commenting on the fact that the Pasuk does not use the word וימת by the death of Yaakov. Another possibility is the fact that Yosef kisses his father after his death. It is the only time in Tanach where someone is kissed after death, leading Chazal to comment that Yosef did not really see his father as deceased⁴.

Musag Learning Outcomes:

Know: Yaakov Avinu does not die in the usual sense, but continues to live. This is true as well, to some extent, with all Tzaddikim.

Understand: When a person uses material things for spiritual purposes he or she elevates them to a spiritual level. The holiness in that material thing never dies. One may thus elevate their physical bodies in the same way, making their bodies immortal in the process.

Think: The Torah uses many words to describe death. The Torah's choice of words informs us as to the nature of the death.

1 See note #1

2 See note #2

3 See note #3

4 One will usually not kiss a deceased person since we do not perceive as if that person is still there.

NOTES

1. Rashi infers that Yaakov never died from the fact that the Pasuk never uses the word **וימת**, but only **ויאסף**. One might ask that Yaakov himself did use the word **מיתה** when talking of his death, both in **מה:כא** and in **ג:ה**. The Ramban answers that Yaakov did so either because he himself did not know he would not die or out of respect for other Tzaddikim by whom the Pasuk does say **וימת**.

Rashi's source is found in (**ה:ה**): **מסכת תענית**. The Gemoroh teaches:

אמר רבי יוחנן: יעקב אבינו לא מת. אמר ליה: וכי בכדי ספדו ספדניא וחנטו חנטייא וקברו קברייא? אמר ליה: מקרא אני דורש, שנאמר (ירמיהו ל') ואתה אל תירא עבדי יעקב נאם ה' ואל תחת ישראל כי הנני מושיעך מרחוק ואת זרעך מארץ שבים, מקיש הוא לזרעו, מה זרעו בחיים אף הוא בחיים.

It is interesting to note that Rashi **רבי יוחנן** does not infer our Musag from the fact that the Pasuk never uses the word **מיתה** by Yaakov, but rather by quoting a Pasuk in Yirmiyahu in which Yaakov is paralleled to his living descendants. If Rashi is correct that we may infer from the lack of the word **וימת**, why did **רבי יוחנן** not mention it? We might answer that the Gemoroh understood that **רבי יוחנן** was indeed inferring from the lack of the word **מיתה**⁵. However, **challenges** the Gemoroh, this inference should be outweighed by the fact that the Pasuk says that he was embalmed⁶ and buried! To this **רבי יוחנן** answers that his opinion is not based solely on the Pasuk in Chumash but by the Pasuk in Yirmiyahu.

2. Rashi on the Gemoroh quoted above understands this to be taken in a physical sense. According to Rashi when **רבי יוחנן** answered that he was basing his statement on the Pasuk in Yirmiyahu, he was stating that the embalming and burial of Yaakov was done because he appeared to be dead even though he was actually alive⁷. Tosafos (**ד"ה יעקב**) supports this view and references a story brought in (**י.ג**) which tells that when Chushim the son of Dan killed Eisav (who was holding up the burial of Yaakov), Yaakov opened his eyes and smiled.

The obvious question is why would Yaakov stay alive and not the other Avos? Rashi⁸ explains that Yaakov was kept alive in order that he might witness the redemption of his children with his own eyes:

אף הוא בחיים: שיביאנו בגולה כדי לגאול את בניו לעיניו, כמו שמצינו במצרים. וירא ישראל את היד הגדולה וגו', ודרשינן: ישראל סבא⁹.

Many other commentators find the contention that Yaakov never physically died to be difficult to accept. Rather, they feel that **ר' יוחנן**'s statement should be interpreted in a spiritual sense¹⁰. An example is found in the Ramban who writes: **וענין המדרש הזה כי נפשות הצדיקים צרורות בצרור החיים**:

The **מהרש"א** explains that the question of whether to take **ר' יוחנן**'s words literally or not was the crux of the dialogue found in the Gemoroh in **תענית** that we quoted above. At first the Gemoroh tried to understand his words literally, for if he was talking spiritually the same should apply to all Tzaddikim as the Ramban explained¹¹. But, asks the Gemoroh, how could we possibly understand **ר' יוחנן** to mean that Yaakov never died, after all the Torah tells us he was embalmed and buried! To this **ר' יוחנן** answers that he did not mean literally, only spiritually, And, as for the question of why

5 Which would explain why the Gemoroh did not ask, "Where did **רבי יוחנן** know this from?"

6 There is a fascinating **הק' אור החיים** who explains why Yosef had his father embalmed. Yosef knew that his father being a Tzaddik, would not decay (this would certainly hold true if he never actually died). The Egyptians, upon seeing this miracle, might attach divine attributes to Yaakov, would worship him as a God, and would never let Yosef remove him from Egypt. Therefore, Yosef used the embalming process to explain why Yaakov did not decay and was thus able to take him out of Egypt.

7 וזה לשון רש"י (סוטה ה:), ד"ה אף הוא בחיים) ודחנטו חנטיא נדמה להם שמת אבל חי היה

8 שם, שם

9 Rashi may be referring to the (**פרשת מקץ פרשה צב**) which states:

ר' פינחס בש' ר' הושעיא נטל הקדוש ברוך הוא רגלי יעקב אבינו והעמידן בים, אמר לו ר'אה ניסים שאני עושה עם בניך היינו הא דכתיב בצאת ישראל ממצרים (תהלים קיד:א) ישראל סבא.

Accordingly, we might explain the Pesukim in Tehilim:

ה מה'לך הים פי תגוס ה'רדן תפס ל'אחור: ו ה'הרים תרקדו כ'אילים ג'בעות פ'בני'צאן: ז מ'לפני א'דון חולי א'רץ מ'לפני א'ל-ל'ה יעקב:

10 The **שפתי חכמים** explains that the Gemoroh means that Yaakov never felt the pain of death.

11 And, if were to understand his words literally it would explain why the Pasuk never used the term **מיתה**.

this was only mentioned by Yaakov even though it would hold true by all Tzaddikim, ר' יוחנן answers that he is simply following the lead of the Pasuk in Yirmiyahu which parallels Yaakov Avinu to his descendants to teach that just like his descendants are alive so is Yaakov. Why the Pasuk only sought to teach us this by Yaakov could be explained as above; that we will be redeemed in the merit of Yaakov. However, his merit will lead to our redemption only as long as the spirit of Yaakov Avinu is still alive in the hearts of his descendants.

3. It is important to note that the difference between the two opinions mentioned above - whether the words of ר' יוחנן are to be taken literally or not - is not as extreme as it seems. Even according to the opinion that Yaakov did not actually die, it is clear that he did not get up and walk around, but rather was indeed buried. Nor, obviously did he feel the pain of being embalmed. And, even according to the opinion that Yaakov did physically die it does not mean that he lost all contact with his physical self. There are various *חז"ל* which teach us that a body of a Tzaddik in a grave is compared to a person who is resting peacefully¹². The only difference, therefore, between the two opinions is to what extent Yaakov remained connected to his body after death. If we take ר' יוחנן's words literally, then Yaakov was strongly attached to his physical self, while according to the second opinion he was loosely attached.

The connection that a Tzaddik retains to his physical self even after death is the result of his sanctification of his body during life. If one uses their body purely for physical pursuits then the body remains constantly at odds with the *נשמה* as the *נשמה* finds no place for its spiritual yearnings. Upon death the soul sees no use for such a body and separates itself from the body, leaving it to decay as all physical things do. However, one who understands that the role of a true *עבד ה'* is to use his body as a vessel to do Mitzvos and to imbue the physical with spirituality, transforms his body into a spiritual being. Even upon death, when the physical being expires, the spiritual parts of the physical body continue to live.

Of all the Avos, no one typified the sanctification of the physical realm more than Yaakov¹³. Therefore it is understandable that the Torah should reveal this concept precisely by him. Whether we maintain that Yaakov literally never died, surpassing the other Avos, or whether his lack of dying is only to be understood in the spiritual sense, as we find by all Tzaddikim, Yaakov Avinu serves as the paradigm of a physical being that has been transformed into a spiritual one¹⁴.

4. Questions for further discussion:

- a. What does the term *ויאסף אל עמיו* mean?
- b. Is there a connection between the sanctification of the material world achieved by Yaakov and the fact that in his merit we will be redeemed?

12 See *מסכת שבת* (קנב:) which tells the story of people who mistakenly disturbed the grave of *בר יאשיה*. He scolded them for disturbing his sleep. The Gemoroh continues with a discussion that ensued between the deceased and *ר' נחמן*. When *ר' נחמן* asked him why he doesn't get up and go home, *ר' אחאי* chastised *ר' נחמן* for not knowing a Pasuk in *נביא* which says: *וידעקם כידעני ה' בפתחי איתקבורתיכם ובהעלותי אתכם מקבורתיכם עמי: (יחזקאל לז:יג)*. The Gemoroh had previously taught regarding the state of Tzaddikim after death that their bodies rest while their *נשמות* return to be stored under the *הכבוד*:

על גופן של צדיקים אומר (ישעיהו נז:ב) יבוא שלום ינוחו על משכבותם ועל נשמתן הוא אומר (שמואל א:כה) והיתה נפש אדני צרורה בצרור החיים

There is also a Gemoroh in *מסכת כתובות* (קג.) which tells that *רבי* used to return to his home every Erev Shabbos even after his death (according to the *ספר הסידים* he even made *קידוש* for others) and that he only stopped doing so out of fear that this would somehow disparage other Tzaddikim who did not merit such a level of connection to their bodies. The Ramban in his commentary in Chumash references these two sources.

13 The 'stealing' of Eisav's role, the vision of the *סולם*, living in *גלות*, the challenge of Lavan, the lessons of Yosef and living out his life in Egypt all point to this.

14 Interestingly, the best example of such a person outside of Tanach is found by *רבי* who continued to physically exist after his death (quoted above in footnote 11). *רבי* was extremely wealthy (see *מסכת ברכות* נז:) and yet the Gemoroh (*מסכת כתובות* קב.) tells us that upon his death *רבי* exclaimed that he did not receive any physical pleasure from this world:

בשעת פטירתו של רבי, זקף עשר אצבעותיו כלפי מעלה, אמר: רבש"ע, גלוי וידוע לפניך שיגעתי בעשר אצבעותי בתורה ולא נהניתי אפילו באצבע קטנה, יהי רצון מלפניך שיהא שלום במנוחתו, יצתה ב"ק ואמרה: (ישעיהו נ"ז) יבא שלום ינוחו על משכבותם.

If someone as wealthy as *רבי* was able to claim that he received no pleasure from the world, it is obvious that he used his substantial material objects solely for spiritual purposes, thus raising his physical self to a fully spiritual level.