

Insights from the Meshech Chochma

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פרשת וְזָאת הַבְּרָכָה תִּשָּׁפ"ו

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וַיָּמָת נָשָׁם מֹשֶׁה עֶבֶד ה' בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹאָב... וַיִּקְבֹּר אֹתוֹ... וְלֹא יָדַע אִישׁ אֶת קְבֻרָתוֹ עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה. (פרק לד' ה-ו)
Moshe, the servant of Hashem, died there, in the land of Moab... (Hashem) buried him... and no one knows his burial place to this day.

in חז"ל discuss Moshe Rabbeinu's departure from this world and we read the opinion of an anonymous Tanna who states that Moshe did not actually die, "for it is written here, וַיָּמָת נָשָׁם מֹשֶׁה עֶבֶד ה' and it is written in שמות לד' כח, when Moshe ascended to heaven to receive the Torah, וַיֵּשְׁבֵם שָׁם עִם ה' אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה, *And (Moshe) remained there with Hashem for forty days and forty nights.* i.e., just as there it means that he was not dead but standing and serving Hashem; so too, here it means that he did not die but was standing and serving Hashem." Rav Meir Simcha offers us his understanding of this fascinating statement and begins as follows: While a person is alive, he is referred to as a הוֹלֵךְ, a traveler, for by assiduously keeping the Torah and its mitzvos, he is "traveling" to higher levels of holiness and devotion to Hashem. By doing so he is attenuating his physical self and enlarging his spiritual self so that his *neshama* is constantly being infused with the קִדְּשָׁה to withstand the body's temptations of being in a very corporeal milieu. Angels, on the other hand, are called עוֹמְדִים, for they are created into a level of קִדְּשָׁה which remains stationary. To a large part, this is because they lack חֲפְזִיּוּת, free will, a concept that Rav Meir Simcha often utilizes.

Rav Meir Simcha continues and points out that in ויחי מד' יט, we read how the famine in Mitzraim worsened and its citizens were increasingly desperate for sustenance. They approached Yosef with the following deal: לָמָּה נָמוּת לְעֵינֶיךָ גַּם אֲנַחְנוּ גַּם אֲדָמָתֵנוּ קִנְיָה אֶתְנוּ וְאֶתְּךָ... *Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Acquire us and our land for bread; and we-with our land-will become serfs to Pharaoh...* Ibn Ezra comments: "One should not be surprised that the Torah employs the word death to land." The Artscroll Stone Edition Chumash editors develop this: "The Egyptians spoke of the death of the land because, as many commentators note, when the land is allowed to lay waste, without being plowed or planted, it is tantamount to its death. The same is true of people who squander their potential. As חז"ל tell us... the wicked are called dead even in their lifetimes. Life is synonymous with productivity." Rav Meir Simcha, similarly, notes that even a great צַדִּיק who passes on to the World to Come, with regards to *this* world, he transitions from a הוֹלֵךְ to an עוֹמֵד and as he so beautifully puts it, it is this אֲפִיסָת which effectuates his מִיתָה. Moshe Rabbeinu on *Har Sinai* was exposed to the highest level of קִדְּשָׁה-something which no other being will ever experience. He lived among the people but in fact surpassed even the הַשָּׂרֵת! And because of that exposure, his בְּחִירָה "to not do the right thing", was removed. He became an עוֹמֵד *in our world*! Rav Meir

Simcha tells us that the Tana in יג: connecting our pasuk with 'וַיְהִי שָׁם עִם ה' is also hinting to this-ה' עִם, Moshe attained the highest level of דְּבִיקוּת possible. And so is his choice of words-וּמִשְׁמֵשׁ עוֹמֵד וּמִשְׁמֵשׁ, אֶף כָּאֵן עוֹמֵד וּמִשְׁמֵשׁ, i.e., when Moshe ascended *Har Sinai* and spent forty days and nights עִם ה', he changed from being a הוֹלֵךְ to an עוֹמֵד and that status continued for as long as Moshe breathed his last breath on this world. It is therefore quite appropriate to say that Moshe's מִיתָה years later may have occurred in a physical sense, but in the spiritual realm, לֹא מָת, for he remained an עוֹמֵד וּמִשְׁמֵשׁ!

With this, Rav Meir Simcha helps us understand a cryptic exegesis of Sifrei: "Some say that even Moshe did not know the place of his burial, as it says, וְלֹא יָדַע אִישׁ אֶת קְבֻרָתוֹ and 'man' refers to Moses, as we read earlier, מִנְּשָׂה עָבָו מָאָד / *And the man, Moshe, was exceedingly humble.*" Rav Meir Simcha takes us to ירושלמי יבמות where we are told by R' Abba and R' Yehoshua that during the first three days after death, הַנֶּפֶשׁ טוֹיֵסָא עַל גּוּפָהּ i.e., the נֶפֶשׁ hovers over the body because it thinks that it will return to it. In שבת קנב: a Baraisa tells us that for a full twelve months a deceased person's נֶפֶשׁ *ascends and descends*, such that it is sometimes in this world with its body. Whatever the time limit is, it is clear from חז"ל that there remains a real connection between the גוּף and the נֶפֶשׁ that persists postmortem. This קוֹשֶׁר makes it very difficult for the נֶפֶשׁ to leave and begin its journey, just as two close friends find it hard to say goodbye to each other. This did not apply to מִנְּשָׂה. The humblest of people, his physical being did not matter. He could remain on *Har Sinai* for forty days and forty nights without bread and water. He separated from his wife with regards to marital relations. And as Rav Meir Simcha said earlier, this was because on a spiritual level, he experienced קִדְּשֵׁת וְלֹא יָדַע אִישׁ אֶת קְבֻרָתוֹ as none other. According to Rav Meir Simcha, including Moshe in וְלֹא יָדַע אִישׁ אֶת קְבֻרָתוֹ is absolutely true because after separating, there was no need for Moshe's נֶפֶשׁ to recognize his גוּף any longer, as this process began when they were still joined. He understands יָדַע in our pasuk in the same way that Rashi explains the words which HKBH used to describe Avraham, וַיֵּדַעְתִּי / *for I have loved him* i.e., although יָדַעְתִּי refers to knowledge, the Torah often uses love as its secondary meaning, for one who loves another brings him close and seeks to know him well. With regards to Moshe, after his physical death, his נֶפֶשׁ had no attraction to his גוּף. וְלֹא יָדַע אִישׁ אֶת קְבֻרָתוֹ... אֶף מִנְּשָׂה אֵינוֹ יוֹדֵעַ מְקוֹם קְבֻרָתוֹ. גוּף.

לזכר נשמת אבי מורי ר' ישראל מנחם בן ר' שלום ז"ל
 לזכר נשמת אמי מורתי רחל בת ר' אלחנן אביגדור ע"ה
 לזכר נשמת חמי מורי ר' יעקב נתן בן ר' ישראל שלמה ז"ל
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