

Parsha Ponders

VeZos HaBeracha | October 9, 2020 | 21 Tishrei 5781

Conflicting acts of kindness¹

וקבר אתו בגי בארץ מואב בית פעור ולא ידע איש את-קברתו עד היום הזה

[Hashem]² buried [Moshe] in the valley of the land of Moav, Beis-Peor. No man knows his place of burial until this day³

The Torah ends with the death of Moshe. *Chazal* note⁴ that the Torah starts and begins with Hashem's *chessed*, acts of loving kindness. After Moshe dies, Hashem Himself buries him. At the beginning of the Torah, we are taught that Hashem adorned Eve as a bride for Adam^{5 6 7}. With this insight, we can glean a new understanding of a vague verse in Ecclesiastes, read during this time of year: טוב אחרית דבר מראשיתו, better is the final word than its beginning⁸. What is this teaching us?

Let's discuss a hopefully hypothetical scenario. An opportunity to provide for a bride appears. She is lacking the usual adornments a bride should be expecting. She has no one to escort her to the *Chuppah*. Unfortunately, at the same time, there's a coffin which needs to be buried. There's no one to escort the deceased, nor anyone to ensure its timely burial. Which one of these two great *mitzvos* come first⁹? Actually, it's a dispute. Some say the bride gets priority¹⁰. Others say the deceased comes first¹¹. Perhaps the verse in Ecclesiastes will settle the matter.

As said, the Torah starts with Hashem's *chessed* of providing for a bride. It ends with Hashem's *chessed* of burying the deceased. Just looking at these two episodes, I'd have no idea which one is more important. Which one has precedence? The verse in Ecclesiastes is coming to tell us that burying the deceased takes precedence. טוב אחרית דבר, better is the final word. Meaning, better is the final act of *chessed* in the Torah¹², that of burying Moshe. Burying the deceased is more important מראשיתו, than the first act of *chessed* of adorning and providing for a bride.

Chazak Chazak VeNischazek! Good Shabbos and Chag Sameach!

¹ Based on *Sefer Apiryon* on *Deuteronomy* 34:6, written by *Rav Shlomo Gantzfried*, author of the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*

² *Rashi ad. loc.* brings an interesting dispute regarding who buried Moshe. The verse doesn't say. Since the verse says that no one knows where he is buried, it couldn't have been another person. As such, one opinion is that it was Hashem Himself. Indeed, this is the approach the *Sefer Apiryon* goes with, as it's the opinion of the sources that are to follow. Rabbi Yishmael however holds that Moshe buried himself, and this is one of the three times the word *את* is reflexive, instead of referring to a different subject (*Sifrei Bamidbar* § 32; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 10:17 only brings the opinion of Rabbi Yishmael). See *Seforno ad. loc.*, who addresses how this was possible if Moshe died on the mountain and was buried in the valley (Cf. *Eitz Yosef* and *Yedei Moshe ad. loc.*, who say that Moshe went into the grave alive, and died in the grave. They must have felt then that he died in the valley. Indeed, the verse doesn't specify his place of death)

³ *Deuteronomy loc. cit.*

⁴ *Midrash Tanchuma Vayera* § 1. A more famous version of this appears in *Sotah* 14a, but there are some differences (as will be pointed out). *Rav Grantzfried's* piece focuses on the one in *Midrash Tanchuma*

⁵ The *Midrash* learns this from *Genesis* 2:22: ויבן יקוק אלקים את הצלע את הצלע. The elucidation is from the fact that in seaside villages they refer to a bride as a בונה. *Sefer Apiryon* cites *Niddah* 71, but nothing is relevant there. A similar teaching is found in *Berachos* 61a, *Shabbos* 95a, *Eruvin* 18a, and *Niddah* 45b, where the *gemarra* says that Hashem braided Eve's hair for Adam, and that seaside villages refer to a braided woman as בנייתא. This *gemarra* in *Niddah* was probably his intent

⁶ The *Midrash* adds that in the "middle" of the Torah we also find Hashem's *chessed*. Hashem "visited" Avraham while the latter was recovering from his circumcision at the age of 99 (*Genesis* 18:1)

⁷ *Sotah loc. cit.* uses a different example to show Hashem's *chessed* at the beginning of the Torah: Hashem provided Adam and Eve with clothes once they realized they were naked (*ibid* 3:21)

⁸ *Ecclesiastes* 7:8

⁹ *Tur Yoreh Deah* § 360 with *Beis Yosef*. See *Sheiltos* (cited in the next note) for reasonings in either direction

¹⁰ *Sheiltos Bereishis* § 3 (end); *Ramban* in *Toras HaAdam*

¹¹ *Mishneh Torah Hilchos Avel* 14:8. The *Rambam* quotes *Ecclesiastes* 7:4 as proof. *Sefer Apiryon* asks why the *Rambam* didn't choose v. 2 as his proof

¹² The verse says דבר, and the Torah is also referred to as דבר, as in the verse in *Psalms* 105:8 (see *Rashi*)