

PARSHAS VAYECHI – “DIGGING YOUR OWN GRAVE” – BY M.D. SPITZER

After Yaakov died, Yosef and his brothers took him to Canaan for burial. When they returned, we are told (50:14):
 וישב יוסף מצרימה, הוא ואחיו וכל העולים אתו לקבור את אביו, אחרי קברו את אביו.

Yosef returned to Egypt, he and all who went up with him to bury his father, after he had buried his father.

There are clearly some extra words in this posuk. Yosef returns “from “burying his father, *after burying his father*”?

The Rogatchover Gaon (1858-1936) offers a brilliant explanation which I would like to share with you.

There is a cryptic Yerushalmi (Taanis 4:2) which says that the Ovos were buried “like people sit at a meal”. But what does this mean? How do people sit at a meal?

Well, the gemora (Brochos 46b) puts it like this:

If there are two people – the more important (A) sits on the right, and the less important (B) on the left.



If there are three people – the most important person (A) sits in the middle, the next most important (B) on the right, and the least important (C) on the left. So – person B must move from the left to the right.



Let us apply this to the burial positions of the Ovos. When Yitzchok died, he was buried to the left of Avrohom:



But when Yaakov died, Yitzchok had to move from the left to the right, so that Yaakov could be buried on the left.



Whoever buried Yaakov had first to move his father Yitzchok from the left to the right – so Yitzchok’s old grave then lay empty on the left, ready for Yaakov. *Yaakov was buried in Yitzchok’s old grave!*

Now we can understand the possuk. Let us read it again: Yosef returned from burying his father, *after burying his father*. The “extra” words are not extra at all. Yosef could only bury his father Yaakov *after he had dug up and reburied his father* – referring to Yaakov’s father, Yitzchok!

Another point (heard from R’ M.A. Friedman, Mir Yeshiva): it turns out that Yaakov actually dug his own grave – he dug the first grave of his father Yitzchok, which later became his own grave. This fits in very nicely with the possuk (50:5) in which Yaakov refers to his burial site as “קברי אשר כריתי לי”, “*the grave I dug for myself*”. Some meforshim are puzzled by this wording. But according to the Rogatchover, Yaakov did actually dig his own grave!