



5778 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Vayechi / פרשת ויחי

## **Buried At the Beginning**

When Yaakov realizes that his time in this world is coming to an end, his first act is to call in his son to ensure that Yosef would organize that he be buried in the Land of Israel. What motivated his desire to be posthumously brought back to his homeland? One interpretation cited by Rashi<sup>1</sup> indicates that Yaakov's main objective was less to arrive in the Land of Israel, and more just to leave Egypt, lest his grave be turned into a deity by the natives.

However, many sources teach that there is a special positive merit associated with being buried in the Holy Land. For example, one Gemara teaches that being connected to the ground of the Land of Israel helps atone for the sins a person committed:<sup>2</sup>

*Rav Anan said: Anyone who is buried in Eretz Yisrael is considered as though he is buried beneath the altar. It is stated here: "An altar of earth [adama] you shall make for Me"<sup>3</sup>, and it is stated there: "For He does avenge the blood of His servants, and renders vengeance to His adversaries, and atones for the land of [admato] His people"<sup>4</sup>. This teaches that one who is buried in the earth of Eretz Yisrael is considered as though he is buried beneath the altar in the Temple*

This advantage of being buried in the Land does not remain in the realm of theoretical philosophy, but has actual halakhic weight. Generally, it is prohibited to remove a corpse from one cemetery in order to inter it elsewhere. However, because of the great advantage of being buried in the Land of Israel, it is permitted to move a corpse from a cemetery outside the Land in order to rebury it in the Land.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rashi to Bereishit 47:30.

<sup>2</sup> Ketubot 111a.

<sup>3</sup> Shemot 20:21

<sup>4</sup> Devarim 32:43

<sup>5</sup> Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 363:1



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Interestingly, there are indications that there is even a hierarchy of burial spots within the Land of Israel. For example, when the Ramban codifies the halakha that a corpse can be moved from outside the Land to the Land, he writes:

*But to move the corpse in order that the person gain atonement or for his honor, such as to move him to the Land of Israel and to Yerushalayim... is permitted.<sup>6</sup>*

The Tzitz Eliezer<sup>7</sup> notes that by singling out Yerushalayim from other places in the Land, the Ramban is teaching us that “there is a special privilege to be buried in Yerushalayim.”

He posits that the reason for the uniqueness of burial in Yerushalayim is rooted in the formulation of the above Talmudic passage. If being buried in proximity to the altar grants a person atonement, then it would stand to reason that the closer to the altar one is buried the more atonement is achieved. Therefore, being buried in Yerushalayim, so close to the location of the altar, has the greatest posthumous effect.

Perhaps we can also suggest that being buried in Yerushalayim is important for a different reason. The Midrash teaches that Adam was initially created from the dirt beneath the site of the altar. If Yerushalayim was the beginning of life, then it is fitting for a person upon passing to be brought back to one’s origin point and source. Thus, being buried in Yerushalayim allows one’s final act to be an affirmation of the centrality of Yerushalayim.

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<sup>6</sup> Ramban, Torat HaAdam.

<sup>7</sup> Tzitz Eliezer 11:75.