



Likkutei Sichos

Volume 15 | Veyechi | Sichah 5

Bury, Buy, Bag

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1.

THREE INTERPRETATIONS

In his commentary on the verse,¹ “My father had adjured me, saying... in my grave, אֶשֶׁר כָּרִיתִי לִי, in the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me,” Rashi expounds upon the words “אֶשֶׁר כָּרִיתִי לִי” and offers three interpretations: (a) “According to its simple meaning...” (dug up) {accordingly, the verse would be understood: “in my grave which I have dug for myself...”};² (b) “and its midrashic interpretation,³ which also fits semantically, as in ‘which I acquired...’”; and (c) “it has another midrashic interpretation — it {כָּרִיתִי} is etymologically related to כָּרִי, a pile, meaning that Yaakov took all the silver and gold... and piled it up. He said to Eisav, ‘Take this....’”⁴

The reason Rashi lists the three interpretations in this order is readily understood. First, he brings the interpretation “**according to its simple meaning,**” then a **midrash** that at least “fits semantically” [אֶשֶׁר כָּרִיתִי לִי, which I acquired for myself]. Then he brings a midrash that does **not** “fit semantically” since, according to the straightforward understanding, it is implausible that the words “אֶשֶׁר כָּרִיתִי לִי” is etymologically related to כָּרִי, a pile”

[In particular, the order that Rashi presents his interpretations is understandable if we view⁵ the interpretation, “it has another midrashic interpretation — it is etymologically related to כָּרִי, a pile...” not as a distinct interpretation, but rather as “another” — a supplemental reason for, and an elucidation of, “its midrashic interpretation... which fits {semantically}...,” which is the second interpretation (“אֶשֶׁר כָּרִיתִי לִי” “as in, ‘which I acquired’”). The Torah uses the word “כָּרִיתִי” (and not a word the Torah usually uses: “קָנִיתִי” or “לָקַחְתִּי”) because of the relevance of “the term כָּרִי.” This term alludes to the idea that the

¹ Bereishis 50:5.

² Similarly, in *Targum Yonasan Ben Uziel* here: “which I have dug for myself”; *Ibn Ezra* here (and *Ramban* on *Bereishis* 49:31); *Radak* (in *Sefer HaShorashim*), “*Shoresh Karah*.”

³ Sourced from *Rosh Hashanah* 26a; see *Sotah* 13a; *Radak*, *ibid*.

⁴ See *Tanchuma*, “*Bereishis*,” sec. 6; *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 100, par. 5); *Shemos Rabbah*, ch. 31, par. 17).

⁵ This is also implied slightly from *Bereishis Rabbah*, *ibid*. and *Shemos Rabbah*, *ibid*.; see *Midrash HaGadol* and *Bechayei* on *Bereishis* 50:5.

acquisition was in the manner of (“כָּרִיתִי”) – “Yaakov took all the silver and gold....”]

However, we need to clarify:

(a) Why is Rashi not content with the “**simple meaning**” to the extent that he brings “its midrashic interpretation”? And (if “another midrashic interpretation” is a third interpretation, this indicates that) he is even dissatisfied with the {first} “midrashic interpretation” that at least “fits semantically.” Rather, Rashi brings another (third) midrashic interpretation that is even further from the simple meaning, as this interpretation **doesn’t** even “fit semantically”!?

(b) Why does Rashi refer to the second interpretation (that “אֲשֶׁר כָּרִיתִי” means “which I acquired”) as “midrashic” when we find verses in which the root “*kirah*” is translated simply as acquiring? In *parshas Devarim*,⁶ it says, “Water תִּקְרוּ {you shall acquire} from them with money...”; **Rashi** translates תִּקְרוּ as “an expression denoting acquisition.” Similarly, in *Hoshea*,⁷ on the verse, “וְאֶכְרֶהָ {so I acquired her} for myself for fifteen {pieces of} silver,” **Rashi** himself clarifies that this “expression denotes business....”

Another perplexing point: In the two places mentioned above where Rashi interprets the words simply (since he does **not** say that it is midrashic), he brings proof specifically from our verse [אֲשֶׁר כָּרִיתִי לִי], where he says that this is **its midrashic interpretation!**⁸

(c) Even if the verses mentioned above did not prove that “כָּרִיתִי” denotes purchasing and business, since, however, Rashi brings a proof for this from, “Rabbi Akiva said...{they call it} *kirah*,” this wouldn’t be considered midrashic. Rather, this is *pshat*,⁹ as found earlier in the verse,¹⁰ “for one hundred *kesitah*.”¹¹

⁶ *Devarim* 2:6.

⁷ *Hoshea* 3:2.

⁸ And see below, sec. 2, question 4, and fn. 20 in the original *sichah*.

⁹ {The plain meaning of Scripture. In his commentary to *Bereishis* 3:8, Rashi says: “I have come only to explain the plain meaning of Scripture.” Though there are many levels and depths of interpretation of the Torah, Rashi adopts a straightforward methodology.}

¹⁰ *Bereishis* 33:19.

¹¹ {A monetary biblical unit.}

Rashi says: “*Kesitah* means a *maah*;¹² Rabbi Akiva said: When I went to the cities across the sea, they called a *maah* ‘*kesitah*,’” and Rashi doesn’t say that this explanation is “its midrashic interpretation.” Similarly, in *parshas Bo*¹³ and *parshas Vaeschanan*,¹⁴ Rashi expounds the word “טוטפות”: “The word טט in Kaspi means two, and פת in Afriki means two.” In these verses, he also doesn’t call this “its midrashic interpretation.”

We see, therefore, that when there is support from a language used in “cities across the sea” (or in “Kaspi,” etc.)¹⁵ to translate a word in Scripture in a certain way (according to Rashi), it is considered *pshat*. So why does Rashi say, “its midrashic interpretation”?

2.

RASHI’S NUANCED WORDING

We also need to clarify several nuances in Rashi’s wording itself:

- a) Why does Rashi include the words “אָפּער ... לי” in his caption, when seemingly he only explains the word “פּרִיִּתִי”?¹⁶
- b) In his first interpretation, Rashi brings the proof “as in the verse, פִּי יִכְרֶה אִישׁ, when a man will dig.”¹⁷ This is unclear: (a) Why doesn’t he bring a proof from an **earlier** verse,¹⁸ “וַיִּכְרוּ שָׁם עַבְדֵי יִצְחָק בְּאֵר” Yitzchak’s servants dug a well there”? (b) Why does Rashi quote the word “אִישׁ, **man**,”¹⁹ which does not add anything to his proof? [Either way: If it is to identify the verse to which he is referring, he doesn’t need the word “אִישׁ” (because this is the only place where it says “פִּי יִכְרֶה”); and if it is to explain that כְּרִיה in this verse means

¹² {A talmudic unit of currency.}

¹³ *Shemos* 13:16

¹⁴ *Devarim* 6:8.

¹⁵ See *Shelah*, 409b, cited in *Or HaTorah*, “*Vaeschanan*,” p. 327.

¹⁶ Similar to Rashi’s commentary on *Vayishlach* 33:19 where he only brings the word “*kesitah*.”

¹⁷ *Shemos* 21:33.

¹⁸ *Bereishis* 26:25; see *Ibn Ezra* there.

¹⁹ This is found in most printed editions, including the first and second ones, and also in many manuscripts of Rashi; in some manuscripts of Rashi, the following word “pit” is also added See below in this *sichah*.

digging, it's not enough to quote the word "אֵישׁ"; Rashi should have also included the word "בּוֹר, pit," that follows {in the verse}].

- c) In his second explanation, Rashi says "כְּמוֹ אֲשֶׁר קָנִיתִי," as in, 'which I acquired.'" Seemingly, either way you look at it, there is a difficulty: If Rashi intends to translate only the word "כְּרִיתִי," he only needs to say "כְּמוֹ קָנִיתִי" (excluding the word "אֲשֶׁר"). And if he's saying this to fit with the continuation of the whole text — "אֲשֶׁר קָנִיתִי לִי" — he should have included the word "לִי" ("as in, אֲשֶׁר קָנִיתִי לִי, 'which I acquired **for myself**'")!²⁰
- d) Why does Rashi bring a proof that "כְּרִיתִי" means "as in, 'which I acquired'" from Rabbi Akiva, who says, "When I went to...," and not from **explicit verses** (cited in Section 1 above, the second question) as he does in the first interpretation?
- e) Even if we were to find a reason why the verses provide insufficient proof, and consequently, Rashi had to bring proof from the words of our Sages, it is still unclear why he also brings the details of the proof ("When I went to the **cities across the sea**, they referred to 'selling' as *kirah*") rather than saying it concisely: "As in אֲשֶׁר קָנִיתִי לִי, since 'selling' is called *kirah*, like in tractate *Rosh Hashanah*," or the like.

3.

AN IMPORTANT GRAVE

The explanation for all this is as follows:

Rashi's intent is not only to interpret the word "כְּרִיתִי," it is also to explain why the verse says, "אֲשֶׁר קָנִיתִי לִי" at all. Seemingly, it would have been sufficient for the verse to have said, "**In my grave** that is in the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me." (This is because the wording "**in my** grave" would already indicate the reason of why Yaakov says, "there you shall bury me.")

²⁰ When Rashi states, "as in, *asher kanisi*," he is not quoting a verse in Scripture (in *Yirmiyahu* 13:4, it says, "*asher kanisa*"; in *Rus* 4:10, it says, "*kanisi li*"); rather, he is merely presenting the **interpretation** of "*karisi*" in this verse.

We must say that by adding “אֲשֶׁר כָּרִיתִי לִי,” Scripture refers to a unique connection that Yaakov had **this** with grave that made it very important to him. Therefore, Yaakov said, “There you shall bury me.”

This means that because Yaakov and Yosef knew that Pharaoh wanted Yaakov to be buried in Egypt [which explains why Yaakov didn't rely on Yosef's word²¹ — “I will do as you say” — but he made Yosef take an oath,²² and commentaries explain²³ that this was to empower him to influence Pharaoh], Yosef said to Pharaoh, “My father had me take an **oath** saying,” thus expressing how important this was to Yaakov. We now understand why Yaakov also stated the reason (Pharaoh would accept) why it was so important for him to be buried in the land of Canaan.

In line with this explanation, Rashi offers his first interpretation, “according to its simple meaning,” that “כָּרִיתִי” means “I dug.” Since this is the grave that **he himself** expended the effort to dig, it clearly was of particular importance to him.

Now we can also understand why Rashi brings a proof specifically from the verse “כִּי יִכְרֶה (and also includes the word) אִישׁ”: Since the verse includes the word “man” {“when a man will dig a pit”} and doesn't just say “or when a pit is dug,”²⁴ it implies²⁵ that “כִּי יִכְרֶה” is an activity requiring special effort and work by a person, {specifically} a grown man. Therefore, we also understand that in our case, since the “כָּרִיתִי” entailed Yaakov making a special effort,²⁶ this automatically evoked {in Pharaoh} an appreciation of the great importance {of this burial place to Yaakov}.

²¹ Bereishis 47:30.

²² Bereishis 47:31.

²³ See Ramban and Kli Yakar (*Bereshis* 47:31), et al.

²⁴ Prior to this, it says, “When a man opens a pit.”

²⁵ Note Rashi on *Shemos* 2:14; Rashi on *Bereishis* 9:20.

²⁶ Note *Tanchuma* (Buber ed.), “*Toldos*,” sec. 7; *Aggaddas Bereishis*, ch. 40: “How do we know Yitzchak was physically strong? see how many wells he dug, etc.”

4.

THE NEED FOR A SECOND INTERPRETATION

Yet, this explanation has many difficulties. Among them:

- a) The **substance** of this explanation: The cave of Machpelah is in the land of Israel, and Yaakov lived in Egypt for the last seventeen years of his life. Accordingly, Yaakov dug his grave more than seventeen years before his passing, something incredible.²⁷
- b) Yaakov said, “כָּרִיתִי, I have dug.” Why did Yaakov himself dig the grave and not use his servants?²⁸ All the same, it could be argued, albeit unconvincingly, that the term “כָּרִיתִי” could (also) refer to his servants.²⁹
- c) The **wording** of the verse: According to this interpretation, the word “לִי” is apparently superfluous. The verse could have said, “which I have dug,” and we would have understood it was “לִי, for myself.”

Therefore, Rashi offers a second interpretation: “Its midrashic interpretation... ‘which I acquired.’ Rabbi Akiva said...” Although this interpretation is “midrashic” and not “the straight-forward meaning,” as explained later, it “fits the wording.” In other words, this interpretation fits the semantic meaning of “כָּרִיתִי” and also explains the necessity of the verse using the word “לִי.” [Rashi calls this interpretation “midrashic” not because of “the wording (of the verse)” but due to its context, as will be explained.] More importantly, this interpretation emphasizes how important the burial place was to Yaakov — he says, “**I bought it**,” as opposed to “I inherited it” (automatically), or “I took it” as an inheritance from “my fathers” — he paid for it. We explained **above** that when Avraham bought the Cave of Machpelah³⁰

²⁷ Note the Radak who says there: “**Is it possible** that Yaakov, our forefather... dug his grave **in his lifetime.**”

²⁸ See *Tanchuma*, “*Toldos*,” sec. 7: “Was Yaakov a digger of **graves**?”

²⁹ Note *Bereishis* 21:30, “I dug the well,” explained in *Bereishis* 26:15: “The wells that the servants **of his father** dug.”

³⁰ *Bereishis* 23:9,16; Rashi’s commentary.

(and the same applies to Yaakov's purchase),³¹ it was bought for the full price (*churfan*).³²

5.

RASHI'S PROOF

This will be understood by explaining the proof that Rashi brings concerning his interpretation of “אֲשֶׁר כָּרִיתִי — as in, ‘which I acquired,’” citing Rabbi Akiva, who said: “When I went... they called *mechirah* {selling} ‘*kirah*.” Seemingly, this **disproves** the point: Rashi's aim is to translate “כָּרִיתִי” as “**I acquired**” (**bought**), and R' Akiva said that “*kirah*” means “*mechirah*” (**selling**)!

The explanation: Rashi cites R' Akiva, who said “they called *mechirah* {selling} ‘*kirah*,” to bring a proof that “כָּרִיתִי” doesn't mean {a one-way transaction} “I acquired” — simply taking — but rather an **exchange** and a transfer of the purchaser's money for the seller's burial ground, or the opposite. Therefore, “כָּרִיתִי” means both “I acquired” and “I sold.”³³

On this basis, it is clear why the verse emphasizes the word “כָּרִיתִי לִי, **for myself**”: Since the word “כָּרִיתִי” alone doesn't specifically mean “I acquired,” but rather, it denotes an exchange and a transfer of ownership, the verse needs to add “לִי, for myself” to imply “I acquired.” [On the other hand, in Rashi's commentary, where he uses the word “I acquired,” it would be superfluous to add the word “for myself.”]

Therefore, Rashi doesn't bring his prooftexts from *parshas Devarim* or *Hoshea* because these other sources could be construed as **contradicting** his interpretation: Since the verses add the words “(buy it from them) **with money**”; “(and buy it for myself) **with fifteen coins of silver**,” the verses

³¹ *Bereishis* 33:19; Rashi's commentary, loc. cit.; See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 25, p. 182.

³² {Aramaic for “good,” denoting “negotiable currency”; see Rashi on *Bereishis* 33:19.}

³³ Note Rashi on *Mikeitz* (41:56), “*shever* means selling and acquiring.”

intimate that כריה unqualified just means “to **take**” (something without giving anything in return).

6.

HOW TO IMPRESS PHARAOH

However, on this basis, there are still difficulties:

a) Regarding the question raised above (in Section 3) as to why Scripture needs to say, “אֲשֶׁר כָּרִיתִי לִי, which I acquired,” to teach us that the grave was acquired (by buying it) — why was it of crucial importance to say to Pharaoh, “I acquired it” to convince Pharaoh that it was necessary to bury Yaakov there — “there you shall bury me”? It would have been quite far-fetched for Yosef to have relied on the fact that **Pharaoh** knew that our forefathers made two acquisitions for substantial sums and to conclude that this acquisition was similar.

b) Why does Scripture use a form of the word “*kirah*,” which means only an exchange and transfer of ownership? Using this word necessitated adding “(I acquired) לִי, for myself.” At the outset, Scripture could have used more precise wording: “קָנִיתִי, I acquired” or similar wording. (This would have prevented the need for Scripture to add the word “לִי, for myself”).

Therefore, Rashi doesn’t only offer the general explanation that “selling” is referred to as *kirah*, but also explains that “**in the *krachim* {cities} across the sea**, they referred to ‘selling’ as *kirah*”: *Krachim* refers to large commercial cities where business was conducted and transactions made on a large scale.

This is what the wording “אֲשֶׁר כָּרִיתִי לִי” means to imply. (It doesn’t only mean, “which I bought”): With this phraseology, Yosef communicated to Pharaoh the importance of this burial place to Yaakov. It was so crucial to Yaakov that he had tried to enter into a transaction like “כָּרִיתִי” — a robust acquisition, as used in “cities across the sea.”

[Therefore, Rashi calls this “midrashic” because this idea — that the acquisitions in the “**cities across the sea**” are called “*kirah*” and represent a formal acquisition, and **with this** pronouncement, Yosef intended to convince Pharaoh how important it was that “there you shall bury me” — is not incontrovertible according to the straightforward meaning.]³⁴

7.

PHYSICALLY DIGGING SHOWS THE GREATEST IMPORTANCE

However, this interpretation doesn’t fully explain the substance of the pronouncement, “אֶשֶׁר כָּרִיתִי לִי.” After all, ultimately, this interpretation {merely} teaches us that Yaakov made an acquisition in the manner of “*kirah*.” This manner of acquisition doesn’t convey Yaakov’s extraordinary effort to provide this burial ground for himself. Thus, this interpretation doesn’t emphasize the tremendous importance of this burial ground for Yaakov. After all, anything with a measure of value is acquired by a formal transaction.

Therefore, Rashi adds, “Another midrashic interpretation — it {כָּרִיתִי} is etymologically related to כָּרִי, a pile... that Yaakov took all the silver and gold that he brought from the house of Lavan....” The verse refers to the acquisition using the word “כָּרִיתִי,” not (only) to indicate how strong the acquisition was, as discussed above, but also to allude to the fact that Yaakov gave away all his “silver and gold that he brought...” This indicates how precious and cherished this grave was to Yaakov, so even Pharaoh would agree that “there you shall bury me.”³⁵

However, this is still a “midrashic interpretation.” Furthermore, it doesn’t even “fit the wording” (in contrast to the interpretation, “as in, ‘which I

³⁴ However, in *Devarim*, {when Rashi translates the word תָּקַד as “an expression that denotes purchasing,”} it is not his intention to convey the idea mentioned here; therefore, he does not state that this interpretation is midrashic. (This is in addition to the straightforward explanation {for not asserting that it is midrashic}, as there is no other interpretation.) Yet, further analysis is needed to understand why there (and in *Hoshea*) Rashi mentions the “cities across the sea.”

³⁵ See, also, *Maskil LeDavid* here.

acquired”) because to suggest that “כָּרִיתִי” is “etymologically related to כָּרִי, a pile” is totally a midrashic approach.

Since these interpretations — “as in, ‘which I acquired’... etymologically related to כָּרִי, a pile” — are midrashic, Rashi’s first and primary interpretation is, “as in, ‘when a man will dig...” This interpretation fits the “simple meaning” in terms of both the diction of the verse (this is the simple translation of “כָּרִיתִי”) and the context of the verse. It expresses how precious and cherished the grave was to Yaakov. He exerted himself so much for it to the extent that he alone dug it לִי — for **myself**, for that purpose.

— From a talk delivered on Shabbos *parshas Vayechi*, 5732 (1972)