

Parashat Vayechi 5779, 2018:

Yosef's Reward

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Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof and Pittsburgh, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Yakir Ephraim ben Rachel Devorah, Mordechai ben Miriam Tovah, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The concluding *pasukim* (verses) of our *parasha* present Yosef's final words to his brothers. They contain both a reminder of Hashem's promise to ultimately redeem the Jewish people from Egypt, and Yosef's poignant personal request:

Joseph said to his brothers, "I am going to die; G-d will surely remember you and take you up out of this land to the land that He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." And Joseph adjured the children of Israel, saying, "G-d will surely remember you, and you shall take up my bones out of here." (This and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

Herein, Yosef reveals the depth of his abiding faith in Hashem and twice declares,

"G-d will surely remember you." Within this context, he placed an oath (*shavuah*) upon his brothers and their descendants to transport his bones with them in the course of the promised Redemption and bury him in Israel. In so doing, he emulated his father, *Ya'akov Avinu* (our Patriarch Ya'akov), who had insisted Yosef take a *shavuah* stating that he would not bury Ya'akov in Egypt, but rather with his forebears in Israel. (*Sefer Bereishit* 47: 29-31) A straightforward reading of our passage indicates that the obligation to transport Yosef's bones from Egypt and bury him in Israel was delegated to the entire Jewish people.

When the Exodus takes place, *Sefer Shemot* 13:19 tells us that Moshe, as the representative of the entire Jewish people, gathered up Yosef's remains and began the long process of

reinterring him in Israel: “Moses took Joseph’s bones with him, for he [Joseph] had adjured the sons of Israel, saying, ‘G-d will surely remember you, and you shall bring up my bones from here with you.’” The first chapter of *Mishnah Sotah* (7 and 9) utilizes this to teach us a crucial lesson about how our present behaviors determine the way we will be treated by Hashem and our fellow man in the future:

According to the manner in which a person acts, others [G-d and man] will act toward him... This [general rule] is in effect when it comes to matters of a positive nature as well...Yosef merited the right to bury his father [Ya’akov], and there was no one among his brothers who was greater than he. As the Torah states: “So Joseph went up to bury his father...And chariots and horsemen also went up with him, and the camp was very numerous.” (*Sefer Bereishit* 50: 7, 9).

Our passage continues and informs us that Yosef was worthy of the greatest possible respect and, therefore, it was only fitting that the most prestigious person alive at the time of the Exodus should be involved in his burial in the Land of Israel:

Whom do we have that deserved to be buried with greater respect than Yosef? Therefore, the only one who could possibly render him the proper respect was Moshe. Moshe merited the right to bury Yosef, and there was no one among his brothers who was greater than he. As the Torah states: “Moses took Joseph’s bones with him.” (*Mishnah* translation my own)

The operating principle in the above-cited Mishnaic passage is the well-known concept of *middah k’neged middah* – according to the manner in which a person acts, G-d and man will act toward him. What is the standard of behavior that should guide us? We are fortunate that the Torah provides us with a clear and direct answer to this question: “*V’halachta b’drachov*” (“And you should walk in His path,” *Sefer Devarim* 28:9). This commandment is explicated in a celebrated passage in *Talmud Bavli, Sotah* 14a:

Just as Hashem clothed the naked [in the case of Adam and Chava] ... so, too, should you clothe the naked. Just as Hashem visited the sick [in the case of Avraham after his *brit milah*] ...so, too, should you visit the sick. Just as the Holy One Blessed be He comforted the mourners [in the case of Yitzhak after Avraham’s passing] ...so, too, should you comfort the mourners. Just as the Holy One Blessed be He buried the dead [in the case of Moshe] ...so, too, should you bury the dead. (Translation, my own)

Stated quite simply, our goal is to emulate the Almighty's actions in each of our deeds.

As my rebbi and mentor Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (1903-1993) noted on many occasions, *halachta b'drachov* emerges as the fundamental underpinning of Judaism's ethical structure. By emulating the actions of the Holy One blessed be He, we create substantive changes in ourselves, and positively impact those with whom we interact. In this sense, we become partners with Hashem in creating the world – *shutfim im Hashem b'ma'aseh Bereishit*.

With Hashem's help, may we be *zocheh* (merit) to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *halachta b'drachov* in its most profound sense. Then may we may become *shutfim im Hashem b'ma'aseh Bereishit*, to make the world a better and nobler place, and, may the *middah k'neged middah* we receive be replete with *zechuyot* (merits). *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>

They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org/> using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha's name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

*** I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.