

Beshalach 2017

1.

Physical or spiritual?

“Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him, for he had firmly adjured the children of Israel, saying, ‘God will surely remember you, and you shall bring up my bones from here with you.’” (13, 19)

"ויקח משה את עצמות יוסף עמו כי השבע השביע את בני ישראל לאמר פקד פקד יפקד אלהים אתכם והעליתם את עצמתי מזה אתכם."

Moshe took the responsibility of taking Yosef’s bones from Egypt when they would leave Egypt. Because of this incredible act the Gemara in Sotah (13a) points out that we could see how dear and precious the mitzvos were to Moshe. Upon leaving Egypt, all the Jews were involved with gathering booty from the Egyptians, but Moshe was involved with mitzvos. (תנו רבנן בא וראה כמה) Shlomo Hamelech writes (Mishlei 10, 8) “the wise of heart will seize good deeds, but the foolish one’s lips will become weary.” "חכם לב יקח מצות ואויל שפתים ילבט." Everyone was involved with physical matters, but Moshe was involved with spiritual matters.

Why is Moshe considered very wise just for performing mitzvos? The Maharsha explains that **Moshe is considered very smart because he was able to make the right decision. It is very hard to do the opposite of what everyone else is doing.** The Mishna in Avos (2, 1) says calculate the cost of a mitzvah against its reward. (Rashi explains calculate the minimal financial loss because of performing a mitzvah against the great reward you will receive in the future. Rabbeinu Yonah adds that if your yeitzer hara whispers to you ‘how can you do a mitzvah, look at much you’ll lose now’, answer back in the future I’ll be rewarded thousands fold! The Tiferes Yisroel explains think about the temporary loss in this world versus the eternal gain in the world to come. Many people go to advanced schooling with rigorous curriculums for a few years. But the rest of their life they will have an enjoyable lucrative profession! This is one of the reasons why Shlomo refers to Moshe as being smart; he realized this calculation.

The Eitz Yosef has difficulty understanding the aforementioned Gemara because the Jews were also involved with mitzvos. The Jews were supposed to ask and borrow items from the Egyptians. Since that is also a mitzvah, what the Gemara mean when it says that the Jews weren’t involved with mitzvos? The Gemara in Berachos (9b) says that in order that Hashem will fulfill what he said to Avraham they would have to leave Egypt with great wealth. The Gemara says they emptied out Egypt like the depths of the sea without fish or like a hunters net without bait. Therefore, they did more than Hashem’s commandment and took extra spoils. They were busy with collecting these extra spoils which don’t fall under the category of Hashem’s commandment to take spoils. The Divrei Shaul offers an additional answer. He says that if one has the choice of performing one mitzvah, either a mitzvah that has a physical pleasure or a mitzvah that doesn’t, usually he will choose the one with a physical pleasure. Moshe dealt with gathering the bones of Yosef which didn’t have any physical pleasure, and this was his greatness. The Jews were involved with a mitzvah that had physical pleasure s attached to it. Therefore, the

reality is that the Jews were involved with a mitzvah; however, this mitzvah was incomparable to Moshe's mitzvah leshma (for its own sake). This is what the Gemara in Sotah means. As a side point the Rabbeinu B'chaya (Shemos 13, 19) says that the Jews weren't involved with any mitzvah.

The Gemara in Sotah said look how great Moshe is because the mitzvos were very dear to him. Why does the Gemara say mitzvos a plural tense here? Seemingly Moshe was only involved with one mitzvah; transferring Yosef's bones. The Ein Yaakov answers that Yosef had many bones. It seems like according to the Ein Yaakov each bone is an independent mitzvah. This isn't simple, because most would assume that it is all considered one mitzvah. He offers an additional answer based on a Medrish that says Moshe gathered the bones of all of the tribes! The Ben Yehoyadah says that the additional mitzvah was fulfilling the oath that he promised Yosef to transfer his bones from Egypt to Israel. The Margolios Hashas offers an additional answer. The Gemara in Berachos (5a) relates what to do if your yeitzer hara is getting to. The final tactic is to remember the day of death! Moshe didn't want everyone to get overwhelmed with the overabundance of spoils. Moshe said to contemplate Yosef's bones and remember the day of death. He alluded to the Jews that you will never live forever and you can't take anything physical to the grave. The Gemara therefore says mitzvos because Moshe performing an additional mitzvah of teaching the Jews Torah and what is really important in life.

The Kli Yakar (13, 19) points out that the pasuk says "Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him." The words "Moshe took" contain a deep message. Money will not go with us to the grave, only one's good deeds and Torah will go with us to the grave. **This is why the pasuk says "Moshe took", meaning, he took the mitzvos with him to the next world! This is why Moshe was involved specifically with Yosef's bones; to remember the day of death.** (The Kli Yakar and the Margolios Hashas are saying a similar idea.) The Braisa in Avos (perek vav) says when a man departs from this world; neither silver, nor gold, nor precious stones nor pearls will escort him, but only Torah study and good deeds etc.

The sefer Kometz Hamincha quotes the Medrish Raba that says the sea saw Yosef's coffin and fled. **Moshe was the ruler of the Jewish people and was very busy. He still nevertheless dealt with Yosef's bones! This is why Moshe was considered very wise!**

The Chafetz Chaim offers a fabulous mashal (analogy) (Toras Habayis page 160) that explains this point of correctly maximizing our time in this world. An individual traveled to a far location for business purposes. When he arrived there, he got caught up in the all the gashmius (physicality's) in that city and completely forgot about his business. As time passed, he totally forgot why he was even there. Eventually, when he returned from his trip he brought back nothing! He had absolutely nothing from all the time he spent there. All the physicality's he was involved with were left there. All the people, including his wife, were shocked at what happened. They were expecting him to return with a fortune; to their surprise he returned completely empty handed. The same is true regarding our neshamos (souls). They traveled a very far distance, all the way from the kisei hakavod (chair of Hashem in heaven) down to earth to do one thing: serve Hashem. The neshama is supposed to be learning Torah, performing mitzvos, fixing middos, and making ourselves better people. The Gemara in Sanhedrin (99b) quotes the pasuk from Iyov (5:7) that says "man was created to toil." The Gemara says that this pusuk is referring to toiling in learning! (אמר רבי אלעזר כל אדם לעמל נברא, שנאמר כי אדם לעמל יולד, איני יודע אם לעמל פה נברא אה)

לעמל מלאכה נברא, כשהוא אומר כי אכף עליו פיהו הוי אומר לעמל פה נברא. ועדיין איני יודע אם לעמל תורה אם לעמל שיחה, כשהוא אומר לא ימוש ספר התורה הזה מפיד הוי אומר לעמל תורה נברא. **If we go back to shamayim (heaven) empty handed, without all of the Torah and mitzvos that we were supposed to accrue while in this world, Hashem and the melachim (angels) will say ‘what a waste! This guy didn’t even do what he was sent down to actually accomplish.’ It’s just like this businessman who traveled abroad and got distracted and returned empty handed!**

2.

Holiness and tradition

The Kometz Hamincha quotes the Yalkut Shimoni (Tehilim 114) that says the sea split because it saw Yosef’s coffin. The sea split (‘ran away’) because Yosef ran away from Potiphar’s wife. What is the explanation of this Medrish? Why doesn’t the pasuk explicitly say this? The pashut pshat (simple explanation) is the pasuk is referring to the previous pasuk of the Jews being holy. Really there is no contradiction! When the Jews left Egypt, they didn’t have many merits as the Medrish Yalkut Revoni (Beshalach 82, 89) as well as the pasuk in Tehilim (15, 5) says. The angels claimed that the Jews didn’t deserve to be redeemed because they were involved with idolatry like the Egyptians. Where did their holiness come from? Chazal say anytime where you see a person abstaining from elicited relations, you’ll find holiness. The Vayikra Raba (24, 6) quotes Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi who says the parsha of arayos (elicited relations) are adjacent to the parsha of holiness because anytime there is abstinence, there is holiness. Similarly, Rashi comments (Vayikra 19, 2) that we must abstain from arayos and other sins because every place where you find abstinence, you’ll find holiness. “You shall be holy” "קדושים תהיו" means abstain from arayos. The Egyptians were steeped with immorality. The Gemara in Sotah (11b) says it was because of the merit of the righteous women that we were redeemed. The pasuk in Tehilim (122, 4) says “for there the tribes ascended, the tribes of God, a testimony for Israel, to give thanks to the name of Hashem.” Even though the Egyptians ruled over them, they couldn’t rule over the women. Rashi (Bamidbar 26, 5) writes that the women saved their houses because they stayed pure. It was because of their merit that we merited leaving Egypt. That’s why the pasuk says they had kedusha because they abstained from arayos.

This kedusha came from Yosef Hatzaddik who descended to Egypt and abstained from sinning with Potiphar’s wife. Yosef essentially chose to be imprisoned rather than sin. The sea saw that Yehuda was holy. His holiness came from Yosef’s holiness. In this merit the sea split. Since Yosef ran away from natural temptation, the sea therefore went against its nature and split. This is why Yosef’s bones were taken out of Egypt because they had kedusha and because of the oath. We learn two very important lessons from the aforementioned; the importance of abstinence from the prohibited and the concept of mesorah (tradition). This prepared the Jews and allowed them to leave Egypt. The Jews kept this mesorah of Yosef Hatzaddik. This concept sh’tims (coincides) with the line ‘father’s actions are a sign to his son’s actions’ (מעשה אבות סימן לבנים).

“And all the persons who emerged from Yaakov’s loins were seventy souls, and Yosef was in Egypt.” (1, 5) "ויהי כל נפש יצאי ירך יעקב שבעים נפש ויוסף היה במצרים." The Ateres Tzvi (page 119) asks why does the pasuk inform us that Yosef was in Egypt; it is seemingly irrelevant and superfluous? We learn a great concept from these words. We see that Yaakov and his children never thought about going to Egypt because of all its impurities. The sole reason why they went there was because Yosef was there and purified the way for them. The lesson is that while we are

in galus (exile), we have to make sure we go to places that have tzaddikim, Rebbeim, and good friends. Yosef was in Egypt in order to pave the way for the Jews to remain pure. The Gemara in Shabbos (130) quotes Rebbi Shimon ben Gamliel who says any mitzvah that the Jews originally happily accepted, we still happily perform that mitzvah, for example, milah. Our mitzvos have an ever lasting impression!

Thank you Yair Moshe Ausabel for typing this up.