

ALSHICH

INSIGHTS FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

ספר שמות

פרשת בשלח

SERIES 1: ISSUE 16

MOSHE TAKES YOSEF'S BONES OUT OF EGYPT

Chapter 13

19) Moshe took Yosef's bones with him because Yosef had made Bnei Yisrael solemnly swear (הִשָּׁבַע הַשְּׁבִיעַי), saying, "God will surely remember you (פָּקֹד יִפְקֹד) and you will bring up my bones from here with you [when you leave]."

(ט) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בֹּא אֶל־פְּרַעֲהַ כִּי־אֲנִי הִכְבַּדְתִּי אֶת־לְבָבוֹ וְאֶת־לֵב עַבְדִּיו לְמַעַן שְׁתִּי אֶתְתִּי אֵלָהּ בְּקִרְבּוֹ.

Consider the following questions:

1. Why does the Torah tell us here that Moshe took Yosef's bones with him? Surely it should have told us this in the previous *parashah*, when they left Egypt, not here after they had already left and reached Sukkos.
2. Why does the Torah emphasize that Moshe took the bones "with him"? It seems unnecessary.
3. Why the double expression הִשָּׁבַע הַשְּׁבִיעַי (lit., swear, he made swear)?
4. In describing Yosef's request of Bnei Yisrael to swear that they would bring up his bones when they left Egypt, why does the Torah have to add that Yosef had said, "God will surely remember you (פָּקֹד יִפְקֹד אֶתְכֶם)"? And why use the unusual double expression פָּקֹד יִפְקֹד (lit., remember, he will remember)?

God had led the Jewish people on a roundabout route out of Egypt because the *eirev rav*, when faced by war, would have panicked and returned to Egypt. But the Jewish people themselves had set out armed and ready for war, with full faith in Hashem. Nevertheless, it was still possible that even they might have decided to return to Egypt when faced by war. The fact that they were meeting armed opposition might have made them think that God was not with them, for He had told Avraham that his descendants would be strangers in a foreign land for 400 years, and that length of time had not yet passed. After all, they had only been in Egypt for 210 years, so perhaps Moshe was not the true redeemer. They may not have known that the 400 years were calculated from the birth of Yitzchak, 190 years before they descended to Egypt.

To ensure that the Jewish people not make this mistake, the Torah tells us, *Moshe took Yosef's bones with him* to serve as proof that he was the true redeemer. How was this a proof?

Verse 19 continues, ...because Yosef had made Bnei Yisrael solemnly swear (הִשָּׁבַע הַשְּׁבִיעַי) saying, "God will surely remember you (פָּקֹד יִפְקֹד)..." The Torah uses the double expression הִשָּׁבַע הַשְּׁבִיעַי because before his death, Yosef had made his brothers swear two oaths. The first oath, as the Sages in *Shemos Rabbah* 3:8 taught, was that they should pass on a phrase to their descendants by which their descendants would be able to identify their true redeemer: the unusual double use of the root פ-ק-ד. Indeed, this is why God told Moshe to use that expression, telling him [*Shemos* 3:16], "Go and gather the elders of Israel and say

to them, 'Hashem the God of your fathers has appeared to me ... saying, 'I have surely remembered [פָּקַד פְּקֻדָּתַי] you.'" **[This begins to answer Question 4.]** The second oath was, as verse 19 concludes, "You will bring up my bones from here." **[This answers Question 3.]**

If the Jewish people would doubt the truth of Moshe's mission and think that perhaps the time for the redemption had not yet come, they would see Moshe with the remains of Yosef, who had promised them that whoever would use the double פָּקַד expression would be the true redeemer. Then they would have no more doubts. **[This begins to answer Questions 1 and 2.]**

But why was it specifically a double expression of remembering that was chosen to serve as the sign? We have said on the verse (*Shemos 7:4*), "I will bring out My legions, [with] My people, Bnei Yisrael, out from the land of Egypt..." that "My legions" refers to the retinue of angels who accompany the Shechinah. God was telling the Jewish people, "There is a guarantee that you will be redeemed. A retinue of holy angels, accompanying the Shechinah, descended into exile in Egypt together with you. I certainly cannot leave them there. When I bring them out, I will bring you out at the same time, together with them." It was to this that the double expression פָּקַד פְּקֻדָּתַי referred: "When I remember and redeem **them** (My legions), I will also remember and redeem **you** (My people)." **[This completes the answer to Question 4.]**

We can also deepen our understanding of how Moshe's taking Yosef's bones with him was a proof that he was the true redeemer. *Shemos Rabbah* (20:19) tells us that when Moshe was looking for Yosef's coffin, Serach bas Asher told him that it was kept together with those of the kings of Egypt. When he got there, he saw many different coffins and he did not know which one belonged to Yosef. He cried out, "Yosef, Yosef, the Shechinah, the retinue of angels, and the Jewish people are leaving Egypt because the time for the redemption has come. If you reveal where you are, then good; otherwise, we will be exempt from our oath to you." Yosef's coffin immediately began to shake and Moshe took it with him. Now, we see from this Midrash that it was only when Moshe told Yosef that the time had come for the Shechinah and Yisrael to be redeemed that he revealed where his remains were. Yosef's soul, which resided in the higher worlds and thus knew the truth, was the one who answered Moshe – and his soul certainly knew whether the time for the redemption had arrived or not. Thus, the very fact that Yosef had agreed to reveal the location of his remains to Moshe was a clear proof that the time of the redemption had indeed come and that Moshe was the true redeemer. **[This completes the answers to Questions 1 and 2.]**

THE ALSHICH AND HIS COMMENTARY

The Alshich (1508–1600), was one of only five famous rabbis in Jewish history universally known by the title "HaKadosh" (the holy one). He served on the same Beis Din as Rabbi Yosef Caro, author of the Shulchan Aruch. The Alshich is most noted for his monumental Tanach commentary.

The Alshich uses his creative insight and encyclopaedic knowledge of Tanach, Talmud, and Midrash to weave together his profound interpretations. He simultaneously focuses on the text as well as the context of a series of verses by listing a range of questions and then answering them all with one or two concepts.

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