

ESSENTIALLY NEW AGAIN

by Rabbi Label Lam

Moshe took Yosef's bones with him, for he [Yosef] made the Sons of Israel promise, saying, "G-d will surely remember you, and you shall bring up my bones from here with you". (Shemos 13:19)

The historic "exodus" is happening and on the way out Moshe detours to exhume the bones of Yosef. The reason is given that this was the fulfillment of a promise exacted by Yosef from his brothers, that at the time when HASHEM would keep His promise to redeem the Jewish People Yosef should not be left in Egypt. It makes practical sense too that this is the time for Moshe to take Yosef's bones on his way out of Egypt. The question remains though, "Why is Moshe the one to take Yosef's bones?"

I recently heard an expansion of the notion that Moshe took Yosef's bones. In Hebrew the word for bones is "Atzmos". The same word can be understood to mean "essence". Moshe needed to tap into the essence of Yosef as he was beginning his role as the leader of the Jewish People. What does it mean to tap into the essence of Yosef? Admittedly it all sounds a little obtuse but it is really a very practical point.

Yosef had demonstrated great leadership not only as a leader of Egyptian society but most importantly how he dealt with his brothers even after the debacle of being sold into slavery. His patience and conciliatory qualities are beyond descriptive words. Moshe would need to emulate these qualities and to model them in order to be successful in his new historic role as leader of the Children of Israel. That's the essence of what I had heard regarding the bones, "atzmos" - the essence of Yosef.

Still, how had Moshe discerned the important qualities of Yosef? A person does a lot of deeds in his life and few had accomplished as much as Yosef in his lifetime. So much is forgotten over time. Even Pharaoh had forgotten or made himself as if he did not know Yosef. How, without a Torah, did Moshe key in on those critical qualities that defined Yosef so they could carry him through his new career?

I once heard directly from the Lubavicher Rebbe ztl at a Yurtzeit event, for his beloved mother, a remarkable statement that has tremendous relevance here. He said that one of the proofs of NESHAMA - soul is that, in the usual course of life, the further a person gets away from a thing the more it fades from memory. Be it time or space, whatever we ate for lunch last week is less and less important and memorable as time goes by. That's how it is with all physical things. However, when it

comes to the loss of a loved one, just the opposite is true. The further one gets away from their departure from this world the more their qualities are crystalized in our mind and heart. We are less distracted by the sound of their voice, the shape of their nose. We are able, year after year, to gain a greater clarity of their elemental being. So too the chief qualities of Yosef become perfectly clear with the passage of time.

The timing of events is particularly poignant here! Why was Yosef concerned about being buried in Israel? Why should he bother his brothers to promise? Why should Moshe be troubled? There is a fundamental belief, number 13 of the 13 that the Rambam outlines. There is a curtain call in history at the very end. With the barriers of time removed the essence of everyone worthy will hold hands on an earthly stage. Yosef spoke to his brothers about the future when HASHEM would remember the Bnei Israel. Now it was happening.

Yosef was extremely patient and forgiving because he had a powerful Emunah - an unshakable loyalty to the prophetic dreams that were eventually realized. His essence was Emuna. He is uniquely titled Yosef HaTzadik and Habakuk is credited with giving the singular summary statement of the Torah, "A Tzadik lives with his Emunah!"

Yosef's essence is best characterized at this moment. It happened as he had spoken, again- just as he had told his brothers before, and without a doubt, now too it was happening again. The Jewish People, after being planted in the soil of Egypt, were exiting as a new nation. So too, his awesome Emunah that we will even after being buried arise **essentially new again**. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).