

A WISE PERSON TAKES BONES

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week we read the parsha of B'shalach. "And it was, b'shalach Paroah [when Paroah sent] the nation... And Bnei Yisroel [Children of Israel] came up out of Mitzrayim [Egypt] 'chamushim.' [13:17-18]"

The classic explanation of the word 'chamushim,' brought by Rashi and others, is that the Bnei Yisroel were armed. The Even Ezra, however, offers an alternative explanation. 'Chamushim,' he explains, means that Bnei Yisroel were laden with wealth. As we learned in last week's parsha, Bnei Yisroel, with Hashem's and Moshe's urging, had taken vessels of gold and silver from the Egyptians. They had their hands filled with the booty they had recouped from Mitzrayim.

Moshe, on the other hand (sorry), had his hands filled with a different type of treasure. "Va'yikach Moshe [And Moshe took] the bones of Yosef with him, being that Yosef had Bnei Yisroel swear (that they would in turn exact an oath from their descendants) to bring his bones out of Mitzrayim with them. [13:19]" (The Chizkuni writes that this was a very understandable request for Yosef to have made. They had stolen him from Shechem and they were therefore obligated to return him to there. Yosef, of course, was ultimately buried in Shechem.)

The Talmud [Sotah 13A] points out the tremendous love that Moshe had for mitzvos [commandments]. While the rest of Bnei Yisroel were busy with gold and silver, Moshe was busy with the bones of Yosef. The posuk [verse] in Mishlei [Proverbs] which states: "A wise hearted person yikach [takes] mitzvos," is referring to Moshe.

Yosef, the greatest amongst the sons of Yaakov, personally dealt with the burial of his father. For that he merited that Moshe himself, the greatest of Bnei Yisroel, personally dealt with his remains being taken out of Mitzrayim. Moshe, in turn, merited that his burial was tended to by no other than Hashem, Himself.

Let's get an understanding of the difficulty involved in taking Yosef's bones out of Mitzrayim in order to understand the incredible reward Moshe received.

The Medrash relates that while the rest of Bnei Yisroel were busying themselves with the gold and silver; Moshe was searching for three days and three nights to find the casket of Yosef. Serach, the daughter of Asher, saw Moshe and asked why he looked so exhausted. He explained that he hadn't been able to find Yosef's casket and they would not be able to leave Mitzrayim without fulfilling the oath made to him. "Come with me and I'll show you where it is," she said to Moshe. She brought him to the Nile, told him that the Egyptians had made a casket weighing 500 talents and showed him

where they had thrown it. The sorcerers had advised Paroah that by doing so it would be impossible to remove the casket-thus ensuring that Bnei Yisroel would never leave Egypt.

Moshe immediately called out: "Yosef, Yosef, you swore that Hashem would redeem your children-do not delay that redemption!"

The casket miraculously floated to the surface and Moshe lifted it onto his shoulder. As Bnei Yisroel were carrying the gold and silver out of Mitzrayim, Moshe was carrying the bones of Yosef.

At that time Hashem declared: "Moshe, the great chesed [kindness] that you have shown will be compensated-I will personally tend to your burial."

The Yalkut Lekach Tov raises an interesting question. We seem to be criticizing Bnei Yisroel by saying that Moshe was involving himself in a mitzvah while they were not. However, as we stated above, they were also commanded to take silver and gold from Mitzrayim. This was a fulfillment of the promise Hashem made to Avrohom that his children would be enslaved in a land and then would leave with much wealth. If so, why is Moshe's mitzvah viewed so glowingly while Bnei Yisroel's is viewed so disparagingly?

There are mitzvos and there are mitzvos. As we make our way through the marketplace of opportunities that we call life, we are confronted with a dazzling array of different types of mitzvos. Some seem glamorous others a bit drab. Some are alive with excitement others on the more sedate side. Some offer us 'cash-back-benefits' others will just put us further in the hole.

We have limited time, limited resources and limited focus. The root of the word mitzvah is tzaveh-command. It is the vehicle through which we show our allegiance to Hashem. Our recognition that His will must transcend our will as only He has the vision to see what is ultimately in our best interest. Whenever we are dealing with a situation of limited means we must prioritize and see what will most effectively accomplish our objective.

Gathering gold was a mitzvah and gathering Yosef's bones was a mitzvah. However, Moshe was able to transcend even considering the gains he'd have in this world. He chose to deal with Yosef's bones.

This is what was meant by "va'yikach Moshe [and Moshe took]." Yikach means an acquisition. On one hand, choosing how to spend limited resources. On the other hand, that which is acquired affects the person and changes, to a degree, who that person is. Moshe decided on the bones of Yosef. That was the acquisition he chose for himself. "A wise hearted person yikach [takes] mitzvos." He carefully chooses those mitzvos which would best show his allegiance to Hashem.

With this, the posuk [verse] gains an added dimension. "Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him." As the Kli Yakar explains, the acquisition of gold chosen by Bnei Yisroel was temporary-one which would not change their essence and therefore would not be taken with them. Moshe's choice, to fulfill that last wish by performing that last chesed [kindness] for Yosef, was an acquisition that

Moshe would take "with him." An acquisition for eternity.

"A wise hearted person yikach {takes} mitzvos."

Good Shabbos,
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