YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA**

**PARASHAT BESHALACH**

**Sicha of HarAV mosheh lichtenstein**

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In loving memory of

Yitzchak and Sheva Shayndel Schwartz *z"l*

whose *yahrzeit* is 13 Shevat

by Avi and Sarah Schwartz

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**"And Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him"**

Summarized by Mordechai Sambol

Translated by David Strauss

**Introduction: Yosef's Relevance**

The first verses of *Parashat* *Beshalach* deal with essential issues for the Israelites' journey in the wilderness – where they will advance, how they will advance, a description of their circumstances, and the pillars of fire and cloud that will guide them along the way. These verses also mention that Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him. On the face of it, this is a marginal detail, whose inclusion alongside issues important to the exodus calls for explanation. It seems that this detail is simply the fulfillment of the promise made by the sons of Yaakov to their brother Yosef, so why does the Torah apparently see it as such an essential matter?

Another question that arises is why it was specifically Moshe who took Yosef's bones. This is not a very central question, and in fact, it is not a particularly difficult one either. It stands to reason that when the Israelites stood on the other side of the Sea of Suf, and saw the Egyptians and their possessions washing up on the shore, it made a great deal of sense to begin gathering the treasures rising up from the sea. After everything they went through in Egypt, it is only to be expected that the Israelites would find it necessary to release some of their tension – and it is not surprising that only Moshe thought of other responsibilities, including taking the bones of Yosef.

*Chazal* (*Sota* 13a) tell us that after the giving of the Torah and the construction of the *aron ha-brit* (ark of the covenant)*,* Moshe placed Yosef's coffin (also *aron*) next to it: “All those years that the people of Israel were in the wilderness, these two *aronot*, one of the dead and one of the *Shekhina*, weremoving forward with each other.” Thus, not only did Moshe concern himself with Yosef's bones, and precisely at the time of the exodus from Egypt, but there is comparison of sorts made between Yosef's coffin and the *aron ha-brit*. Once again, our question returns in full force: What was so important about Yosef's bones?

**Yosef: The Jew Who Did Not Assimilate**

When the Israelites leave Egypt, what interest do they have in going specifically to the land of Canaan? Presumably, what is most important to them is the very departure from Egypt; any place they can reach, and in which they can establish residence, is a good place. Why then should they not go somewhere else, perhaps more fertile and abundant, as was indeed suggested thousands of years later in the Uganda proposal?

A major part of the answer is connected to Yosef. When someone is in exile and is suffering, it is clear why he wants to get out of that situation. But when someone is in exile and is prospering, yet still wants to leave, that makes a significant statement.

It was so important to Yosef to return to the land of Canaan that he made his brothers swear they would return his bones to the land, and this left a deep impression on the Israelites. Here it must be emphasized that Yosef is not just anybody; he is the person whom the Egyptians made the greatest effort to assimilate. They gave him a new name, provided him with a wife, and when he died, they buried him and embalmed him according to the Egyptian custom. The importance of name and family to a person's identity is clear, and the way a person is buried also says something very fundamental about the person, his life, and his individuality. Thus, *Chazal* (*Sota* 13a) relate that Yosef was buried in the Nile or in the pyramids – the two most extreme expressions of *Egyptian* burial, with all its import.

Nevertheless, Yosef did not lose his identity as a member of the people of Israel. He was culturally influenced, but did not change his identity. Yosef identifies himself as a Hebrew at every stage, to the great dismay of the Egyptians. This may be why Yosef merited being buried in the land of Israel, while Moshe did not – because Yosef remained true to his identity, while Moshe, when he arrived in Midyan, presented himself as an Egyptian (*Devarim Rabba* 2, 8, based on *Shemot* 2:19).

**Torah, Service, and the Legacy of Yosef**

Yosef's consequence is not limited to his loyalty to his Hebrew identity, however; he expresses other important messages as well. Similarly, there was more than one goal in the Israelites’ journey from Egypt into the wilderness. The first goal was to receive the Torah, specifically in the wilderness, which is perceived as being beyond the limits of location and time. It is an isolated and primal place, a place where a person goes to disconnect. That is why this is the ideal place for giving the Torah – for giving that which is beyond place and time. The second goal of going out into the wilderness was, of course, to reach the land of Canaan.

These two goals are essentially the two things that were most important to Yosef. First, he was a doer, someone whose entire life was filled with action – as *Chazal* explained the placement of Yosef's coffin next to the *aron ha-brit*: "This one [Yosef] observed that which is written in the other one [the Torah]" (*Sota* 13b). That is to say, Yosef engaged not only in activity in general, but also in the performance of *mitzvot,* and for this reason his *aron* was set next to the *aron* of God. Second, as already noted, Yosef attached great important to remaining connected to the Land of Israel and reaching it.

We learn from Yosef, for the future as well, the importance of Torah and action. Thus, one of the fundamental questions we must ask ourselves is what kind of society we wish to build. There are communities that focus only on the *aron* of God – the Torah – and neglect the *aron* containing the bones of Yosef – the action. There are also communities that only attend to the *aron* containing the bones of Yosef – the action – and neglect the *aron* of God – the Torah. But the ideal for which we advocate is "these two *aronot* moving forward with each other."

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How can we accomplish this? Through people like Yehoshua Bin Nun. It may be argued that Yehoshua was the "first *hesdernik*." On the one hand, Moshe gives him the Torah and commands him to follow it – "Moshe received the Torah at Sinai and passed it down to Yehoshua, and Yehoshua to the elders" (*Avot* 1:1); on the other hand, Moshe also commands him to lead the army – "And Moshe said to Yehoshua: Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek" (*Shemot* 17:9). Yehoshua fulfills both ideals, of the Torah and of action.

**Yosef's Sons**

The double message represented by Yosef, as well as by his descendant Yehoshua Bin Nun after him, emerges clearly already at the time of the blessing Yaakov bestows upon Efrayim and Menashe: "And he blessed them that day, saying: By you shall Israel bless, saying: God make you as Efrayim and as Menashe" (*Bereishit* 48:20). Yaakov insists on placing Efrayim before his older brother Menashe, and it is clear that his action reflects a principled decision between the ideals represented by the two.

Why did Yaakov prefer Efrayim? Menashe was first of all a man of action. He was very active in the house of Yosef, and *Chazal* identified him with "the translator" (*Bereishit* 42:23) who stood between Yosef and the brothers before Yosef revealed his identity (*Bereishit Rabba* *Miketz* 91, 8). In contrast, Efrayim was first of all a man of Torah study, and only secondly a man of action. If we look at the descendants of the sons of Yosef – Yehoshua is a descendant of Efrayim, "a young man, who departed not out of the Tent" (*Shemot* 33:11). In contrast, Gidon, a descendant of Menashe, was a man of action, more impulsive, who was counted among the three "light ones of the world," i.e., three of the most questionable characters (*Rosh Ha-shana* 25b).

Even though Yaakov gives precedence to Efrayim, he makes it clear that Menashe as well will merit a suitable blessing: "He [Menashe] shall also become a people, and he also shall be great; but his younger brother shall be greater than he" (*Bereishit* 48:19). That is to say, Menashe shall also be great, and will become thousands, but Efrayim, who is a man of Torah first and only afterwards a man of action, shall become ten thousands, as Moshe blesses them: "And they are the ten thousands of Efrayim, and they are the thousands of Menashe" (*Devarim* 33:17).

Yehoshua, therefore, as a descendant of Efrayim, is first of all a man of Torah study. As mentioned, he was first of all "Yehoshua Bin Nun, a young man, who departed not out of the Tent" (*Shemot* 33:11), and only afterwards a man of action – "And Moshe said to Yehoshua: Choose us out men" (*Shemot* 17:9). But even this is not enough, for during the war with Amalek, it was necessary to combine the sword of Yehoshua and the staff of Moshe.

Thus, in order to fulfill "these two *aronot* moving forward with each other," we must accept the Torah and take responsibility for it, and this, while maintaining the correct order: to be people of Torah first, and only then, following on its heels, also people of action.

[This *sicha* was delivered by Harav Mosheh Lichtenstein on Shabbat *Parashat Beshalach* 5782.]