

IMAGES OF JOSEPH'S BONES

עצמות יוסף

IN TORAH AND MIDRASH

by

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IMAGES OF JOSEPH'S BONES - עֲצָמוֹת יוֹסֵף - IN TORAH AND MIDRASH

וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל־אֶחָיו אֲנֹכִי מֵת וְאֱלֹהִים פָּקֹד יִפְקֹד אֶתְכֶם וְהָעֵלָה אֶתְכֶם מִן־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וְלַיָּעֲקֹב: וַיִּשְׁבַּע יוֹסֵף אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר פָּקֹד יִפְקֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶתְכֶם וְהָעֵלָתֶם אֶת־עַצְמוֹתַי מִזֶּה: וַיָּמָת יוֹסֵף בֶּן־מָאָה וָעֶשְׂרִי שָׁנִים וַיַּחְנֹטוּ אֹתוֹ וַיִּשֶׂם בְּאֵרוֹן בְּמִצְרַיִם (בראשית פרק נ:כד-כו)

Joseph said to his brothers: I am dying, but God will take account, yes account of you, and will bring you up from this land to the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Joseph had the Children of Israel swear, saying: When God takes account yes, account of you, bring my bones up from here. And Joseph died, being a hundred and ten years old. They embalmed him, and they put him in a coffin in Egypt. (Gen. 50:24 -26)

INTRODUCTION - THE MIDRASHIC CONTEXT

After an enigmatic journey of trauma, tribulation and adventure, the life of *Yosef ben Yaakov v'Rachel* - Joseph the dreamer, trusted advisor to the Egyptian Pharaoh - comes to an end. After announcing the immanence of his death, Joseph requests of his brothers: at some future time when God brings you forth from Egypt, “*bring my bones up from here*” to Canaan, land of my birthplace. With Joseph’s body embalmed and encased in an Egyptian coffin, the book of Genesis reaches its finale.

However the image of **Joseph’s bones/עֲצָמוֹת יוֹסֵף** lives on in Biblical tradition, and as I explore in the pages which follow, proliferates in the Midrashic imagination. We next hear of **Joseph’s bones/עֲצָמוֹת יוֹסֵף** in the Book of Exodus. After suffering the hardships of slavery under “*the king who knew not Joseph*” (Ex. 1:8) the Israelites are eventually redeemed, freed from the grasp of Egyptian oppression. On flight from Pharaoh's army, they meander through the wilderness approaching the Red Sea, protected by a pillar of cloud by day, a pillar of fire by night. Amidst the chaos of moving a wild and wooly slave nation, their charismatic leader Moses: “*had taken Joseph’s bones/עֲצָמוֹת יוֹסֵף with him; for he had*

made the Children of Israel swear, yes swear, saying, God will take account, yes, account of you - so bring my bones up from here with you.” (Ex. 13:19).

וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת־עֲצָמוֹת יוֹסֵף עִמּוֹ כִּי הִשְׁבִּיעַ הַשִּׁבְיעַ אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר פֶּקֶד יִפְקֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶתְכֶם וְהֵעֲלִיתֶם אֶת־עֲצָמֹתַי מִזֶּה אִתְּכֶם (שמות פרק יג:יט)



Carrying of Joseph's Bones, from *The Ten Commandments*, by Cecil B. DeMille.

Throughout forty years of desert wandering, Torah says nothing more about Joseph's bones/עֲצָמוֹת יוֹסֵף. However, as the Israelites approach to the Jordan River, Moses dies and is replaced by Joshua. As leader Joshua oversees the Israelites crossing the Jordan, military conquest of Canaan, and allocation of land to the tribes. Eventually Joshua dies and "*the elders of who outlived Joshua*" (Josh. 24:31) - הַזִּקְנִים אֲשֶׁר הָאֵרִיכוּ יָמִים אַחֲרֵי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ.

- (יהושע פרק כד:לב) - attend to the burial of Joseph's bones/עֲצָמוֹת יוֹסֵף in Shechem, modern day Nablus:

And the bones of Joseph, which the Children of Israel brought out of Egypt, they buried in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for a hundred pieces of silver; and it became the inheritance of the sons of Joseph. (Josh. 24:32)

וְאֶת־עַצְמוֹת יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר־הָעֵלּוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל | מִמִּצְרַיִם קָבְרוּ בְּשָׂכֶם בְּחֶלֶקֶת הַשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר קָנָה
יַעֲקֹב מֵאֵת בְּנֵי־חָמוֹר אָבִי־שָׁכֶם בְּמֵאָה קִשְׁיָטָה וַיְהִי לְבְנֵי־יוֹסֵף לְנַחֲלָה:
(יהושע פרק כד:לב)



Photograph of Joseph's Tomb in Shechem, pre-state Palestine.

There are thus only three passages in *Tanakh* referring to Joseph's bones/עַצְמוֹת יוֹסֵף:

- 1) at the time of his death;
- 2) upon departure from Egypt; and
- 3) at the time of burial in Shechem.

This schema left a great deal of room for Midrashic creativity. Among the questions which underlie Midrashic inquiry regarding Joseph's bones/עַצְמוֹת יוֹסֵף are the following:

What happened to Joseph's bones/עַצְמוֹת יוֹסֵף from the time of his death until the departure of the Israelites from Egypt? Where was his coffin lying during this time? How did Moses know where to find Joseph's bones/עַצְמוֹת יוֹסֵף? What was it like forty years carrying Joseph's bones/עַצְמוֹת יוֹסֵף through the Sinai desert? Why was Shechem chosen as a burial site?

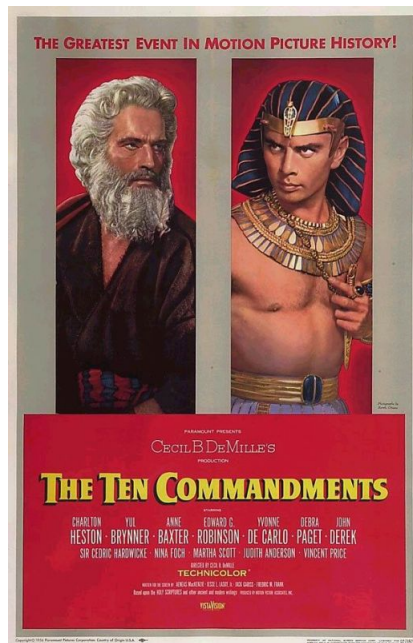
This paper shall present a collage of texts demonstrating various ways Midrash attempts to answer these questions regarding Joseph's bones/עַצְמוֹת יוֹסֵף. Then I shall present a

mythic understanding of Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף and ways I use the image in my teaching work as a Jewish death awareness educator.

Finally, as an appendix to this paper, I have included a wide assortment of Midrashic texts on Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף.

PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL CONTEXT

My interest in this image is two-fold, personal and professional. In 1956 Cecil B. DeMille's epic movie, *The Ten Commandments* was released. It was one of the earliest movies I recall seeing in a theater, quite impressionable for a dreamy child of five. Over the years I have frequently shown this movie to my children and to students in my Religion classes.



Original billboard for Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments*

In particular, the scene of crossing the Red Sea - the earliest use of special effects in modern cinema - has become standard fare at our Passover Seders, a creative intermezzo between *Magid* and *Shulkhan Arukh*, and always a treat for both children and adults present.

I have watched the Red Sea scene quite often, but only recently noticed an image of Joseph's bones/עַצְמוֹת יוֹסֵף being carried among masses of Israelites passing through the parted waters of the Red Sea. I have been interested in tracing the sources upon which Cecil B. DeMille had based this vignette, as well as other Midrashic improvisations on this image.

Professionally, I have found this image particularly poignant in my teaching as a death awareness educator. The image of Joseph's bones/עַצְמוֹת יוֹסֵף symbolizes a deeply ingrained Jewish tradition to remember and respect the dead, in spite of the apparent aversion to do so in our Western culture. I speak of this below further.

WHY WAS JOSEPH BURIED IN EGYPT?

As death approached, Jacob called his sons together and requested of them: "...bury me by my fathers at the cave that is in the field... of Makhpela... in the land of Canaan... There they buried Avraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Yitzhak and Rivkah, his wife, there I buried Leah." (Gen. 49:29-31). After time-designated Egyptian embalming and mourning rituals (Gen. 50:2-3), Joseph, accompanied by his brothers and kin, and an Egyptian entourage honored Jacob's request, returning his body to Canaan for burial.

Why did Joseph not make a similar request of his surviving family members, but instead chose to remain in Egypt after his death? Traditional Rabbinic Midrash says little in answer to this question. However one explanation can be found in the Book of Jubilees, a Pseudepigraphical work from 2nd century BCE. Like all Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, this Hellenis-

tic-Jewish text, reflects the mythic mind of late Second Temple and early Rabbinic Judaism.¹

The tale told in Jubilees is that Joseph was cognizant the Egyptians would not permit him him to be returned to Canaan for burial, as Jacob was. Why? Because political conflict between Egypt and Canaan made traveling freely between the two countries impossible:

...for Makamaron, king of Canaan, while dwelling in the land of Assyria, fought in the valley with the king of Egypt and slew him there, and pursued after the Egyptians to the gates of 'Ermon. But he was not able to enter, for another, a new king, had become king of Egypt, and he was stronger than he, and he returned to the land of Canaan, and the gates of Egypt were closed, and none went out and none came into Egypt. (Jubilees 46:5-8)

A radically different understanding of Joseph's choice to remain in Egypt appears in Zohar, what may considered a medieval mystical Midrash. According to Zohar, Joseph's coffin was submerged into the Nile, where it was accompanied by the presence of *Shekhinah*. While *Shekhinah* is said to dwell only in Israel, the purifying power of water, in the world-view of the Zohar, protected Joseph's coffin from the impurity of Egypt. Cleaving to Joseph's coffin, *Shekhinah* could remain with the Israelites even in their exile, thereby mitigating the deleterious effects of Egyptian slavery:² *"Joseph's coffin was cast into water. The blessed Holy One said, 'If Joseph departs from here, the exile will remain unfulfilled. Rather let his burial be in a place that cannot be defiled, and Israel will endure the exile.'"* (Zohar I, 222b)

אוף הכא יוסף במיא אתרמי ארונא דיליה. אמר קב"ה. אי יוסף יסתלק מהכא גלותא לא יתקיים. אלא תהא קבורתיה באתר דלא יסתאב. ויסבלון בני ישראל גלותא (הזהר עמוד רכב ע"ב)

1. James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1983).

2. Daniel Matt, trans. and commentary, *The Zohar Pritzker Edition*, Vol. III (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), commentary on 1:222b, p. 336.

WHERE IN EGYPT WAS JOSEPH BURIED?

Early in the Book of Genesis, God says to Abram:

You must know, yes, know that your seed will be sojourners in a land not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge; and afterward shall they come out with great wealth. And you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come here again; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.
(Gen.15:13-16)

וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַבְרָם יְדַע תְּדַע כִּי־גֵר אֶהְיֶה זְרָעְךָ בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא לָהֶם וְעִבְדוּם וְעָנוּ אֹתָם אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה: וְגַם אֶת־הַגּוֹי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲבֹדוּ דָן אֲנִכִּי וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן יֵצְאוּ בְּרֶכֶשׁ גָּדוֹל: וְאַתָּה תָּבוֹא אֶל־אֲבֹתֶיךָ בְּשָׁלוֹם תִּקָּבֵר בְּשֵׂיבָה טוֹבָה: (בראשית פרק טו:יג)

Based upon this passage, (and other genealogical computations of Genesis), Midrashic traditions holds that the Hebrews were in Egypt 400 years. Thus, almost four centuries past between the time of Joseph's death, and the Exodus. Given this Biblical understanding of history, in its characteristic style of inquiry Midrash attempted to answer two questions: first, where were **Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף** during these long centuries in Egypt? And, secondly how was Moses able to find the location coffin where Joseph had been placed?

Regarding the whereabouts of **Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף**, Midrash provides a number of different answers. The earliest can be found in *The Testament of Simeon*, another 2nd century BCE Hellenistic-Jewish text, originally written in either Hebrew or Aramaic. This Pseudepigraphic text, part of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, consists of a series of deathbed reflections of the twelve sons of Jacob.³

According to *The Testament of Simeon* wizards and soothsayers of Egypt had predicted that when the Israelites would depart Egypt, darkness, gloom and a great plague would

3. Charlesworth, pp. 775ff.

pervade the land. To avoid plague and castigation, Joseph's coffin was hidden away "*in the treasure-houses of the palace*" (8:12).

Elsewhere Midrash claims Joseph's coffin was hidden in the royal tombs:

When Moses entered the royal tombs, he smelled Joseph's coffin, which was as fragrant as the Ark of the Covenant. "Surely" he thought, "these are the bones of Joseph." (Perek R' Yishayhu, Beit HaMidrash 6:112)

כיון שנכנס משה לפלטירין של מלכים היה מריח ארונו של יוסף כריח ארון הברית ואמר בודאי אילו עצמות של יוסף (פרק ר' יאשיהו, בית המדרש ו'112)

Similarly, in *Exodus Rabbah*, Joseph's body is said to be in an Egyptian *sarcophagus*, within a royal tomb, protected by barking dogs:

Others say that he was buried, like a king, in a royal mausoleum, and the Egyptians had constructed dogs made of gold which, by means of magic, barked whenever a man approached the sarcophagus. The sound of their barking filled the whole land of Egypt, a journey of forty days. (Exodus R. 20:19).

וי"א בתוך הפלטירין היה קבור כדרך שהמלכים קבורים ועשו מצרים כלבים של זהב בכשפים שאם יבא אדם לשם יהיו נובחים וקולן הולך בכל ארץ מצרים מהלך מ'יום (שמות רבה כ:יט)

However, the most common and consistent place Midrash locates Joseph's tomb is at the bottom of the Nile: There are a number of Midrashic traditions around this motif:

"The Egyptians made a metal coffin for him which they fixed in the river Nile so that its waters should be blessed" (Sotah 13a);

ארון של מתכת עשו לו מצרים וקבעוהו בנילוס הנהר, כדי שיתברכו מימיו (סוטה דף יג ע"א).

Similarly, in *Mekhilta*: *"The Egyptians put him in a small metal coffin which they sunk in the Nile"* (Mekhilta Vayehi Beshalach, 2)⁴;

עשו לו מצרים ארון של מתכת ושקעוהו בתוך נילוס (מכילתא פרשה בשלח ב).

4. See also Exodus R. 20:19; *Midrash HaGadol*, end of *Bereishit*;

In *Deuteronomy Rabbah*, Joseph's coffin is hidden by the Egyptians at the bottom of a river [assumed but not specifically indicated to be the Nile] so the Hebrews will not find it, and thus be unable to leave Egypt.

She took him to him the river [understood here as the Nile] 'In this place have the magicians and astrologers made for him a coffin of five hundred talents in weight and cast it into the river, and thus have they spoken to Pharaoh: " If it is your wish that this people should never leave this place, then as long as they will not find the bones of Joseph, so long will they be unable to leave."
(Deut. R. 11:7)

הוליכה אותו לנחל אמרה לו במקום הזה עשו ארון של ת"ק ככרים והשליכוהו בתוך הנחל החרטומים והאשפים וכן אמרו לפרעה רצונך שלא תצא אומה זו מכאן לעולם העצמות של יוסף אם לא ימצאו.. אותן עד עולם אינם יכולים לצאת (דברים רבה יא"ז)

And finally, according to Zohar II, 46a, Joseph's brothers decided to sink his coffin in the Nile so that his body would not be worshipped by the Egyptians as a God.

ואית דאמריב גין דלא יעבדון ליה ע"ז שוו בנילוס (הזהר ותוספות עמוד מו ע"א).

As Midrashic tradition has it, one of Joseph's nieces, Serah the daughter of Joseph's older brother Asher, knew where her Uncle Joseph's coffin was buried. As we shall see below, Serah bat Asher plays an essential role in locating Joseph's burial site.

HOW DOES MOSES FIND JOSEPH'S BONES/עצמות יוסף?

Despite Egyptian machinations to hide the location of Joseph's coffin from the Israelites, ultimately their subterfuge is unsuccessful. Like a mythic character on the Hero's Quest, needing to overcome unending trials and tribulations⁵, Moses succeeds in tracking down Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף and carrying them out of Egypt.

Midrashic tradition asserts that because of the loyalty Moses demonstrated in searching for Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף at the time of the Exodus, he alone merited the

5. See Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with A Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).

unprecedented honor of being buried by G!d upon his own death (Deut. 34:6). In the days prior to the departure from Egypt, while the Israelites were greedily gathering booty of silver and gold, Moses would have none of that, and instead embarked upon a passionate search for Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף:

And why did Moses merit that God should busy Himself with his burial? Because when God went down to Egypt and the time for the redemption of Israel had come, all Israel were occupied with gathering silver and gold, but Moses was going round the city, and for three days and three nights was labouring to find Joseph's coffin, for the Israelites could not leave Egypt without Joseph.
(Deut. R. 11:7)⁶

ולמה זכה משה שהקב"ה נתעסק עמו אלא בשעה שירד למצרים והגיע גאולתן של ישראל כל ישראל היו עסוקים בכסף וזהב ומשה היה מסבב את העיר ויגע שלשה ימים ושלשה לילות למצוא ארונו של יוסף שלא היו יכולים לצאת ממצרים חוץ מיוסף למה שכך נשבע להן בשבועה לפני מותו (דברים רבה יא"ז)

Adding to this further, *Deuteronomy Rabbah* reports:

And while Israel carried the silver and gold which they had taken away from Egypt, Moses was carrying Joseph's coffin. God said to him: 'Moses, you say that you have done a small thing; by your life, this act of kindness is a great thing; since as you ignored silver and gold, I too will do unto you this kindness in that I will busy Myself with your burial.' (Deut. R. 11:7)

אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא משה אתה אומר שדבר קטן עשית חייך החסד הזה שעשית גדול הוא ולא השגחת לכסף ולזהב אף אני אעשה עמך החסד הזה ואתעסק עמך (דברים רבה יא"ז)

Two questions still remain: exactly how did Moses discover the site of Joseph's burial?

And how did he retrieve Joseph's coffin so the Israelites could finally depart Egypt?

According to Midrash, Serah bat Asher, Jacob's grand-daughter, and the longest-living survivor from Joseph's generation, knew where her Uncle Joseph's coffin had been buried.

Various texts - the *Mekhilta* of Rabbi Yishmael (*Vayehi Beshalach*, 2), the *Tosefta* (Tos. Sota

6. See also Ex. R. 20:19; *Mekhilta*, *Vayehi Beshalach*, 2.

4:3), and the Babylonian Talmud (Sota 13a) - as well as one non-Rabbinic source, *Tibat Markeh*, a collection of Samaritan writings from 4th century C.E.⁷ present versions of Moses' encounter with this wise old woman Serah bat Asher. What these different sources all have in common is that it is Serah bat Asher who is the one to help Moses find the exact location where **Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף** are submerged beneath the waters of the Nile.

The *Tibat Markeh* text, according to the Biblical scholar Leila Bronner⁸ describes how the Israelites are unable to move on their Exodus journey, their sojourn from Raamses to Sukkot blocked by a pillar of fire. Moses and the elders confer with various tribal leaders to determine what wrong might have been committed. When visiting the area of the tribe of Asher, they are greeted by Serah ben Asher. A woman of clairvoyant vision, she informs them no evil had been committed - the problem is simply that **Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף** had been forgotten:

Serah the daughter of Asher went hurrying out to them. "There is nothing evil in your midst. Behold, I will reveal to you what this secret is." At once they surrounded her and brought her to the great prophet Moses and she stood before him . . . [saying] "Hear from me this thing that you seek: Praise to those who remembered my bed [Joseph], though you have forgotten him. For had not the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire stood still, you would have departed and he would have been left in Egypt. I remember the day that he died and he caused the whole people to swear that they would bring his bones up from here with them." The great prophet Moses said to her, "Worthy are you Serah, wisest of women. From this day on will your greatness be told". . . . Serah went with all the tribe of Ephraim around her, and Moses and Aaron went after them, until she came to the place where he was hidden (Tibat Markeh).⁹

7. For a fuller exploration of themes of this Midrash, see Leila Bronner, "Serah and the Exodus: A Midrashic Miracle" <<http://www.bibleandjewishstudies.com/articles/serah.htm>>. For a contemporary Midrash on Serah bat Asher see Jill Hammer, *Sisters at Sinai - New Tales of Biblical Women* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2001) pp. 114-116.

8. Bronner.

9. *Ibid.*

In *Mekhilta of Rabbi Yishmael*, the most complete version of this Midrash, Moses uses a table(t) of gold inscribed with the Tetragrammaton, the four-lettered name of God. Acting upon the wise advice given to him by Serah bat Asher, and utilizing his own command of magical techniques, Moses successfully brings Joseph's bones/עַצְמוֹת יוֹסֵף to the surface.

In the words of the *Mekhilta of Rabbi Yishmael*:

But how did Moses know where Joseph was buried? It is told that Serah, the daughter of Asher survived from that generation and she showed Moses the grave of Joseph. She said to him: The Egyptians put him in a small metal coffin which they sunk in the Nile. So Moses went and stood by the Nile. He took a table[t] of gold on which he engraved the Tetragrammaton, and throwing it into the Nile, he cried out and said: "Joseph son of Jacob! The oath to redeem his children, which God swore to our father Abraham, has reached its fulfillment. If you come up, well and good. But if not, we shall be guiltless of your oath." Immediately Joseph's coffin came up to the surface, and Moses took it. (Mekhilta, Vayehi Beshalach, 2)

מהיכן היה יודע היכן היה קבור יוסף אמרו סרה בת אשר נשתיירה מאותו הדור והיא הראתה למשה קבר יוסף אמרה לו במקום הזה שמוהו עשו לו מצרים ארון של מתכת ושקעוהו בתוך נילוס בא ועמד על נילוס נטל צרור וזרק לתוכו וזעק ואמר יוסף יוסף הגיעה השבועה שנשבע הקב"ה לאברהם אבינו שהוא גאל את בניו תן כבוד ליי' אלהי ישראל ואל תעכב את גאולתך כי בגללך אנו מעוכבים ואם לאו נקיים אנחנו משבועתך מיד צף ארונו של יוסף ונטלו משה (מכילתא פרשה בשלח ב)

One additional Midrash adds an interesting dimension to Moses' methodology for raising up Joseph's coffin from the bottom of the Nile. According to *Midrash HaGadol*:

Moses took Joseph's goblet and cut four pieces out of it. On one he drew a lion, on another an ox, on another an eagle, and on another a man. [Then] he stood at the Nile, threw [in] the image of the lion, and said: "Joseph, the time has come for Israel to be redeemed"; but [the coffin] did not rise. He threw in the drawing of the ox, and then of the eagle, but it did not rise. [Finally] he threw in the drawing of the man and said, "Joseph, the time has come." Joseph's coffin immediately floated to the top of the water, and Moses took it. (Midrash HaGadol, end of Bereishit)

What is fascinating here is that there is a very clear mythic resonance between the Joseph story, and the Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris. Osiris is an Egyptian deity, connected

with the Nile. According to the myth, he was a King of Egypt, who ruled with his wife and beloved, Isis, as Queen. Osiris was killed by his jealous brother Set, and thrown into the river in a coffin. Bereft of her husband, Isis went off in search of Osiris.

In one legend, Anubis, the jackal-headed God helped Isis revive Osiris. In another legend, when Osiris died his body was dismembered; but his wife Isis was able to use her magical powers to gather up the fourteen parts of his body from the waters of the Nile, thus resurrecting Osiris. In Egyptian mythology, Osiris is associated with immortality, afterlife and especially resurrection.¹⁰

According to Gerard Mussies:

*...it does appear that the several versions of the finding of Joseph's bones agree in a number of respects with the Osiris myth as told by Plutarch (A.D. 46-120) in his treatise De Iside at Osiride... Osiris and Joseph are both put in coffins, their coffins are thrown into the Nile, are searched for and found, their scattered limbs bones or bones are reassembled, and moreover ... both are taken to the water, whether Sea or Nile.*¹¹

Exploring the cross-cultural parallels between the Joseph story and Egyptian myth is beyond the scope of this paper, however, even to recognize that there are resemblances between the two stories reveals an even more profound archetypal depth to the Joseph story. What we are dealing with in the tale of **Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף** beneath the Nile is an ancient mythic story - in Jung's terms, an expression of the collective unconscious.¹² In

10. Neil Philip, *The Illustrated Book of Myths - Tales and Legends of the World* (New York: DK Publishing, 1995) pp. 80-81.

11. Gerard Mussies, "The Interpretation Judaica of Sarapis", in *Studies in Hellenistic Religions*, edited by Maarten Hozef Vermaseren (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979) p. 209.

12. See C. G. Jung, (Ed.), *Man and His Symbols* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1970).

Dr. Jean Houston's understanding, a manifestation of the mythic level of the psyche,¹³ that speaks to the unfolding of soul and consciousness in every period of human history.

Our task below will be to make sense of the mythological symbolism encoded in the tales of Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף, and discover how that story speaks to us human folk in this age of post-millennial stress and anxiety. But first, we return back to the Israelites journeying from Egypt, through the desert of Sinai and their eventual arrival in the Land of Canaan.

WHERE WERE JOSEPH'S BONES/עצמות יוסף ON THE MARCH THROUGH SINAI?

Once the Israelites had crossed the Red Sea, and set out through the Wilderness of Sinai, Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף remained with them throughout their travels. Thus we find in Exodus Rabbah 20:19 the statement that: "*During the entire forty years' wanderings in the wilderness, the bones of Joseph travelled with them.*"

והיו עצמותיו של יוסף מחזרין עמהם במדבר מ' שנה (שמות רבה כ:יט)

With regard to the questions of *where* Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף were kept and *how* they were transported during the long trek through the Sinai desert, one unique text indicates that:

*Moses took Joseph's bones and wrapped them in a sheep's skin, upon which "the Name of God" was written; the dead bones and the skin then came to life again, and assuming the form of a sheep, it followed the camp of Israel during their wanderings through the wilderness.*¹⁴

13. Jean Houston, *The Passion of Isis and Osiris: A Gateway to Transcendent Love* (New York: Random House, 1995).

14. Louis Ginzberg, (ed.), *Legends of the Jews*, trans. Henrietta Szold and Paul Radin, Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2003), p. 430 note 442, citing *Hadar*, Exod. 13.

Elsewhere, according to a Midrashic legend in the Babylonian Talmud the Israelites carried with them two arks, one the Ark of the Covenant infused with the Presence of Shekhinah, the other an ark containing Joseph's bones/עֲצָמוֹת יוֹסֵף:

All those years that the Israelites were in the wilderness, those two chests, one of the dead and the other of the Shekhinah, proceeded side by side, and passersby used to ask: 'What is the nature of those two chests?' They received the reply: 'One is of the dead and the other of the Shekhinah'. 'But is it, then, the way of the dead to proceed with the Shekhinah?' They were told, 'This one [Joseph] fulfilled all that was written in the other'. (Sotah 13a-13b).

וכל אותן שנים שהיו ישראל במדבר, היו שני ארונות הללו אחד של מת ואחד של שכינה מהלכין זה עם זה, והיו עוברים ושבים אומרים: מה טיבן של שני ארונות הללו? אמרו: אחד של מת ואחד של שכינה וכי מה דרכו של מת להלך עם שכינה? אמרו: [סוטה דף יג ע"ב] קיים זה כל מה שכתוב בזה. ואי לא עסיק ביה משה, ישראל לא הווי מיעסקי ביה? והכתיב: (יהושע כד) ואת עצמות יוסף אשר העלו בני ישראל ממצרים קברו בשכם! ותו, אי לא איעסקו ביה ישראל, בניו לא הווי מיעסקי ביה? והכתיב: (יהושע כד) ויהיו לבני יוסף לנחלה! אמרו: הניחו לו, כבודו במרובים יותר מבמועטין, ותו אמרו: הניחו לו, כבודו בגדולים יותר מבקטנים, קברו בשכם מאי שנא בשכם? אמר ר' חמא בר' חנינא: משכם גנבוהו, ולשכם נחזיר אבידת (סוטה דף יג ע"א- ע"ב)

The sense here is that Joseph's bones/עֲצָמוֹת יוֹסֵף are not an after-thought for the Israelites on their forty years of wandering. Like the Ark of the Covenant, and the Ten Commandments contained therein, they are central to the spiritual foundation of the nation. Thus, for the wandering Israelites, in complying with Joseph's deathbed request to "bring my bones up from here with you." (Ex. 13:19) (שמות פרק יג:יט) the Sinai journey becomes simultaneously a pilgrimage to freedom as well as a national funeral procession¹⁵ honoring the dead, and carrying forth the legacy of the ancestors.

15. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Andrea L. Weiss (eds.), *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* (New York: URJ Press, 2008), p. 383.

WHERE WERE JOSEPH'S BONES/עצמות יוסף FINALLY BURIED?

The Israelites meander through the Sinai desert for forty years. As they near the River Jordan, a major leadership change takes place. At the end of Deuteronomy, G'd gives Moses a glimpse of the land of Canaan, and says to him: *"You will die on the mountain that you are climbing, and be gathered to your people... you shall see the land from afar; but you shall not go there to the land."* (Deut. 32: 49-50; 52). After a life of leadership and service, Moses dies, and is buried in the land of Moab; and he is replaced by Joshua bi' Nun.

When Joshua gets over the River Jordan, the newly inaugurated Israelite leader is fully engaged in military and political affairs. Only upon his death, at the end of the Book of Joshua, do those elders who survive him make arrangements for the final internment of Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף at Shechem.

And why is Shechem the site of burial asks the Midrash? According to Exodus Rabbah¹⁶:

...it was from Shechem that the brothers of Joseph had stolen him and had sold him: and when he was about to die, he adjured them: ' My brothers! you have stolen me from Shechem while I was alive, I pray you, return my bones to Shechem.' For this reason does it say: And the bones of Joseph, which children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, they buried in Shechem (Josh. 24, 32). (Exodus Rabbah 20:19)

משכם גנבו אחיו של יוסף אותו ומכרו אותו וכשבא ליפטר מן העולם השביע אותם אמר להם בבקשה
מכם אחי משכם גנבתם אותי חי החזירו את עצמותי לשכם לכך נאמר (יהושע כד) ואת עצמות יוסף
אשר העלו בני ישראל ממצרים קברו בשכם (שמות רבה כ:יט)

After a long and circuitous journey Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף are finally returned to the land of his birth, and to the earth of Shechem, where as a young, innocent and dreamy

16. See also Gen R. 85:3

child the destiny of his life changed forever. And, according to tradition, there they remain to this day.



During his lifetime Joseph played many roles and experienced much life as beloved son of Jacob and Rachel; boy of the rainbow-colored coat; dreamer; prisoner; political leader and advisor to Pharaoh; and peace-maker in his own family. But in his death, over the course of more than four centuries **Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף** witnessed even more, much more.

From the time of death in Egypt, and burial in the waters of the Nile, to the time of returning to the earth at Shechem, **Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף** witnessed the travails of a people in exile; miraculous redemption of the Hebrew slaves; awesome manifestation of the divine at Mount Sinai; the ever-complex forty years journey of the Israelite tribes; arrival of his people on the other side of the Jordan River; conquest and settlement of Canaan; and finally his own long overdue return back to where the journey had begun.

Through Midrash **Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף** speak loud and clear and tell the story of a life, a death and an afterlife! What a life! What a death! What an afterlife! Rest Joseph! Rest! You've done your job, and you've done it well!

REFLECTIONS UPON THE MYTHIC IMAGE OF JOSEPH'S BONES/עצמות יוסף

To understand Midrashic traditions regarding Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף from a mythic perspective, we first need to recall elements of the Joseph story in Genesis. Joseph is the dreamer - he is gifted with important, prophetic archetypal dreams; he is also skilled in interpreting dreams when imprisoned in Egypt, and later for the Pharaoh.

Using the language of Jungian psychology, we can say that Joseph is in touch with the depths of the unconscious psyche, the Self, the inner divinity. According to the Jungian analyst, Edward Edinger, the emergence of "the Pharaoh who knew not Joseph" represents a psychological condition in which consciousness of Self, has been eclipsed, forgotten.¹⁷ This creates a psychological or spiritual state of slavery, i.e. internal bondage to the demands of ego consciousness, the narrow, limiting places of Egypt, *Mitzraim* (from root of Hebrew word "tzar", צר, narrow).

Following from this: with Joseph's death, the wisdom of the deep psyche goes back into the unconscious, beneath the waters of the Nile. However, even there, the Zohar teaches, *Shekhinah* is present, albeit hidden away. The image of Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף hidden beneath the waters of the Nile represents the wisdom depths of the psyche. Surrounded and protected by the *Shekhinah*, this wisdom may be hidden but not extinguished, accessible with right awareness, right timing and efficacious methods of access to the psyche.

It is Serah bat Asher who helps Moses find Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף hidden beneath the water of the Nile. Mythically, she is the guide to the depths of the unconscious; in

17. Edward Edinger, *Psyche and Bible: Individuation Symbolism in the Old Testament* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1986) pp. 45ff.

classical Jungian terms, she represents the anima, the internal feminine principle which brings one into contact with the Self.

With the ending of the period of Egyptian slavery, of ego oppression of the Self, the wisdom of the depths, symbolized by **Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף**, is once again prepared to emerge. Through the guidance of Serah bat Asher, and the skillful means of Moses' magical practices - dropping into the Nile a gold tablet engraved with the Tetragrammaton¹⁸ or pieces from Joseph's goblet with engraved images¹⁹ - the wisdom of the depths arises, becomes conscious once again.

In leaving behind slavery, the oppression of ego-consciousness, the Israelites are re-awakened into consciousness, passing through the birth canal of the Red Sea. Throughout the trials and travails of the wanderings through Sinai, at the center of the Israelite community can be found **Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף** - transported alongside the Ark of the Covenant, the central symbol of God's manifestation. Consciousness is re-awakened: both the Divine Presence of *Shekhinah*, and **Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף** accompany the Israelites on the wilderness journey, and eventually return to the Promised Land.

JOSEPH'S BONES/עצמות יוסף: WISDOM OF SOULS IN THE WORLD BEYOND

If the retrieval of **Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף** from beneath the waters of the Nile, symbolizes an awakening of consciousness, a revival of connection with the deep psyche, the question I ask here is: what is the nature of that consciousness awakened and brought with

18. *Midrash HaGadol*, end of Bereishit

19. *Mekhilta*, Vayehi Beshalach, 2

the Israelites through Sinai and into the Land of Canaan? Why the passionate need not only to remember Joseph four centuries after his death, but also to "shlep" his dead and decomposed body through four decades of desert wandering? Didn't the Israelites have other simple priorities like caring for the physical needs of 600,000 souls? Wasn't that enough? Obviously, not.

For me, in my Rabbinic work as a death awareness educator, **Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף** represent the unbroken connection between the world of the living and the world of the dead, between this embodied life, and existence in the world beyond, what Nahmanides referred to as "the world of souls", **עולם הנשמות**.²⁰ And at this time in history, more than six decades after the Holocaust, it is this connection that we must re-awaken once again.

In secularized, scientific-based Western society, the notion of a connection between the world of the living and the world of the dead has been lost. Often Western cultural understanding is that "dead is dead"... pull the plug and life is over. Dead and gone. All too often, once dead there is little discussion of those who have died, no memorialization and certainly no sense of a world beyond, no consciousness after death.

However, in contradistinction to scientific-based Western culture, traditional Jewish values have always affirmed that death is inherently part of life, and long after the death of the physical body, a sense of connection between the living and the dead goes on.

Traditionally, Judaism prescribes remembering the dead throughout the year. In the month of Ellul, as part of preparation for the New Year, it is traditional to go to the

20. Ramban, *The Gate of Reward*, trans. and ed. Charles B. Chavel (New York: Shilo Publishing House, 1983) p. 105.

cemetery and visit the dead. Similarly, a bride or groom visit graves of deceased loved ones prior to a wedding. Throughout the year we say Yizkor, and remember the dead: on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, and juxtaposed with times of joyous celebration, the final days of the Festivals of Sukkot, Pesach and Shmini Azeret. When we say Kaddish we honor the connection between the living and dead. These are but a few of the ways in which a connection with the world of the dead is hard-wired into Jewish practice.

Even more, in spite of the influence of scientific secularization on Jewish life, Judaism has always had a sense of an afterlife, and values the ongoing connection between the world beyond and the world of the living. The notion that Judaism believes only in life and the living, and does not have a belief in afterlife is a modern misconception, a product of Enlightenment rationalism.

Yes, its true that Judaism believes in life and living! It is in this world that we perform *mitzvoth*, and through our sacred actions, this human realm is made holy, infused with G!d's Presence. Even more, through commitment to *tikkun olam*, to transforming this world, we can bring divine holiness into the world, creating a healed and redeemed social reality on the plane of human existence. However, that does not mean Judaism does not believe in a life after death. Belief in the afterlife has been part of Jewish life over the course of four millennia.

We find extensive Jewish teachings on afterlife survival of the soul throughout Jewish tradition. In my book *Jewish Views of the Afterlife* I have demonstrated the rich Jewish traditions on afterlife in Torah, Rabbinic literature, medieval philosophy, Kabbalah and Zohar. Even more, I have demonstrated how notions of afterlife are inherent in so many of

our contemporary Jewish death and mourning rituals.²¹ For our great- great-grandparents who lived in a world not unlike that described in the writings of Isaac Bashevis Singer, and in the stories of the Hasidic masters, there were never any existential questions about a life after death, and connection between the living and the souls of the deceased. Simply put, Judaism has always believed in a survival of consciousness after death.

Just as our Biblical ancestors took upon themselves the holy obligation of carrying **Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף**, from ancient Egypt through the Sinai, and into the Land of Canaan, today as the 21st century unfolds, we all have the same obligation and responsibility to remember to bring up from the depths of unconsciousness the lost and little-known Jewish teachings on the afterlife. Just as Joseph was present as a guide for the Israelites wandering through Sinai, in the wilderness of our times, in the desert of this age of post-millennial stress, the souls of loved ones dead and gone continue to guide and inspire our lives. Those beings on the other side of the transition we call death can be and are intercessors for our lives, as they have been for our ancestors for millennia.

Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף remind us of an age-old Jewish truth that between the world of the living and the world of the dead there is a window and not a wall. Remembering **Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף** as our Biblical ancestors did, we remember to open that window and carry within our hearts the connection with loved ones who have entered the world beyond, so that our lives may be filled with guidance, inspiration and blessing.

21. On this topic see Simcha Paull Raphael, "Afterlife and the Renewal of Jewish Death" in *Jewish Views of the Afterlife*, 2nd edition (Latham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009).

Like young man Joseph, we are all dreamers, seeing upon the horizon a time of greater awareness, consciousness and maybe even one day, peace on the planet, peace in Jerusalem. May the wisdom embodied in the image of **Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף**, and the wisdom of the ancestors in the world beyond inspire and guide our dreams.

Reb Simcha Raphael, Ph.D.

APPENDIX: JOSEPH'S BONES עֲצָמוֹת יוֹסֵף IN TORAH AND MIDRASH

JOSEPH'S BONES IN TANAKH

Genesis 50:24

And Joseph said to his brothers, I die; and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. 25 And Joseph took an oath from the people of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here. 26 So Joseph died, being a hundred and ten years old; and *they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.*

בראשית נ:כד

וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל-אֶחָיו אֲנֹכִי מֵת וְאֱלֹהִים פֶּקֶד יִפְקֹד אֶתְכֶם וְהֶעֱלָה אֶתְכֶם מִן-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב: כֹּה וַיִּשְׁבַּע יוֹסֵף אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר פֶּקֶד יִפְקֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶתְכֶם וְהֶעֱלָתֶם אֶת-עַצְמוֹתַי מִזֶּה בְּמִצְרַיִם: כֹּו וַיָּמָת יוֹסֵף בֶּן-מָאָה וָעֶשְׂרִי שָׁנִים וַיַּחְגֹּטוּ אֹתוֹ וַיִּשֶׂם בְּאֵרוֹן בְּמִצְרַיִם

Exodus 13:19

And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him; for he had solemnly sworn the people of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and *you shall carry up my bones from here with you.*

שמות יג:יג

וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת-עַצְמוֹת יוֹסֵף עִמּוֹ כִּי הִשְׁבִּיעַ הַשִּׁבְיעַ אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר פֶּקֶד יִפְקֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶתְכֶם וְהֶעֱלִיתֶם אֶת-עַצְמוֹתַי מִזֶּה אִתְּכֶם

Joshua 24:32

And *the bones of Joseph, which the people of Israel brought out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for a hundred pieces of silver; and it became the inheritance of the sons of Joseph.*

יהושע כד:לב

וְאֶת-עַצְמוֹת יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר-הֶעֱלוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל / מִמִּצְרַיִם קָבְרוּ בְּשָׂכֶם בְּחֶלְקֵת הַשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר קָנָה יַעֲקֹב מֵאֵת בְּנֵי-חָמוֹר אֲבֵי-שָׂכֶם בְּמָאָה קְשִׁיטָה וַיְהִי לְבְנֵי-יוֹסֵף לְנַחֲלָה



Photograph of Joseph's Tomb in Shechem, pre-state Palestine.

JOSEPH'S BONES IN PSEUDEPIGRAPHIA

Jubilees 46:5-8

And he commanded the children of Israel before he died that they should carry his bones with them when they went forth from the land of Egypt. And he made them swear regarding his bones, for he knew that the Egyptians would not again bring forth and bury him in the land of Canaan, for Makaron, king of Canaan, while dwelling in the land of Assyria, fought in the valley with the king of Egypt and slew him there, and pursued after the Egyptians to the gates of 'Ermon. But he was not able to enter, for another, a new king, had become king of Egypt, and he was stronger than he, and he returned to the land of Canaan, and the gates of Egypt were closed, and none went out and none came into Egypt. And Joseph died in the forty-sixth Jubilee, in the sixth week, in the second year, and they buried him in the land of Egypt.

Testament of Simeon 8:1-3

The bones of Joseph the Egyptians kept in the treasure-houses of the palace, since their wizards told them that at the departure of Joseph's bones there would be darkness and gloom in the whole land and a great plague on the Egyptians, so that even with a lamp no one could recognize his brother.

JOSEPH'S BONES IN MISHNAH AND TOSEFTA

M. Sotah 1:9

Joseph earned merit by burying his father and there was none among his brothers greater than he; as it is said, and *Joseph went up to bury his father*, etc., and there went up with him both chariots and horsemen. Whom have we greater than Joseph since none other than Moses occupied himself with his burial? Moses earned merit through the bones of Joseph and there was none in Israel greater than he, as it is said, and *Moses took the bones of Joseph with him*. Whom have we greater than Moses since none other than the Omnipresent occupied himself [with his burial], as it is said, *and he buried him in the valley*?

משנה סוטה א:ט

יוסף זכה לקבור את אביו ואין באחיו גדול ממנו, שנאמר: (בראשית נ) ויעל יוסף לקבור את אביו... וי
עמו גם רכב גם פרשים, מי לנו גדול מיוסף שלא נתעסק בו אלא משה. משה זכה בעצמות יוסף ואין
בישראל גדול ממנו, שנאמר: (שמות ג) ויקח משה את עצמות יוסף עמו, מי גדול ממשה שלא נתעסק בו
אלא המקום, שנאמר: (דברים לד) ויקבור אותו בגיא

Tosefta Sotah 4:3

How did Moses know where Joseph had been buried? They tell: Serah daughter of Asher was [a survivor] of the generation [of Joseph], and she went and said to Moses, "In the River Nile Joseph is buried. And the Egyptians made for him metal spits and affixed them with pitch (to keep him down)." Moses went and stood at the Nile River and said, "Joseph, the time has come for the Holy One, blessed be He, to redeem Israel. Lo, the *Shekhina* is held up for you, and the Israelites are held up for you, and the clouds of glory are held up for you. If you show yourself, well and good, and if not, we are free of the oath which you have imposed upon our father." Then the coffin of Joseph floated to the surface and Moses took it and went his way.

מנין היה משה יודע היכן יוסף קבור אמרו סרח בת אשר [היתה באותו הדור הלכה ואמרה לו למשה בנילוס נהר] יוסף קבור שעשו לו מצרים שפודין של מתכת וחברום בבעץ [והלך] משה ועמד על נילוס נהר ואמר יוסף יוסף הגיעה [שעה] שהקב"ה גואל את ישראל הרי שכינה מעוכבת לך וישראל מתעכבין לך וענני כבוד מתעכבין לך אם אתה מגלה א"ע מוטב ואם לאו נקיים אנו משבועה שהשבעת את אבותינו מיד צף ארוננו של יוסף לשפת ונטלו משה ובא לו.

JOSEPH'S BONES IN MIDRASH RABBA

Gen. R. 85:3

R. Huna said on the authority of R. Eleazar the son of R. Jose the Galilean: When one commences a good deed and does not finish it, while another comes and finishes it, it is credited to the second. Thus it is written, *And the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, etc.* (Josh. 34:32). But did not Moses bring up Joseph's bones: *And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him* (Ex. 13:19)? Since, however, it was decreed that he should not enter the [Promised] Land, and these others took charge of them, they were given the credit for it. (This is compared to the story of thieves who entered a wine vault, took a barrel, and drank it. The owner of the vault looked in on them and said: 'I hope that you found it sweet and tasty and satisfying! You have drunk the wine-put back the barrel in its place.' Similarly the Holy One, blessed be He, said to the tribes: 'Ye have sold Joseph-return his bones to their place.' Another comment: Joseph said to him, 'I adjure you to return me to the place whence you stole me,' and so the children of Israel did: *'And the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem.'*)

בראשית רבה פ"ה: ג

ר' יהודה בר סימון ורבי חנין בשם ר' יוחנן כל מי שהוא מתחיל במצוה ואינו גומרה קובר את אשתו ואת בניו, ממי אתה למד מיהודה ויאמר יהודה אל אחיו מה בצע וגו', היה לו להוליכו על כתיפו אצל אביו מה גרם לו קבר אשתו ובניו, רבי הונא בשם רבי אליעזר בנו של רבי יוסי הגלילי כל מי שמתחיל במצוה ואינו גומרה ואחר בא וגומרה היא נקראת על שמו של שני, הה"ד (יהושע כד) ואת עצמות יוסף אשר העלו בני ישראל, והלא משה העלה שנאמר (שמות יג) ויקח משה את עצמות יוסף עמו, אלא לפי שנגזר עליו שלא יכנס לארץ ואלו נטפלו בהם לפיכך נקראת על שמם, ואת עצמות יוסף וגו', מושלים אותו למה הדבר דומה לליסטים שנכנסו למרתף אחד של יין נטלו קנקן אחד ושתו הציץ עליהם בעל המרתף אמר להם יערב לכם יבושם לכם ימתק לכם שתיתם את היין החזירו את הקנקן למקומה, כך אמר הקב"ה לשבטים מכרתם את יוסף החזירו עצמותיו למקומן, ד"א אמר להם יוסף למקום שנגבתוני שם תחזירוני, הלוא אחיך רועים בשכם כן עשו בני ישראל שנאמר (יהושע כד) ואת עצמות יוסף אשר העלו בני ישראל ממצרים קברו בשכם.

Exodus R. 20:19

And Moses took the bones of Joseph (Ex. 13:19). Concerning him does it say: *The wise in heart will take good deeds* (Prov. 10, 8) for at the time when whole of Israel were busily occupied in collecting gold and silver, Moses was occupied with collecting the bones of Joseph, as it says: *And Moses took the bones of Joseph*. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: 'In thee is fulfilled verse: "The wise in heart will receive commandments." Joseph was duty bound to bury his father, being a son;

Exodus R. 20:19 (cont'd)

but you, though neither his son nor his grandson, have occupied yourself with his burial. So will I too occupy Myself with thy burial, though I am not obliged to do so for anyone.' Hence does it say: *And he buried him in the valley* (Deut. 34, 6). How did Moses know where Joseph was buried? Some opine that Serach the daughter of Asher showed him the place in the Nile where he was buried. What did Moses do?... Others say that he was buried, like a king, in a royal mausoleum, and the Egyptians had constructed dogs made of gold which, by means of magic, barked whenever a man approached the sarcophagus. The sound of their barking filled the whole land of Egypt, a journey of forty days ; but Moses silenced them, for it says: *But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog whet his tongue* (Ex. 11, 7). Moses began to cry:

'Joseph, Joseph, the hour has come of which you did say: *God will surely remember you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence*' (Gen. 50, 25), Straightway the coffin moved to the surface and Moses took it, as it says: *And Moses took the bones of Joseph*. During the entire forty years' wanderings in the wilderness, the bones of Joseph travelled with them. God had said to him [Joseph]: 'Because you have said: "I will feed you" to you brothers, I assure you that when you are dead, your bones will journey with them for forty years in the wilderness,' as it says: *But there were certain men, who were unclean by the dead body of a man* (Num. 9, 6). The word 'man' refers to Joseph, for it says: The tent which He had made to dwell among men (Ps. 78, 60), and then: Moreover He abhorred the tent of Joseph (ib. 67) *For the sake of your bones shall they celebrate the lesser Passover. For he had straightly sworn the children of Israel* (Ex. 13, 19). Why is the word 'hishbia' repeated? Because he [Joseph] swore that he had nothing in his heart against them, and they swore that they had nothing against him. Why did he request: *'And you shall carry up my bones away with you'* ? R. Levi said: It can be compared to a man who brought his wine into the cellar, and thieves came and took away the barrels and drank their contents. When the owner of the wine found those who had stolen the barrels of wine, he said to them: 'You have drunk the wine: at least return the casks to their place.' Similarly, it was from Shechem that the brothers of Joseph had stolen him and had sold him: and when he was about to die, he adjured them: 'My brothers! you have stolen me from Shechem while I was alive, I pray you, return my bones to Shechem.' For this reason does it say: *And the bones of Joseph, which children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem* (Josh. 24, 32).

שמות רבה כ:יט

וחמושים עלו בני ישראל שעלו מזוינין, ויקח משה את עצמות יוסף עהכ"א (משלי י) חכם לבב יקח מצות שכל ישראל היו עסוקים בכסף וזהב ומשה היה עסוק בעצמות יוסף שנאמר ויקח משה את עצמות וגו', אמר הקב"ה למשה עליך נתקיים חכם לב יקח מצות, יוסף היה חייב לאביו לקבור מפני שהוא בנו ואתה לא בנו ולא בן בנו ולא היית חייב לעסוק בו וקברת אותו וכן אני שאיני חייב לקבור אני מטפל בך ואקבורך שנאמר (דברים לד) ויקבור אותו בגי ומנין היה משה ידע היכן היה יוסף קבור, י"א סרח בת אשר הראה אותו והיה קבור בנילוס מה עשה משה וכו' וי"א בתוך הפלטרין היה קבור כדרך שהמלכים קבורים ועשו מצרים כלבים של זהב בכשפים שאם יבא אדם לשם יהיו נובחים וקולן הולך בכל ארץ מצרים מהלך מ' יום ושתקן משה שנאמר (שמות יא) ולכל בני ישראל לא יחרץ כלב לשונך, התחיל משה צווח יוסף יוסף הגיע השעה שאמרת (בראשית נ) פקוד יפקוד אלהים אתכם מיד נתנדנד הארון ונטלו משה שנאמר ויקח משה את עצמות יוסף, והיו עצמותיו של יוסף מחזרין עמהם במדבר מ' שנה, א"ל הקב"ה אתה אמרת לאחיך (שם בראשית נ) אנכי אכלכל אתכם חיך אתה נפטר ויהיו עצמותיך מחזרין עמהם במדבר מ' שנה שנאמר (במדבר ט) ויהי אנשים אשר היו טמאים לנפש אדם ואין אדם

אלא יוסף שנאמר (תהלים עח) אהל שכן באדם, וכתוב (שם תהלים ע"ח) וימאס באהל יוסף, בזכות עצמותיך הם עושים פסח קטן, כי השבע השביע את בני ישראל, למה שני פעמים אלא הוא נשבע להם שאין בלבו עליהם והם נשבעים לו שאין בלבם עליו, למה והעליתם את עצמותי מזה אתכם א"ר לוי משל למה"ד לאדם שהכניס יינו במרתף נכנסו הגנבים ונטלו החביות והלכו להם ושתו אותו ובא בעל היין ומצא אותם שגנבו החבית אמר להם שתיתם היין החזירו החבית למקומו כך משכם גנבו אחיו של אותי חי החזירו את עצמותי לשכם לכך נאמר (יהושע כד) ואת עצמות יוסף אשר העלו בני ישראל ממצרים קברו בשכם. יוסף אותו ומכרו אותו וכשבא ליפטר מן העולם השביע אותם אמר להם בבקשה מכם אחי משכם גנבתם אותי חי החזירו את עצמותי לשכם לכך נאמר (יהושע כד) ואת עצמות יוסף אשר העלו בני ישראל ממצרים קברו בשכם

Deut. R. 11:7

And why did Moses merit that God should busy Himself with his burial? Because when God went down to Egypt and the time for the redemption of Israel had come, all Israel were occupied with gathering silver and gold, but Moses was going round the city, and for three days and three nights was labouring to find Joseph's coffin, for the Israelites could not leave Egypt without Joseph. Why? Because he so bound them by oath before his death, as it is said, *And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel saying, etc.* (Gen.50:25). After Moses had tired himself out, a certain Segula met him and observing that he was weary from his efforts she said to him: 'My lord Moses, why are you tired?' He replied: 'For three days and three nights I have been going round the city to find Joseph's coffin and I cannot find it.' Said she to him: 'Come with me and I will show you where it is.' She took him to the river and said to him: 'In this place have the magicians and astrologers made for him a coffin of five hundred talents in weight and cast it into the river, and thus have they spoken to Pharaoh: "If it is your wish that this people should never leave this place, then as long as they will not find the bones of Joseph, so long will they be unable to leave." ' Immediately Moses' placed himself by the bank of the river and called out: 'Joseph, Joseph, you know how you have adjured Israel [with the words], God will surely remember you (ib.); give honor to the God of Israel and do not hold up the redemption of Israel; you have good deeds to your credit. intercede then with your Creator and come up from the depths.' Whereupon immediately Joseph's coffin began to break through the waters and to rise from the depths like a stick. Moses took it and placed it upon his shoulder and carried it, and all Israel followed him. And whilst Israel carried the silver and gold which they had taken away from Egypt, Moses was carrying Joseph's coffin. God said to him: 'Moses, you say that you have done a small thing; by your life, this act of kindness is a great thing; since as you ignored silver and gold, I too will do unto you this kindness in that I will busy Myself with your burial.'

ולמה זכה משה שהקב"ה נתעסק עמו אלא בשעה שירד למצרים והגיע גאולתן של ישראל כל ישראל היו עסוקים בכסף וזהב ומשה היה מסבב את העיר ויגע שלשה ימים ושלשה לילות למצוא ארונו של יוסף שלא היו יכולים לצאת ממצרים חוץ מיוסף למה שכך נשבע להן בשבועה לפני מותו שנאמר (בראשית נ) וישבע יוסף את בני ישראל לאמר וגו' משנתיגע הרבה פגעה בו סגולה וראתה משה שהוא עיף מן היגיעה אמרה לו אדוני משה למה אתה עיף אמר לה ג' ימים וג' לילות סבבתי את העיר למצוא ארונו של יוסף ואין אני מוצא אותך אמרה לו בא עמי ואראך היכן הוא, הולכה אותו לנחל אמרה לו במקום הזה עשו ארון של ת"ק ככרים והשליכוהו בתוך הנחל החרטומים והאשפים וכן אמרו לפרעה רצונך שלא תצא אומה זו מכאן לעולם העצמות של יוסף אם לא ימצאו אותן עד עולם אינם יכולים לצאת, מיד עמד משה על שפת הנחל ואמר יוסף יוסף אתה ידעת היאך נשבעת לישראל (בראשית נ) פקוד יפקוד אלהים אתכם תן כבוד לאלהי ישראל ואל תעכב גאולתן של ישראל מעשים טובים יש לך בקש רחמים לפני בוראך ועלה מן התהומות, מיד התחיל ארונו של יוסף מפעפע ועולה מן התהומות כקנה אחד לקח אותו ושם אותו על כתפו והיה סובל אותו וכל ישראל אחריו וישראל היו סובלים את הכסף ואת הזהב שנטלו ממצרים ומשה סובל ארונו של יוסף אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא משה אתה אומר שדבר קטן עשית חייך החסד הזה שעשית גדול הוא ולא השגחת לכסף ולזהב אף אני אעשה עמך החסד הזה ואתעסק עמך

JOSEPH'S BONES IN OTHER MIDRASHIM

Mekhilta, Vayehi Beshalach, 2

And Moses Took the Bone of Joseph with Him. This proclaims the wisdom and the piety of Moses. For all Israel were busy with the booty while Moses busied himself with the duty of looking after the bones of Joseph. Of him Scripture says: "the wise in heart takes on duties" (Prov. 10:8). But how did Moses know where Joseph was buried? It is told that Serah, the daughter of Asher survived from that generation and she showed Moses the grave of Joseph. She said to him: The Egyptians put him in a small metal coffin which they sunk in the Nile. So Moses went and stood by the Nile. He took a table of gold on which he engraved the Tetragrammaton, and throwing it into the Nile, he cried out and said: "Joseph son of Jacob! The oath to redeem his children, which God swore to our father Abraham, has reached its fulfillment. If you come up, well and good. But if not, we shall be guiltless of your oath." *Immediately Joseph's coffin came up to the surface, and Moses took it.*

מכילתא פרשה בשלח ב

ויקח משה את עצמות יוסף עמו. להודיע חכמתו וחסידותו של משה שכל ישראל עוסקין בבזה ומשה עוסק במצות עצמות יוסף עליו הכתוב אומר (משלי י') חכם לב יקח מצות ואויל שפתים ילבט. ומשה מהיכן היה יודע היכן היה קבור יוסף אמרו סרח בת אשר נשתיירה מאותו הדור והיא הראתה למשה קבר יוסף אמרה לו במקום הזה שמוהו עשו לו מצרים ארון של מתכת ושקעוהו בתוך נילוס בא ועמד על נילוס נטל צרור וזרק לתוכו וזעק ואמר יוסף יוסף הגיעה השבועה שנשבע הקב"ה לאברהם אבינו שהוא גאל את בניו תן כבוד לי' אלהי ישראל ואל תעכב את גאולתך כי בגללך אנו מעוכבים ואם לאו נקיים אנחנו משבועתך מיד צפ ארונו של יוסף ונטלו משה

ויקח משה את עצמות יוסף, מנין יודע משה היכן יוסף קבור אמרו סרה בת אשר נשתיירה מאותו (ב) הדור היא הודיעה את משה היכן יוסף קבור עמדו מצרים ועשו לו ארון של מתכת ושקעוהו בנילוס בא משה ועמד על נילוס נטל צרור וחקק בו עלה שור וצוות ואומר יוסף יוסף הגיעה שעה שהקב"ה גואל את בניו והשכינה מעכבת לך - וישראל וענני כבוד מעכבין לך אם אתה מגלה את עצמך מוטב ואם לאו הרי אנו נקיים משבועתך, מיד צף ועלה ארונו של יוסף, ואל תתמה שהרי הוא אומר ויהי האחד מפיל הקורה ואת הברזל נפל אל המים ויצעק ויאמר אהה אדוני והוא שאול ויאמר איש האלהים אנה נפל ויקצב עץ וישלח שמה ויצף הברזל (מ"ב מלכים ב' ז) והרי דברים ק"ו ומה אלישע תלמידו של אליהו הציף הברזל משה שהוא רבו של אליהו עאכ"ו, ר' נתן אומר בקבורת המלכים היה יוסף קבור שנאמר ויחננו אותו, ומנין היה יודע משה היכן ארונו של יוסף אלא בא ועמד בין הארונות וצעק ואמר יוסף יוסף הגיעה השעה שהקב"ה גואל את בניו השכינה מעכבת לך וישראל וענני כבוד מעכבין לך אם אתה מגלה את עצמך מוטב ואם לאו אנו נקיים משבועתך מיד נזדעזע ארונו ונטלו והלך ללמדך במדה שאדם מודד בה מודדין לו, יוסף קבר את אביו שנאמר (בראשית נ) ויעל יוסף לקבור את אביו ואין באחיו גדול ממנו שהיה מלך וכתוב ויעל עמו גם רכב גם פרשים (שם בראשית נ) וזכה לצאת מן הקבר ע"י משה, משה הוציא את עצמות יוסף ממצרים ואין בעולם גדול ממנו והוא מלך שנאמר (דברים לג) ויהי בישורון מלך לפיכך זכה משה שיתעסק בו שכינה שנאמר (שם דברים לד) ויקבר אותו בגיא ולא עוד אלא עם יעקב עלו עבדי פרעה וזקני ביתו וזקני ארץ מצרים ועם ארונו של יוסף עלו השכינה והארון והכהנים והלויים ושבעה ענני כבוד וארונו של יוסף מהלך עם ארון העדות במדבר, ואומות העולם אומרים מה טיבן של שני ארונות אלו וישראל אומרים זה ארון המת וזה ארון חי העולמים, והן אומרים וכי דרכו של מת מהלך עם ארון חי העולמים, והן משיבין ואומרים להן המת המונח בארון קיים כל מה שכתוב בזה, מרים המתינה שעה אחת למשה שנאמר (שמות ב) ותתצב אחותו מרחוק, לפיכך עכב הקב"ה במדבר וענני הכבוד והכהנים והלויים שבעת ימים שנאמר (במדבר יב) והעם לא נסע עד האסף מרים, כי השבעה השביע, השביעין שישביעו לבניהם, את בני ישראל, למה השביע את אחיו ולא את בניו, אמר אם אני משביע את בני אין המצרים מניחין אותן, ואם יאמרו להן אבינו העלה את אביו, הן אומרים להן אביכם מלך היה, לפיכך השביע את אחיו, דבר אחר א"ל אבינו ירד כאן לרצונו ואני העליתי אותו בעל כרחו משביעני עליכם שממקום שגנבתוני לשם החזירוני וכן עשו שנאמר (יהושע כד) ואת עצמות יוסף אשר העלו בני ישראל ממצרים קברו בשכם, פקוד יפקוד, פקוד במצרים יפקוד בים, פקוד במדבר יפקוד בנחלי ארנון, פקוד בעולם הזה יפקוד לעולם הבא

Perek R' Yishayhu, Beit HaMidrash 6:112

When Moses entered the royal tombs, he smelled Joseph's coffin, which was as fragrant as the Ark of the Covenant. "Surely" he thought, "these are the bones of Joseph."

פרק ר' יאשיהו, בית המרש' ו' 112

כיון שנכנס משה לפלטרין של מלכים היה מריח ארונו של יוסף כריח ארון הברית ואמר בודאי אילו עצמות של יוסף

Midrash HaGadol, end of Bereishit:

Moses took Joseph's goblet and cut four pieces out of it. On one he drew a lion, on another an ox, on another an eagle, and on another a man. [Then] he stood at the Nile, threw [in] the image of the lion, and said: "Joseph, the time has come for Israel to be redeemed"; but [the coffin] did not rise. He threw in the drawing of the ox, and then of the eagle, but it did not rise. [Finally] he threw in the drawing of the man and said, "Joseph, the time has come." Joseph's coffin immediately floated to the top of the water, and Moses took it.

JOSEPH'S BONES IN TALMUD

Sotah 13a-b

But whence did Moses know the place where Joseph was buried? — It is related that Serah, daughter of Asher, was a survivor of that generation. Moses went to her and asked: 'Do you know where Joseph was buried?' She answered him, 'The Egyptians made a metal coffin for him which they fixed in the river Nile so that its waters should be blessed'. Moses went and stood on the bank of the Nile and exclaimed: 'Joseph, Joseph! the time has arrived which the Holy One, blessed be He, swore, "I will deliver you", and the oath which you impose upon the Israelites has reached [the time of fulfilment]; if you will show yourself, well and good; otherwise, behold, we are free of thine oath'. Immediately Joseph's coffin floated [on the surface of the water]. Be not astonished that iron should float; for, behold, it is written: *As one was felling a beam, the axe-head fell into the water etc.* Alas, my master, for it was borrowed. And the man of God said: Where fell it? And he shewed him the place. And he cut down a stick and cast it in thither, and made the iron to swim. Now cannot the matter be argued by a fortiori reasoning — if iron floated on account of Elisha who was the disciple of Elijah who was the disciple of Moses, how much more so on account of Moses our teacher! R. Nathan says: He was buried in the sepulchre of the kings; and Moses went and stood by the sepulchre of the kings and exclaimed. 'Joseph! the time has arrived which the Holy One, blessed be He, swore "I will deliver you", and the oath which thou didst impose upon the Israelites has reached [the time of fulfilment]; if thou wilt shew thyself, well and good; otherwise, behold, we are free of thine oath'. At that moment, Joseph's coffin shook, and Moses took it and carried it with him. All those years that the Israelites were in the wilderness, those two chests, one of the dead and the other of the Shechinah, proceeded side by side, and passersby used to ask: 'What is the nature of those two chests?' They received the reply: 'One is of the dead and the other of the Shechinah'. 'But is it, then, the way of the dead to proceed with the Shechinah?' They were told, [Sotah 13b] 'This one [Joseph] fulfilled all that was written in the other'. But if Moses had not occupied himself with him, would not the Israelites have occupied themselves with him? Behold, it is written: And the bones of Joseph which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt buried they in Shechem! Furthermore, if the Israelites had not occupied themselves with him, would not his own sons have done so? And, behold, it is written: And they became the inheritance of the children of Joseph! — They said [to one another], 'Leave him; his honor will be greater [when the burial is performed] by many rather than by few'; and they also said: 'Leave him; his honour will be greater [when the burial is performed] by the great rather than by the small' Buried they in Shechem. Why just in Shechem? — R. Hama son of R. Hanina said: From Shechem they stole him, and to Shechem we will restore what is lost.

ומניין היה יודע משה רבינו היכן יוסף קבור? אמרו: סרה בת אשר נשתיירה מאותו הדור, הלך משה אצלה, אמר לה: כלום את יודעת היכן יוסף קבור? אמרה לו: ארון של מתכת עשו לו מצרים וקבעוהו בנילוס הנהר, כדי שיתברכו מימיו. הלך משה ועמד על שפת נילוס, אמר לו: יוסף, הגיע העת שנשבע הקב"ה שאני גואל אתכם, והגיעה השבועה שהשבעת את ישראל, אם אתה מראה עצמך מוטב, אם לאו הרי אנו מנוקין משבועתך, מיד צף ארונו של יוסף. ואל תתמה היאך ברזל צף, שהרי כתיב: (מלכים ב' ו') ויהי האחד מפיל הקורה ואת הברזל נפל אל המים וגו' אהה אדוני והוא שאול ויאמר איש האלהים אנה נפל ויראהו את המקום ויקצב עץ וישלך שמה ויצף הברזל, והלא דברים ק"ו: ומה אלישע תלמידו של אליהו ואליהו תלמידו של משה צף ברזל מפניו, מפני משה רבינו על אחת כמה וכמה. רבי נתן אומר: בקברניט של מלכים היה קבור, הלך משה ועמד על קברניט של מלכים, אמר: יוסף, הגיע עת שנשבע הקב"ה שאני גואל אתכם, והגיעה שבועה שהשבעת את ישראל, אם אתה מראה עצמך מוטב, ואם לאו הרי אנו מנוקין משבועתך, באותה שעה נזדעזע ארונו של יוסף, נטלו משה והביאו אצלו. וכל אותן שנים שהיו ישראל במדבר, היו שני ארונות הללו אחד של מת ואחד של שכינה מהלכין זה עם זה, והיו עוברין ושבין אומרים: מה טיבן של שני ארונות הללו? אמרו: אחד של מת ואחד של שכינה וכי מה דרכו של מת להלך עם שכינה? אמרו: [סוטה דף יג ע"ב] קיים זה כל מה שכתוב בזה. ואי לא עסיק ביה משה, ישראל לא הוּו מיעסקי ביה? והכתיב: (יהושע כד) ואת עצמות יוסף אשר העלו בני ישראל ממצרים קברו בשכם! ותו, אי לא איעסקו ביה ישראל, בניו לא הוּו מיעסקי ביה? והכתיב: (יהושע כד) ויהיו לבני יוסף לנחלה! אמרו: הניחו לו, כבודו במרובים יותר מבמועטין, ותו אמרו: הניחו לו, כבודו בגדולים יותר מבקטנים, קברו בשכם מאי שנא בשכם? אמר ר' חמא בר' חנינא: משכם גנבוהו, ולשכם נחזיר אבידת



JOSEPH'S BONES IN ZOHAR

הזהר עמוד רכב ע"ב

אוף הכא יוסף במיא אתרמי ארונא דיליה. אמר קב"ה. אי יוסף יסתלק מהכא גלותא לא יתקיים. אלא תהא קבורתיה באתר דלא יסתאב. ויסבלון בני ישראל גלותא

Zohar, I, 122b

Joseph's coffin was cast into the water. The blessed Holy One sad, "If Joseph departs from here, the exile will remain unfulfilled. Rather let his burial be in a place that cannot be defiled, and Israel will endure the exile."

JOSEPH'S BONES IN NON-RABBINIC SOURCES

Tibat Markeh, (a collection of Samaritan writings dating from 4th century C.E)

Serah the daughter of Asher went hurrying out to them. "There is nothing evil in your midst. Behold, I will reveal to you what this secret is." At once they surrounded her and brought her to the great prophet Moses and she stood before him . . . [saying] "Hear from me this thing that you seek: Praise to those who remembered my bed [Joseph], though you have forgotten him. For had not the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire stood still, you would have departed and he would have been left in Egypt. I remember the day that he died and he caused the whole people to swear that they would bring his bones up from here with them." The great prophet Moses said to her, "Worthy are you Serah, wisest of women. From this day on will your greatness be told". . . . Serah went with all the tribe of Ephraim around her, and Moses and Aaron went after them, until she came to the place where he was hidden.

Like young man Joseph, we are all dreamers, seeing a new horizon for a time of greater awareness, consciousness and maybe even one day peace on the planet, peace in Jerusalem. May the wisdom embodied in the image of Joseph's bones/עצמות יוסף, and the wisdom of the ancestors in the world beyond inspire and guide our dreams.

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