

ANCESTRAL JOURNEYS
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SINAI PROCESSION AS A FUNERAL RITUAL

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1. JOSEPH'S BONES IN TANAKH—GENESIS

Joseph said to his brothers: I am dying, but God will take 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 of you, bring my bones up from here. And Joseph died, being a hundred and ten years old. They mummified him, and they put him in a coffin in Egypt. (Gen. 50:24 –26)

2. JOSEPH'S BONES IN TANAKH—EXODUS

Now Moses had taken Joseph's bones 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).

3. JOSEPH'S BONES IN TANAKH—JOSHUA

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)

4. JOSEPH'S BONES IN AGGADAH - AT THE BOTTOM OF THE NILE

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

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

5. WHY WAS JOSEPH'S COFFIN HIDDEN BENEATH THE NILE?

'In this place have the magicians and astrologers made for him a coffin of 500 talents in weight and cast it into the river [assumed to be the Nile], 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)

Joseph's coffin was cast into the 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, 122b

"According to Rabbinic tradition, Joseph's coffin was deposited in the Nile, so he remained invulnerable to the impurity of Egypt, and Shechinah could manifest near him, alleviating Israel's suffering in exile." Daniel Matt, *Commentary on Zohar I*, 122b

6. HOW DOES MOSES FIND JOSEPH'S BONES

MYSTERY OF SERAH BAT ASHER

But how did Moses know where Joseph was buried? It is told that Serah bat 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 tablet 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)

7. JOSEPH'S BONES AND THE TABERNACLE IN THE WILDERNESS

During the entire forty years' wanderings in the wilderness, the bones of Joseph travelled with them. (Exodus R. 20:19)

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 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).

8. WHERE WERE JOSEPH'S BONES BURIED?

...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)

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 and the wisdom of the ancestors in the world beyond inspire and guide our dreams.

