

Parashat Vayechi, 5784, 2023:

Middah K'neged Middah

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ה' יעזור וירחם על אחינו, כל בני ישראל בארץ ישראל ובכל חלקי הארץ

The concluding *pasukim* of our *parasha* present Yosef's final words to his brothers. They contain both a reminder of Hashem's promise to ultimately redeem the Jewish people from Egypt, and Yosef's poignant personal request:

Yosef said to his brothers, "I am going to die; G-d will surely remember you and take you up out of this land to the land that He swore to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Ya'akov." And Yosef adjured the children of Israel, saying, "G-d will surely remember you, and you shall take up my bones out of here." (This and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

These verses reveal the depth of Yosef's abiding faith in Hashem when he twice declares, "G-d will surely remember you." Within this context, he placed a *shavuah* upon his brothers and their descendants to transport his bones with them in the course of the promised redemption and bury him in Israel. In so doing, he emulated his father, *Ya'akov Avinu*, who insisted Yosef take a *shavuah* stating that he would not bury him in Egypt, but rather with his forebears in Israel. (*Sefer Bereishit* 47: 29-31) A straightforward reading of our passage indicates that the obligation to transport Yosef's bones from Egypt and bury him in Israel was incumbent upon the entire Jewish people.

When the Exodus takes place, *Sefer Shemot* 13:19 tells us that Moshe, as the representative of the entire Jewish people, gathered up Yosef's remains and began the long process of reintering him in Israel: "Moshe took Yosef's bones with him, for he [Yosef] had adjured the sons of Israel, saying, 'G-d will surely remember you, and you shall bring up my bones

from here with you.” Basing itself on this *pasuk*, the first chapter of *Mishnah Sotah* (7 and 9) teaches us a crucial lesson regarding how our present behaviors determine the way we will be treated by others in the future:

According to the manner in which a person acts, others will act toward him... This [general rule] is in effect when it comes to matters of a positive nature as well... Yosef merited the right to bury his father [Ya'akov], and there was no one among his brothers who was greater than he. As the Torah states: “So Yosef went up to bury his father... And chariots and horsemen also went up with him, and the camp was very numerous.” (*Sefer Bereishit* 50: 7, 9).

Our passage continues and informs us that Yosef was worthy of the greatest possible respect. As such, it was fitting that *Moshe Rabbeinu* would be involved in his burial in the Land of Israel:

Whom do we have that deserved to be buried with greater respect than Yosef? Therefore, the only one who could possibly render him the proper respect was Moshe. Moshe merited the right to bury Yosef, and there was no one among his brothers who was greater than he. As the Torah states: “Moshe took Yosef’s bones with him.” (*Mishnah* translation my own)

The operating principle in this mishnaic passage is the well-known concept of *middah k'neged middah*—according to the manner in which a person acts, G-d and man will act toward him. We are fortunate that the Torah provides us with a clear metric for analyzing our actions, namely, “*v’halachta b’drachov*” (“And you should walk in His path,” *Sefer Devarim* 28:9). This commandment is elucidated in a celebrated passage in *Talmud Bavli, Sotah* 14a:

Just as Hashem clothed the naked [in the case of Adam and Chava] ... so, too, should you clothe the naked. Just as Hashem visited the sick [in the case of Avraham after his *brit milah*] ...so, too, should you visit the sick. Just as the Holy One Blessed be He comforted the mourners [in the case of Yitzhak after Avraham’s passing] ...so, too, should you comfort the mourners. Just as the Holy One Blessed be He buried the dead [in the case of Moshe] ...so, too, should you bury the dead. (Translation, my own)

Stated quite simply, our goal is to emulate the Almighty’s actions in each of our deeds.

As my rebbi and mentor Rabbi Yosef B. Soloveitchik (1903-1993) noted on many occasions, *halachta b'drachov* emerges as the fundamental underpinning of Judaism's ethical structure. By emulating the actions of the Holy One blessed be He, we create substantive changes in ourselves, and positively impact those with whom we interact. In this sense, we become partners with Hashem in creating the world – *shutfim im Hashem b'ma'aseh Bereishit*.

With Hashem's help, may we be *zocheh* to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *halachta b'drachov* in its most profound sense. Then may we become *shutfim im Hashem b'ma'aseh Bereishit*, to make the world a better and nobler place, and may the *middah k'neged middah* we receive be replete with *zechuyot* (merits). *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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*** I have posted 164 of Rabbi Soloveitchik's English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link: [The Ray](#)