



**Partners In Torah**  
**San Diego Study Guide**

***Beshalach***  
***תשפ"ג***

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***Partners Detroit***

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## **Partners In Torah San Diego**

### **Mission Statement:**

**Partners In Torah San Diego is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.**

**Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.**

**Partners in Torah San Diego has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.**

**Welcome.**

**Thank you for coming.**

**Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we can grow together as a community.**

## To Take or Not to Take; that is the Question!

When our forefather Avraham Avihu was seventy years old, at the ברית בין הבתרים - the Covenant of the Pieces, Hashem told him (Genesis 15:13-14) that his grandchildren would be slaves in a foreign land for 400 years, after which Hashem will punish their captors, and the Jewish people will leave with great wealth.

(יג) וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַבְרָם יְדַע תְּדַע כִּי גֵר יִהְיֶה זְרַעְךָ בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא לָהֶם וְעִבְדוּם וְעָנוּ:  
אַתֶּם אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה

(יד) וְגַם אֶת הַגּוֹי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲבֹדוּ דָן אֲנִי וְאַחֲרַי כֵּן יֵצְאוּ בְּרִכְשׁ גָּדוֹל

13) *He said to Avram, "Know with certainty that your offspring shall be aliens in a land not their own, and they will serve them, and they will oppress them for four hundred years. 14) But also, the nation they will serve, I shall judge, and afterwards they will leave with great wealth.*

With this in mind, Hashem told Moshe to tell the Jewish people (Exodus 11:2) to "borrow" as many gold and silver vessels as they can from the Egyptians, before leaving.

(ב) דַּבֵּר נָא בְּאָזְנֵי הָעָם וַיִּשְׁאַלּוּ אִישׁ מֵאֵת רֵעֵהוּ וְאִשָּׁה מֵאֵת רֵעוּתָהּ כְּלֵי כֶסֶף וְכְלֵי זָהָב

2) **Please** speak in the ears of the people: Let each man request of his fellow and each woman from her fellow silver vessels and gold vessels.

The commentaries are perplexed by Hashem invoking the word *please*. Why would Hashem need to beg the Jewish people to take the Egyptian wealth? Wouldn't this be something they would naturally want to do? After being slaves for so long, it would be especially sweet to take the Egyptian gold and silver as payment for their work.

Commenting on this verse, Rashi quotes a Talmudic passage (Berachot 9b) that adds a new dimension to this request.

(ב) דבר נא - אין נא אלא לשון בקשה בבקשה ממך הזהירם על כך שלא יאמר אותו צדיק אברהם ועבדום וענו אותם קיים בהם ואחרי כן יצאו ברכוש גדול לא קיים בהם

2) *The word נא means please. "I am asking you to please tell them to do this so that that Avraham the Righteous should not complain to Me: 'The slavery and the affliction You fulfilled in them, but as far as leaving with great wealth, that didn't happen.' "*

Hashem had a special interest in urging the Jewish people to take the Egyptian's wealth so that Avraham Avinu would not have a complaint against Him. Why, however, did Hashem feel that the Jewish people needed encouragement to do this mitzvah? And wouldn't Hashem want them to take the wealth just to fulfill His promise to Avraham?

In his commentary to the Torah *אזנים לתורה*, Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin זצ"ל (d. 1966) opens our eyes to the meaning of this verse.

Rabb Sorotzkin begins by saying that these questions concerned the sages for generations; indeed, and they could not until recently (the 1950s) satisfactorily resolve them.

After the Germans י"ש were defeated and were going to pay the Jews for the money and possessions that they stole and plundered from them, and, to some minuscule degree, for the horrific torture and murder of six million Jews, the potential recipients of the money were divided into two opposing groups.

Some said, “Should our murderers also become our inheritors? Of course, we should take whatever we can from them!” Others said, “We should not take anything from these evil people lest they say that they have compensated us for the atrocities that they did to us, and that we became wealthy at the expense of our brothers whose blood the Nazis spilled like water.”

Going back in time we can imagine that the Jews leaving Egypt felt the same. There were many who felt that the Egyptians stole their babies and threw them into the river; they put their small bodies into the buildings that they built; and they slaughtered them for their blood for the Pharaoh’s baths. They argued that we should not take anything from the Egyptians lest they claim that they have compensated us for the children that they murdered. Others said, “We are entitled to compensation for the years of slavery that we have worked for the Egyptians. We should take whatever we can get.”

Hashem commiserated with those who wished not to take from the Egyptians, and completely understood their feelings. Therefore, He did not force them to take the Egyptian’s wealth if they chose not to. Rather, He requested it “politely,” so-to-speak, adding that perhaps the Jews would consider taking it anyway so Hashem should not look bad in the eyes of Avraham.

### **Joseph’s Remains are Miraculously Recovered**

There is a Midrash, however, from which there is a question on that notion.

In the beginning of this week’s parsha, *Beshalach*, we read (13:19) that on the way out of Egypt Moshe took Yosef’s bones with him.

(יט) וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת עֲצָמוֹת יוֹסֵף עִמּוֹ כִּי הִשְׁבַּע הַשָּׁבִיעַ אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל  
לֵאמֹר פֶּקֶד פֶּקֶד אֱלֹקִים אֲתֶכֶם וְהֶעֱלִיתֶם אֶת עֲצָמֹתַי מִזֶּה אֲתֶכֶם

19) *Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him, for he had firmly adjured the Bnai Yisroel saying, "Hashem will surely remember you, and you shall bring up my bones from here with you."*

The Midrash informs us that this was a very difficult task. The Egyptians were aware that the Jewish people could not leave Egypt without Yosef's coffin, so they made it out of lead and sunk it in the Nile River. Moshe did not know this, and for three days and three nights he searched the city for Yosef's burial place to no avail. He then ran into Asher's daughter *Serach* who was alive at the time of Yosef's death. Seeing that Moshe was exhausted and fatigued, she asked him, "Moshe, why are you so tired?" He responded, "For three days and nights I am trying to find Yosef's coffin to fulfill the promise that we will take his bones out with us, and I cannot find them." She then said, "Let me show you where they are." She took Moshe to its place in the Nile River and told him that they weighted his coffin down with lead so that it will never surface and so that the Jewish people should never be able to leave Egypt.

How did Moshe bring the heavy coffin up from the depths of the Nile River? The Midrash (*Tanchuma Beshalach 2*) explains.

בא משה ועמד על נילוס נטל צרור וחקק בו עלה שור וצווח 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

*Moshe went and stood at the shore of the Nile. He took a stone and engraved on it “עלה שור,” the words that Yaakov Avinu used (Genesis 49:) to describe Yosef in his blessing to him, which mean “rise up Shor,” (Yosef’s nickname), threw it into the river and screamed, “Yosef, Yosef! The time has come for Hashem to redeem His children. Hashem is waiting for you, the Jewish people are waiting for you, and the Clouds of Glory are waiting for you. If you reveal yourself, fine. But if you don’t, we are absolved of our oath.” Immediately, Yosef’s lead coffin rose and floated on the river, whereupon Moshe took it.*

When telling the story of how Moshe put himself out to fulfill the promise to Yosef, the Midrash (Shemot Rabba 20:19) lauds Moshe for performing this great mitzvah.

ויקח משה את עצמות יוסף עליו הכתוב אומר (משלי י) חכם לבב יקח מצות  
שכל ישראל היו עסוקים בכסף וזהב ומשה היה עסוק בעצמות יוסף

*Hashem said to Moshe. “The verse (Proverbs 10:8) חכם לב יקח מצות - **One with a wise heart will take mitzvot**, was said about you, for while all the other Jews were busy collecting gold and silver, you decided to find and take Yosef’s bones.”*

This Midrash perplexed the Sages. Didn’t we just learn that the Jewish people were also engaged in a mitzvah by taking the Egyptian’s gold and silver? Were they not doing Hashem a favor by ensuring that that He not be embarrassed before Avraham Avinu?

Here are a few instructive answers to this question.

## Seeing a mitzvah as a Unique Opportunity

There is an adage in the Talmud that goes like this.

“A pot owed in partnership is never hot when it needs to be hot and never cold when it needs to be cold.” This is because the nature of a human being is to do as little work as possible. Hence, each partner assumes the other partner will take care of the pot, and, in the end, no one does. How much more is this the case when no one in particular is assigned to a particular job. Each person exempts himself from doing it by saying, “Why should *I* do it? I wasn’t told to!”

This holds true when one views the needed action as a chore. Yet' if one sees the need as an opportunity and he stands to gain greatly from it, he will jump to get it before anyone else.

This is why Hashem lauded Moshe for taking care of Yosef’s bones. Yosef’s descendants should have taken responsibility to take care of their grandfather’s request. Instead, Moshe, who was not a close relative, jumped at the opportunity and took it upon himself to fulfill the great mitzvah. One with a wise heart understands that the mitzvot are not a burden, but, rather, an opportunity. He appreciates the value of a mitzvah and therefore seizes every opportunity to perform one. Indeed, the midrash goes on to say that as a reward for Moshe taking care of Yosef’s bones even though he was not related, Hashem Himself, at the end of the Torah, buried Moshe, even though Hashem owes no creature anything.

Hence, even though the Jewish people were also engaged in a mitzvah, Moshe was singled out because he demonstrated how mitzvot should be looked at as opportunities, not burdens.



## **A Pure Mitzvah, without Personal Gain**

There is another layer of depth here.

Our Sages teach us that kindness done with a deceased is the purest form of kindness. This is because the one performing the act of kindness has no designs of receiving any personal benefit from the deceased. When he does the kindness knowing that there is nothing in it for him, he is doing it purely for the deceased.

Although the Jewish people were certainly engaged in a mitzvah by emptying Egypt of its riches, because they would also personally gain from the performance of that mitzvah, it paled in comparison to Moshe's mitzvah, which was completely altruistic. Hashem was praising Moshe for having chosen to engage in the highest quality mitzvah possible instead of one with a personal benefit.

The Midrash is here teaching a very profound message. "Choose your mitzvot wisely!" Not all mitzvot are of equal value. Have a wise heart! We are adjured to go for the greatest mitzvot like Moshe Rabbeinu did. How can you know which mitzvot carry the greatest reward? The less personal benefit you receive from it, the greater the mitzvah.

Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky (1891-1986) answers the question differently.

When the Jewish people came to the Reed Sea and Hashem told the sea to split so the Jewish people could go through, the Midrash notes that the angels questioned Hashem.

"These [the Egyptians] are idol worshippers and these [the Jews] are idol worshippers. Why should the sea split for the Jewish people any more than for the Egyptians?" What made the angels change their minds? The Midrash (Bereshit Rabbah 87:8) tells us.

שמעון איש קטרון אמר בזכות עצמותיו של יוסף נקרע הים לישראל  
הה"ד (תהלים קיד) הים ראה **וינוס** בזכות ויעזוב בגדו בידה **וינס**

*Shimon from Katron said, "In the merit of Yosef's bones the sea split for the Jewish people. How do we know? The verse says, 'And the sea saw (the bones of Yosef) **and it fled.**' In the merit of what it says about Yosef, "And he left his tunic in her hands **and he fled.**"*

Somehow, when the sea "saw" the bones of Yosef about whom it said, "And he fled," the sea also fled and split for the Jewish people.

Rabbi Kamenetsky explains the connection.

When Yosef left his shirt in the hands of *Potiphera's* wife, he was really putting his neck on the line. He realized that she would have to invent a story to cover her tracks and that he would likely go to prison. Once in prison, he could languish there forever, and, indeed, he may have, if not for Hashem giving Pharaoh dreams that required interpretation. Nevertheless, Yosef did what he had to do, paying no attention to his likely fate.

Superficially, often, there is no difference between a Jew and a gentile, and without identifying a clear qualitative difference between them, why indeed should the sea split for the Jews? This is where Yosef's internal strength to do Hashem's will, demonstrated a special quality about the Jews.

The Midrash tells us that a gentile matriarch asked Rabbi Yosi. "Do you expect me to believe that Yosef, who was seventeen years old and with all of his virility, actually resisted temptation and didn't sin? Impossible!"

The matriarch could not conceive of such self-control. What would motivate it? What would give a person the strength to overcome such a burning desire?

The answer is, the greater fire of Hashem, the holiness, that burns within every Jewish soul, is what gives a Jew the ability to overcome his earthly desires. Thus, Yosef's act demonstrated that the Jewish people truly have a different constitution, and even though the Jews may have, as a result of their servitude, worshipped idols like the Egyptians, that was only on the surface; internally, they are inherently different and are therefore worthy of having the sea split for them.

We see from this Midrash that if it were not for Yosef's casket, the Jewish people may not have made it across the Reed Sea. Thus, Moshe's one mitzvah caused the sea to spilt and brought forth so many other mitzvot.

The upshot is that while the Jewish people were also engaged in performing a mitzvah, it lacked the same far-reaching effects as Moshe's mitzvah did. That is why Hashem praised Moshe who chose a mitzvah that had many important ramifications.

Once again, the lesson is, choose mitzvot wisely. Not all mitzvot are created equal. Some have far-reaching ramifications, and they are greater than mitzvot that end when the mitzvah is done.

### **Wisdom of the Heart**

Finally, why did King Solomon in Proverbs talk about a "*wise hearted*" person? Wisdom resides in the mind. Where does the heart come into play here?

The answer comes from the craftsmen who contributed their skills to the construction of the Tabernacle. There it says (Exodus 31:6):

וַיְבָלֵב כָּל חָכָם לֵב נָתַתִּי חֲכָמָה וַעֲשׂוּ אֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִךָ :

*And I have endowed the heart of every **wise hearted** person with wisdom, and they will make all that I have commanded you.*

What made them wise before the wisdom was endowed to them?

The לב - *heart*, is the source of our deepest and innermost desires. It represents our true רצון – *inner will*. The word רצון, comes from the Hebrew word רץ which means to run. The רצון is what causes us to chase after the things that we seek. Whether consciously or subconsciously, it is what motivates our every decision, for we are always trying to achieve our רצון. A “wise heart” means that his רצונות , *his inner most aspirations*, are wise and on target.

When Moshe announced to the people that he needed volunteers to help with the Tabernacle’s construction and told them, “We need weavers, we need fine goldsmiths, and silversmiths. We need carpenters, and diamond cutters,” most people thought to themselves, “I can’t do that! I have no training or experience in those areas. I have been working with bricks and mortar for my whole life. How could I possibly do fine craftsmanship?” They did not offer to help.

But there were a few חכמי לב - people whose hearts were in the right place and who wanted desperately to be part of the construction, who said, “I volunteer! I will do it! How will I do it you ask? I have no training? I don’t know! I’ll figure it out. All I know is that I want to be a part of this holy work.”

Hashem said to these wise hearted people, “You want to be part of this? No problem! I will endow you with the skill and know-how you need so you can fulfill your wish.”

This same concept applies to doing mitzvot. When thinking about doing a mitzvah, a person may think to himself, “How can I do that? I have no training; it is not in my skill set.”

Moshe also had no idea how he would find Yosef's casket. He unsuccessfully searched for three days and three nights. All that he had going for him was a deep desire to accomplish this mitzvah, and he persisted at it until Hashem opened his eyes and had him bump into *Serach* who had the secret that he needed.

This is the meaning of a "wise hearted" person. He really doesn't possess the wisdom in his mind as to how he will fulfill the mitzvah. His heart, however, is wise to the value and power of fulfilling mitzvot, and to that end he seeks to fulfill the mitzvah even without knowing exactly how. Such a person is worthy of great acclaim and will accomplish many mitzvot in his lifetime because Hashem will show him the way and endow him with the abilities that he needs to succeed.