



## The Pardes Parsha Discussion by Rabbi Alex Israel

### Vayehi: Keys to Redemption

The belief in the Redemption is a central axiom of Jewish faith. If we listen closely to our parsha we might discover its origins.

As Joseph neared death at age 110, he asks his family take an oath:

“I am about to die. God will surely remember you and bring you up from this land to the land that He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.” So Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, “God will remember you (pakod yifkod); and you shall carry up my bones from here.” (Gen 50:24-25)

Out of all Jacob’s sons, Joseph is probably the most acculturated to Egypt, and yet it is specifically Joseph who requests that his bones be returned to his birthplace - Eretz Yisrael. From where did he draw this longing, this commitment to his homeland?

The first factor would be the oath that his own father made him take, when Jacob was dying. Jacob asked Joseph to swear that he would not be buried in Egypt, and Joseph internalized the powerful message; that Israel, Canaan, is home, whereas Egypt is foreign soil. This cultivated a deep emotional commitment within Joseph, and when his time comes, he too instructs his family to take his bones with them when they leave. [Parenthetically, a point to ponder... As parents, what principles and fundamental values do we transmit to our kids?]

But Joseph’s oath contains a detail, sometimes overlooked, which is for me, more powerful still. He tells his family to swear that “God will remember you – pakod yifkod.”(\*) In other words, embedded in Joseph’s words, is a commitment to a future redemption, an insistence that his descendants and the entire Jewish people never lose faith in their redemption, in the realization of the promise to the forefathers that the nation will indeed return the children of Israel to their land.

This faith in the future, this promise of redemption is quoted verbatim hundreds of years after Joseph, in the depths and horrors of the Egyptian enslavement, as God charges Moses with the mission of the Exodus:

Go and assemble the elders of Israel and say to them: the Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has appeared to me and said, 'I have remembered you (pakod pakad'ti) and what is being done to you in Egypt, and I have declared: I will take you out of the misery of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites ... a land flowing with milk and honey.' (Ex 3:16-17)

It is quite remarkable that the memory of this promise persisted in the Israelite collective memory so much that when Moses delivers this message to the nation's elders, using this specific phraseology of "pakod yifkod", it resonates deeply with them:

... and the people were convinced. When they heard that the Lord had remembered (pakod) of the Israelites and that He had seen their plight, they bowed low in homage. (Ex 4:31)

As Israel leave Egypt, they carry Joseph's bones with them, and again, the Torah reminds us about Joseph's pledge to the nation, a pledge that fostered the belief in redemption:

And Moses took with him the bones of Joseph, who had exacted an oath from the children of Israel, saying, "God will be sure to remember you (pakod yifkod)..." (Ex 13:19)

What is the key to redemption? At the most elementary level we might identify two things.

First, we have to know that we are in Exile; that Egypt is not home but that our future lies elsewhere in a land of promise.

Second, we need to keep hope alive. This was Joseph's final gift. He instilled a deep consciousness in the nation that God would indeed redeem us, that God's promise was an inviolable pledge. Israel never relinquished this hope.

And this is no small thing. Throughout our history, in the depths of exile, in Egypt, Babylon, and around the globe, Jews have always remembered that God's promise awaits them. However bleak the reality that surrounds the people of Israel, the future will bring hope and redemption.

**So let's discuss around the table:**

- What has given Jews hope in the future when we experienced the depths of slavery?
- Does hope of redemption inspire young people today?

- Is the hope of redemption an asset or a liability, a source of fortitude or a cause of fanaticism?
- Is there any central belief, narrative or cause that might form a core identity for Jews today?

Shabbat Shalom!

(\*) This word can indicate positive fulfillment of a promise “and God fulfilled his promise to Sarah” (as in Gen 21:1; see other examples I Sam 2:21, Jer 27:22) or alternatively, punishment as in “He will visit the sins of the fathers on the children (Ex 20:5, and see also Ex 32:34, I Sam 15:2, Amos 3:2, Zefania 1:12). The main thing is that God will follow through on his promises – whether for good or for bad.