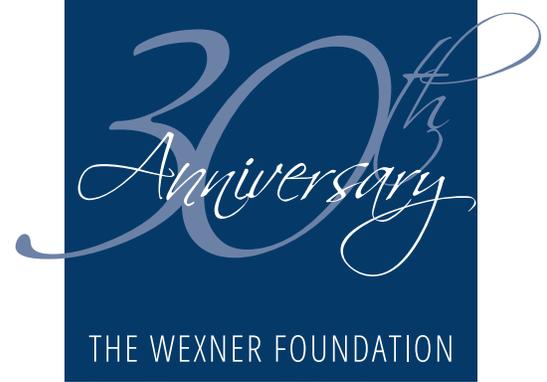


TAKING OUR BONES WITH US: THE ROLE OF THE PAST IN MAPPING THE JEWISH FUTURE

RABBI RACHEL NUSSBAUM



THE BONES OF JOSEPH

GENESIS 50:25

25 And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying: 'God will surely remember you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.'

כֹּה וַיִּשְׁבַּע יוֹסֵף, אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר: פְּקֹד פְּקֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶתְכֶם, וְהֶעֱלֵתֶם אֶת-עַצְמוֹתַי מִזֶּה

EXODUS 13:19

19 And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him; for he had indeed sworn the children of Israel, saying: 'God will surely remember you; and you shall carry up my bones from here with you.'

יֵט וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת-עַצְמוֹת יוֹסֵף, עִמוֹ: כִּי הִשְׁבַּע הַשְּׂבִיעַ אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, לֵאמֹר, פְּקֹד פְּקֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶתְכֶם, וְהֶעֱלִיתֶם אֶת-עַצְמוֹתַי מִזֶּה אִתְּכֶם.

BABYLONIAN TALMUD SOTAH 13a

The Rabbis taught: Come and see how beloved the commandments were to Moses our teacher. When all Israel was busy with the spoils (of Egypt), he occupied himself with the commandments, as it says: "The wise of heart take mitzvot but the prattling fool will stumble" (Mishlei 10:8). How did Moses know where Joseph was buried? They said: "Serach bat Asher remains from that generation." Moses went to her and said: "Do you know where Joseph is buried?" She said: "The Egyptians buried him in an iron casket and placed it in the Nile so that its waters become blessed." Moses went and stood at the banks of the Nile. He said: "Joseph, Joseph, the time has come that the Holy One, blessed be He, swore that He would redeem them. The time has also come for the oath that Israel swore (to bury Joseph in the land of Israel). If you show yourself, well and good. If not, we are free from your oath." Immediately, Yosef's casket floated to the surface... All those years that the Israelites were in the wilderness, those two chests (aronot), one of the dead and the other of the Shechinah, proceeded side by side. 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, "This one [Joseph] fulfilled all that was written in the other."

THE TREES OF THE PATRIARCHS

EXODUS 25:5

5 and rams' skins dyed red, and sealskins, and acacia-wood;

ה. וְעֹרֹת אֵילִם מֵאֲדָמִים וְעֹרֹת תְּחָשִׁים, וְעֵצֵי שִׁטִּים.

"Jacob our father planted at the time he descended to Egypt. He said, 'My sons, eventually you will be redeemed from this place, and the blessed Holy One will say to you: 'You will be redeemed,' so that you may build a sanctuary for Him. Therefore, go plant acacia, trees now so that when He commands you to erect a sanctuary for Him, beams of acacia, will be available. Immediately they arose and planted as he had commanded them to do" (Tanhuma 1:9, cf. Bereshit Rabbah 94:4; ibn Ezra on Exodus 25:5).

GENESIS 21:33

33 And Abraham planted a tamarisk-tree in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God.

לֹג וַיִּטַּע אַבְרָהָם, בְּבְאֵר שֵׁבַע, וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם--בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה, אֵל עוֹלָם

TAKING OUR BONES WITH US: THE ROLE OF THE PAST IN MAPPING THE JEWISH FUTURE

RABBI RACHEL NUSSBAUM



EXODUS 26:28

28 and the middle bar in the midst of the boards, which shall pass through from end to end.

כח והברית התיכון, בתוך הקרשים, מברח, מן-הקצה
אל-הקצה

The center beam (briach ha-tichon) went from one end of the Mishkan to the other and it was made from the tree that Abraham our father planted in Be'er Sheva. When the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, the angels chopped down the tree and threw it into the sea where it floated on the face of the water. An angel then announced, "This is the tree that Abraham planted in Be'er Sheva, where he called out in the Name of Lord!" The Israelites took the tree and carved from it the center beam which was seventy amot (110 feet) long. Wondrous miracles occurred with this bar. When the Mishkan was erected, it would go through the holes of the beams, twisting around the corners like a snake. When the Mishkan was taken apart, it would straighten out like a stick. (Targum Yonatan on Shemot 26:28)

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

EXODUS 15:20

20 And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.

כ ותקח מרים הנביאה אחות אהרן, את-התוף--בגדה;
ותצאנ כל-הנשים אחריה, בתפים ובמחלות

"Whence did the Israelites have timbrels for dancing in the wilderness? Rather, the righteous trusted in God, they knew that He would perform miracles and mighty acts when they would go forth from Egypt, and they prepared for themselves timbrels and dancing" (Me-khilta de-Rabbi Ishmael [Masekhta de-Shirah, Beshalah 10]; Pesikta Zutarta [Lekah Tov, Ex. 15:20]).