

Becoming a Human Torah: In Life and in Death

In memory of memory of the lives lost and in honor of those whose lives have been affected

Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh

Rabbi Leon A. Morris

1. Genesis 50:24-26

(24) At length, Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die. God will surely take notice of you and bring you up from this land to the land that He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.” (25) So Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, “When God has taken notice of you, you shall carry up my bones from here.” (26) Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

בראשית נ' כ"ד-כ"ו

(כד) וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל-אֶחָיו אֲנֹכִי מֵת וְאֱלֹקִים פִּקְדוּ יִפְקְדוּ אֶתְכֶם וְהֵעֵלָה אֶתְכֶם מִן-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וְלִיעֲקֹב: (כה) וַיִּשְׁבַּע יוֹסֵף אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר פִּקְדוּ אֱלֹקִים אֶתְכֶם וְהֵעֵלְתֶם אֶת-עַצְמוֹתַי מִזֶּה: (כו) וַיָּמָת יוֹסֵף בֶּן-מֵאָה וָעֶשֶׂר שָׁנַיִם וַיִּחַנְטוּ אֹתוֹ וַיִּשְׂמוּ בָאָרוֹן בְּמִצְרַיִם:

2. Exodus 13:17-20

(17) Now when Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Phillistines, although it was nearer; for God said, “The people may have a change of heart when they see war, and return to Egypt.” (18) So God led the people roundabout, by way of the wilderness at the Sea of Reeds. Now the Israelites went up armed out of the land of Egypt. (19) 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 take notice of you: then you shall carry up my bones from here with you.” (20) They set out from Succoth, and encamped at Etham, at the edge of the wilderness.

שמות י"ג:י"ז-כ'

(יז) וַיְהִי בַשְּׁלַח פָּרַעֲהוֹ אֶת-הָעָם וְלֹא-נָחַם אֱלֹקֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים כִּי קָרוֹב הוּא כִּי אָמַר אֱלֹקֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל פֶּן-יִנָּחֵם הָעָם בְּרֹאֲתָם מִלְחָמָה וְשָׁבוּ מִצְרַיִם: (יח) וַיֹּסֵב אֱלֹקִים אֶת-הָעָם דֶּרֶךְ הַמִּדְבָּר יַם-סוּף וְחַמְשִׁים עֶלֶף בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאָרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: (יט) וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת-עַצְמוֹת יוֹסֵף עִמּוֹ כִּי הִשְׁבִּיעַ הַשִּׁבְיַע אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר פִּקְדוּ אֱלֹקִים אֶתְכֶם וְהֵעֵלְתֶם אֶת-עַצְמוֹתַי מִזֶּה אֶתְכֶם: (כ) וַיִּסְעוּ מִסּוּכֹת וַיִּחַנּוּ בְּאֶתְמֹת בְּקִצֵּה הַמִּדְבָּר:

3. Joshua 24:31-32

(31) Israel served the LORD during the lifetime of Joshua and the lifetime of the elders who lived on after Joshua, and who had experienced all the deeds that the LORD had wrought for Israel. (32) The bones of Joseph, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem, in the piece of ground which Jacob had bought for

יהושע כ"ד:ל"א-ל"ב

(לא) וַיַּעֲבֹד יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-ה' כָּל יְמֵי הַיְהוֹשֻׁעַ וְכָל יְמֵי הַזִּקְנָיִם אֲשֶׁר הָאָרִיכוּ יָמִים אַחֲרָיו הַיְהוֹשֻׁעַ וְאֲשֶׁר יָדְעוּ אֵת כָּל-מַעֲשֵׂה ה' אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל: (לב) וְאֶת-עַצְמוֹת יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר-הֵעֵלוּ בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם קָבְרוּ בְּשִׁכְמֹת בְּחֵלְקֵת הַשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר קָנָה יַעֲקֹב מֵאֵת בְּנֵי-חַמּוֹר אֲבֵי-שִׁכְמֹת בְּמֵאָה קֶשֶׁטִּיטָה וַיְהִי לְבְנֵי-יוֹסֵף לְנַחֲלָה:

a hundred kesitahs from the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, and which had become a heritage of the Josephites.

4. Sotah 13a

§ It states further in the mishna: **Who, to us, had a greater burial than Joseph**, as it was none other than Moses who involved himself in transporting his coffin. **The Sages taught in the Tosefta (4:6–7): Come and see how beloved mitzvot are to Moses our teacher. As, at the time of the Exodus, all the Jewish people were involved in taking the plunder from Egypt, and he was involved in the performance of mitzvot, as it is stated: “The wise in heart will take mitzvot”** (Proverbs 10:8).

The Gemara asks: **And from where did Moses our teacher know where Joseph was buried?** The Sages said: **Serah, the daughter of Asher, remained from that generation that initially descended to Egypt with Jacob. Moses went to her and said to her: Do you know anything about where Joseph is buried? She said to him: The Egyptians fashioned a metal casket for him and set it in the Nile [Nilus] River as an augury so that its water would be blessed. Moses went and stood on the bank of the Nile. He said to Joseph: Joseph, Joseph, the time has arrived about which the Holy One, Blessed be He, took an oath saying that I, i.e., God, will redeem you. And the time for fulfillment of the oath that you administered to the Jewish people that they will bury you in Eretz Yisrael has arrived. If you show yourself, it is good, but if not, we are clear from your oath. Immediately, the casket of Joseph floated to the top of the water ... Moses took it and brought it over to himself. And all those years that the Jewish people were in the wilderness, these two arks, one a casket of a dead man, Joseph, and one the Ark of the Divine Presence, i.e., the Ark of the Covenant, were traveling together, and passersby would say: What is the nature**

סוטה י"ג א

מי לנו גדול מיוסף כו' ת"ר בא וראה כמה חביבות מצות על משה רבינו שכל ישראל כולן נתעסקו בביזה והוא נתעסק במצות שנאמר (משלי י, ח) חכם לב יקח מצות וגו' ומנין היה יודע משה רבינו היכן יוסף קבור אמרו סרח בת אשר נשתיירה מאותו הדור הלך משה אצלה אמר לה כלום את יודעת היכן יוסף קבור אמרה לו ארון של מתכת עשו לו מצרים וקבעוהו בנילוס הנהר כדי שיתברכו מימיו הלך משה ועמד על שפת נילוס אמר לו יוסף יוסף הגיע העת שנשבע הקב"ה שאני גואל אתכם והגיעה השבועה שהשבעת את ישראל אם אתה מראה עצמך מוטב אם לאו הרי אנו מנוקין משבועתך מיד צף ארונו של יוסף ... נטלו משה והביאו אצלו וכל אותן שנים שהיו ישראל במדבר היו שני ארונות הללו אחד של מת ואחד של שכינה מהלכין זה עם זה והיו עוברין ושבין אומרים מה טיבן של שני ארונות הללו אמרו אחד של מת ואחד של שכינה וכי מה דרכו של מת להלך עם שכינה אמרו קיים זה כל מה שכתוב בזה

of these two arks? They said to them: One is of a dead person and one is of the Divine Presence. The passersby would ask: **And in what way is it the manner of a dead person to travel with the Divine Presence? They said** in response: **This one, i.e., the deceased Joseph, fulfilled all that is written in this.**

5. Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael 13:19

(ה) משה נתעסק בעצמות יוסף, שאין בישראל גדול ממנו, שנאמר "ויקח משה את עצמות יוסף עמו". מי לנו גדול כמשה, שלא נתעסק בו אלא שכינה, שנאמר (דברים לד) "ויקבור אותו בגיא"! ולא עוד, אלא שעם יעקב עלו עבדי פרעה וזקני ביתו – ועם יוסף הארון והשכינה והכהנים והלוויים וכל ישראל ושבעה ענני כבוד. ולא עוד, אלא שהיה מהלך ארונו של יוסף עם ארון חי העולמים, והיו עוברים ושבים אומרים: מה טיבן של שני ארונות הללו? והם אומרים להם: זה ארונו של מת, וזה ארונו של חי העולמים. ואומרים להם: מה טיבו של מת להלוך עם ארון חי העולמים? – ואומרים להם: המונח בארון זה – קיים מה שכתוב במונח בארון זה.

(ו) במונח בארון זה כתיב (שמות כ) "אנכי ה' אלקיך", וביוסף כתיב (בראשית נ) "התחת אלקים אני". במונח בארון זה כתיב (שמות כ) "לא יהיה לך אלקים אחרים", וביוסף כתיב (בראשית מב) "את האלקים אני ירא". (שמות כ) "לא תשא", וביוסף כתיב (בראשית מב) "חי פרעה". (שמות כ) "זכור את יום השבת", וביוסף כתיב (בראשית מג) "וטבוח טבח והכן", ואין "הכן" אלא ערב שבת – כתיב הכא והכן וכתב התם (שמות טז) "והיה ביום הששי והכינו". (שמות כ) "כבד את אביך", וביוסף כתיב (בראשית לז) "ויאמר ישראל אל יוסף הלא אחיך רועים בשכם, לך ואשלחך אליהם, ויאמר לו הנני – יודע היה שאחיו שונאים אותו, ולא רצה לעבור על דברי אביו. (שמות כ) "לא תרצח", לא רצח לפוטיפר. (שמות כ) "לא תנאף", לא נאף לאשת פוטיפר. (שמות כ) "לא תגנוב", לא גנב פרעה, שנאמר (בראשית מז) "וילקט יוסף את כל הכסף" וגו'. (שמות כ) "לא תענה ברעך", ויוסף לא הגיד לאביו מה שעשו לו אחיו. והרי דברים ק"ו: ומה דבר של אמת לא ענה, של שקר על אחת כמה וכמה! (שמות כ) "לא תחמוד", שלא חמד אשת פוטיפר.

(ז) כתיב (ויקרא יט) "לא תשנא", וביוסף אומר (בראשית נ) "וינחם אותם וידבר על לבם". כתיב (ויקרא יט) "לא תקום ולא תטור", וכתב (בראשית נ) "ואתם חשבתם עלי רעה אלקים חשבה לטובה". (ויקרא כה) "וחי אחיך עמך", (בראשית מז) "ויכלכל יוסף את אביו".

(5) Moses occupied himself with the bones of Joseph, there being none in Israel greater than he (Moses), viz. "And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him." Who was there among us greater than Moses, who was attended by the Shechinah Himself, viz. (Devarim 34:6) "And He buried him in the valley." And, what is more, with (the casket of) Jacob there went up the servants of Pharaoh and the elders of his household, while with Joseph there went up the ark and the Shechinah and the Cohanim and the Levites and all of Israel and the seven clouds of glory. And, what is more, the casket of Joseph went alongside the ark of "the Life of the Worlds" (i.e., the Ten Commandments), and when the passersby asked: What are these two arks? they were told: This is the ark of a dead man and the other is the ark of "the Life of the Worlds." And when they asked: How is it that the ark of a dead man goes alongside the ark of "the Life of the Worlds"? they were told: He who lies in this ark fulfills what is written in what lies in the other ark. ...

(6) In what lies in the other ark it is written (Exodus 20) "I am the L rd your G d," and of Joseph it is written (Genesis 50:19) "Am I in the place of G d?" In what lies in this ark it is written (Exodus 20) "There shall not be before you any other gods," and of Joseph it is written (Genesis 42:18) "It is G d whom I fear." (Exodus 20) "You shall not take the name of

the L rd your G d in vain." And of Joseph it is written (Genesis 42:15) "By the life of Pharaoh," (Joseph not swearing by "the life" of the L rd.) (Exodus 20) "Remember the Sabbath day." Joseph (Genesis 42:16) "slaughter an animal and prepare it," "prepare" alluding to Sabbath eve, it being written here "prepare," and elsewhere (Exodus 16:5) "And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare." (Exodus 20) "Honor your father." Joseph (Genesis 37:13) "And Israel said to Joseph: Are your brothers not grazing (the sheep) in Shechem? Go, and I will send you to them. And he said to him: Here I am" (at your service). Joseph knew that his brothers hated him, but he would not transgress the words of his father. (Exodus 20) "You shall not kill." He did not kill Potiphar (even though he could have.) (Exodus 20) "You shall not commit adultery." He did not commit adultery with the wife of Potiphar. (Exodus 20) "You shall not steal." He did not rob Pharaoh, viz. (Genesis 47:14) "And Joseph collected all of the money, etc." (Exodus 20) "You shall not testify falsely against your neighbor." Joseph did not tell his father what his brothers had done to him. Now does this not follow a fortiori, viz.: If he did not testify (against them) even truthfully, how much more so, falsely! (Exodus 20) "You shall not covet." He did not covet Potiphar's wife. (7) It is written (Leviticus 19:17) "Do not hate your brother in your heart." And of Joseph it is written (Genesis 50:21) "And he counseled them and he spoke to their hearts." It is written (Leviticus 19:18) "You shall not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge," and (in respect to Joseph, Genesis 50:20) "And you contemplated evil against me, but G d contemplated it for the good." (Leviticus 25:36) "And let your brother live with you." (Genesis 47:12) "And Joseph sustained his father and his brothers, etc."

6. Bava Kamma 17a

The Sages taught a *baraita* that offers another interpretation of the verse cited: **“And afforded him [lo] honor in his death”** (II Chronicles 32:33). This is referring to the honor given to **Hezekiah, king of Judea, that** at his burial **36,000 men with bared shoulders went out before him**. They removed their robes from their shoulders as a sign of mourning. The number 36,000 is alluded to by the numerical value of the word *lo*, which is thirty-six. This is **the statement of Rabbi Yehuda**. **Rabbi Neḥemya said to him: But didn’t they also do this before Ahab?** Apparently, if they did this for the wicked king Ahab, it is an honor shown to all kings, and it is was not a unique show of honor for the righteous Hezekiah.

Rather, the honor that was done for Hezekiah was **that they laid a Torah scroll upon his bier and they said: This one, i.e., Hezekiah, fulfilled that which is written in this, i.e., the Torah scroll**.

The Gemara asks: **But nowadays as well,**

בבא קמא י"ז א

ת"ר וכבוד עשו לו במותו זה חזקיה מלך יהודה שיצאו לפניו שלשים וששה אלף חלוצי כתף דברי ר' יהודה
א"ל ר' נחמיה והלא לפני אחאב עשו כן אלא שהניחו ס"ת על מטתו ואמרו קיים זה מה שכתוב בזה
והאידנא נמי עבדינן הכי אפוקי מפקינן אנוחי לא מנחינן ואיבעית אימא אנוחי נמי מנחינן קיים לא אמרינן
אמר רבה בר בר חנה הוה אזילנא בהדיה דר' יוחנן למשאל שמעתא כי הוה עייל לבית הכסא והוה בעינא מיניה מלתא לא פשיט לן עד דמשי ידיה ומנח תפילין ומברך והדר אמר לן אפילו קיים אמרינן לימד לא אמרינן

we do this for any great Torah scholar that dies, so what is unique about what was done to honor Hezekiah? The Gemara answers: Nowadays, **we take** a Torah scroll **out** but **we do not lay** it on the bier of the deceased. **And if you wish, say** instead that nowadays **we also lay** a Torah scroll on the bier of the deceased; but **we do not say:** This one **fulfilled** that which is written in this.

Rabba bar bar Ḥana said: I was once walking together with Rabbi Yoḥanan to ask him about this statement. Whenever he would enter a lavatory, upon his exit I would ask him to explain a matter, and he would not answer us until he had washed his hands and donned his phylacteries and made the blessing, and only then would he answer us. With regard to the honor given to King Hezekiah, he said: Nowadays, **we even say:** This one **fulfilled** that which is written in this, but **we do not say: He taught** that which is written in this, which was a unique honor performed at the burial of the righteous King Hezekiah.

7. Moed Katan 25a

§ The Gemara relates another incident: **When Rav Huna died they thought to place a Torah scroll on his bier,** as was commonly done after the death of a Torah scholar, as if to say that the deceased fulfilled everything written in the scroll. **Rav Ḥisda said to them: This is a practice that he did not hold with during his lifetime; now should we stand up and do it for him** when he is dead? **As Rav Taḥlifa said: I myself saw Rav Huna, who wished to sit on his bed, and there was a Torah scroll placed on it. And he turned a jug over and placed the Torah scroll on it** so that he could then sit on the bed. **Apparently he holds that it is prohibited to sit on a bed upon which a Torah scroll lies.** Therefore, it would be inappropriate to lay a Torah scroll next to his body after he died.

מועד קטן כ"ה א

כי נח נפשיה דרב הונא סבור לאותובי ספר תורה אפורייה אמר להו רב חסדא מילתא דבחייה לא סבירא ליה השתא ליקום (ליה) ליעבד ליה דאמר רב תחליפא אנא חזיתיה לרב הונא דבעי למיתב אפורי' והוה מנח ספר תורה עליה וכף כדא אארעא ואותיב ספר תורה עילוייה אלמא קסבר אסור לישוב על גבי מטה שספר תורה מונח עליה

8. Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 353:2

(2) A scroll of Law is not placed on a scholar's bier. *Be'er Heitev: Should, however, the scroll of Law be placed on a stool or the like in the presence of the dead, it would be permissible.*

9. Avodah Zarah 18a

The Sages said: **Not even a few days passed before Rabbi Yosei ben Kisma died of his illness, and all of the Roman notables went to bury him, and they eulogized him with a great eulogy. And upon their return, they found Rabbi Ḥanina ben Teradyon, who was sitting and engaging in Torah study and convening assemblies in public, with a Torah scroll placed in his lap.**

They brought him to be sentenced, and wrapped him in the Torah scroll, and encircled him with bundles of branches, and they set fire to it. And they brought tufts of wool and soaked them in water, and placed them on his heart, so that his soul should not leave his body quickly, but he would die slowly and painfully. His daughter said to him: Father, must I see you like this? Rabbi Ḥanina ben Teradyon said to her: If I alone were being burned, it would be difficult for me, but now that I am burning along with a Torah scroll, He who will seek retribution for the insult accorded to the Torah scroll will also seek retribution for the insult accorded to me.

His students said to him: Our teacher, what do you see? Rabbi Ḥanina ben Teradyon said to them: I see the parchment burning, but its letters are flying to the heavens. They said to him: You too should open your mouth and the fire will enter you, and you will die quickly. Rabbi Ḥanina ben Teradyon said to them: It is preferable that He who gave me my soul should take it away, and one should not harm oneself to speed his death.

The executioner [kaltzatoniri] said to him:

יורה דעה שני"ג:ב'

(ב) אין מניחין ספר תורה על מטתו של חכם.

עבודה זרה י"ח א

אמרו לא היו ימים מועטים עד שנפטר רבי יוסי בן קיסמא והלכו כל גדולי רומי לקברו והספידוהו הספד גדול ובחזרתן מצאוהו לרבי חנינא בן תרדיון שהיה יושב ועוסק בתורה ומקהיל קהלות רבים וס"ת מונח לו בחיקו הביאוהו וכרכוהו בס"ת והקיפוהו בחבילי זמורות והציתו בהן את האור והביאו ספוגין של צמר ושראום במים והניחום על לבו כדי שלא תצא נשמתו מהרה אמרה לו בתו אבא אראך בכך אמר לה אילמלי אני נשרפתי לבדי היה הדבר קשה לי עכשיו שאני נשרף וס"ת עמי מי שמבקש עלבונה של ס"ת הוא יבקש עלבוני אמרו לו תלמידיו רבי מה אתה רואה אמר להן גליון נשרפין ואותיות פורחות אף אתה פתח פ"ך ותנס בך האש אמר להן מוטב שיטלנה מי שנתנה ואל יחבל הוא בעצמו אמר לו קלצטונירי רבי אם אני מרבה בשלהבת ונוטל ספוגין של צמר מעל לבך אתה מביאני לחיי העולם הבא אמר לו הן השבע לי נשבע לו מיד הרבה בשלהבת ונטל ספוגין של צמר מעל לבו יצאה נשמתו במהרה אף הוא קפץ ונפל לתוך האור

יצאה בת קול ואמרה רבי חנינא בן תרדיון וקלצטונירי מזומנין הן לחיי העולם הבא בכה רבי ואמר יש קונה עולמו בשעה אחת ויש קונה עולמו בכמה שנים

My teacher, if I increase the flame and take off the tufts of wool from your heart, so that you will die sooner and suffer less, **will you bring me to the life of the World-to-Come?** Rabbi Ḥanina ben Teradyon **said to the executioner: Yes.** The executioner said: **Take an oath for me,** that what you say is true. Rabbi Ḥanina ben Teradyon **took the oath for him,** and the executioner **immediately increased the flame and took off the tufts of wool from his heart,** causing **his soul to leave his body quickly.** The executioner **too leaped and fell into the fire** and died.

A Divine Voice emerged and said: Rabbi Ḥanina ben Teradyon and the executioner are destined for the life of the World-to-Come. Upon hearing this, **Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi wept and said: There is one who acquires his share in the World-to-Come in one moment,** such as the executioner, **and there is one who acquires his share in the World-to-Come only after many years of toil,** such as Rabbi Ḥanina ben Teradyon.

10. Abraham Joshua Heschel, The Spirit of Jewish Education

What we need more than anything else is not textbooks but textpeople. It is the personality of the teacher which is the text that the pupils read; the text that they will never forget. The modern teacher, while not wearing a snowy beard, is a link in the chain of a tradition. He is the intermediary between the past and the present as well. Yet he is also the creator of the future of our people. He must teach the pupils to evaluate the past in order to clarify their future.