



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

B'SHALACH

He Made His Own coffin

In his dying moments, Yosef made the Israelites promise that they would carry his remains with them when they finally left Egypt to return to the Promised Land. To make this possible, "they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt" (B'reishit 50:25-26).

Ibn Ezra points out that the Hebrew uses the definite article - not "a" but "the" coffin - i.e. the coffin he had prepared for himself.

Many years later, say the Sages, when the departure from Egypt was imminent, Moshe spent three days and nights vainly hunting for this coffin.

Eventually, Serach bat Asher, the last survivor of Yosef's generation and by then a very old lady, met Moshe and asked why he looked so weary.

When Moshe told her, she took him to the Nile and said that when Yosef died the Egyptians, knowing the Israelites could not leave without Yosef's remains, put Yosef's coffin in

another, leaden coffin and sank it in the Nile.

Moshe thereupon took Yosef's cup and cut four plates out of it. On one he engraved a lion, on the second an eagle, on the third a bull, and on the fourth a human figure. He threw the first into the water and implored Yosef to show himself, but without result. He repeated this procedure with the second and third plate, but still nothing happened.

Finally he threw in the fourth plate and implored Yosef to come up, and this time the coffin rose to the surface and the Exodus could proceed (Midrash Sh'mot Rabba 20:17).

It rarely happened in Jewish history that a family could take their ancestors' or dear ones' remains with them when they moved from country to country.

Tragically, the sacred spots where Jewish families had buried their dead were often desecrated by a heartless enemy who had respect for no-one, neither the dead nor the living.

This is all the more reason to ensure that wherever we are we conserve and preserve Jewish cemeteries and never let them decay or disintegrate.

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Miracles & Manna

The food that sustained the Israelites in the wilderness was called manna because they wondered, MAN HU? - "What is it?"

Each day it covered the ground like hoar frost. Ground into flour and baked into cakes, it tasted like honey wafers (Sh'mot 16:31).

In later centuries travellers claimed they had come across it. Near Durban in 1932, for example, there was a fall of a white snow-like substance that looked like popcorn and tasted like honey. Some of our own generation compare it to tofu, a utility food with a versatile taste depending on how you prepare it.

Moshe said to Aharon, "Take a jar and put in it an omer of manna, and lay it up before the Lord, to be kept throughout your generations" (16:33) - the first food museum in history, maybe the first museum of any kind.

What was in Moshe's mind when he told Aharon to "lay up" the manna?

One answer is hinted at in the sidra. The narrative goes from the drama at the Red Sea to the daily provision of manna. Obviously the crossing of the Red Sea was a miracle. So was the manna.

It showed God's constant care for His creatures. As the Siddur says, "Your

miracles are with us every day, Your wonders and favours at all times".

Those who wonder why miracles only happened in ancient times are making a false assumption. Miracles have never ceased, especially the gift of life and the capacity to love, think, create, conserve, tend the universe and succour human beings.

It is these daily wonders which the jar of manna was meant to symbolise.

-OZ

Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH