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Tethered to Redemption

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Considerable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the translation while maintaining its clarity. However, as in all translations, inadvertent errors may occur.

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1.

YAAKOV'S COFFIN

In his commentary on the verse,¹ “His sons carried him” — regarding Yaakov’s sons carrying his coffin “to the land of Canaan” — Rashi clarifies the arrangement of Yaakov’s sons when they carried the coffin:²

He assigned them places: three to the east {of the coffin}, and likewise for all four directions. They were assigned {their places around the coffin} here, in the same order as their camp would {later} march under banners.³

Rashi continues to say that Yaakov gave the following directive:

Levi shall not carry my coffin, for he is destined to carry the Ark; and Yosef shall not carry it, for he is a king. In their stead, Menasheh and Efraim shall carry it.

This needs to be clarified: How does Yaakov’s directive that “Yosef shall not carry it” fit with the explicit oath that Yaakov made Yosef swear,⁴ “**You shall transport me** out of Egypt”? In other words, the obligation of carrying Yaakov’s coffin fell (primarily) upon Yosef. Surely, Yosef had to do everything within his power to fulfill this oath, including the terms of the oath — “**you shall transport me**” — according to the straightforward meaning!⁵

We also need to clarify why Levi was exempt: The tribe of Levi would carry the Ark of Testimony in the distant **future** (after the period during which the Jews were enslaved and oppressed in Egypt).⁶ Moreover, this role applied not to Levi himself but to his descendants. Levi lived in an earlier generation, and it would only be much later, in the generation preceding “the **fourth** generation,”⁷ that the Levites would carry the Ark. Why would this exempt Levi from carrying his father’s coffin? (In general, showing unrequited kindness to the dead by carrying their coffin is a **mitzvah**,⁸ and particularly in this case, since it was his father’s coffin.)

¹ *Bereishis* 50:13.

² {Rashi on *Bereishis* 50:13.}

³ {The way the Tribes were positioned vis-a-vis the Ark when they traveled in the desert following the Exodus.}

⁴ *Bereishis* 47:30.

⁵ See *Paneach Raza* on *Bereishis* 50:10, in the note.

⁶ *Bereishis* 15:13.

⁷ *Bereishis* 15:16; see Rash, ad loc.

⁸ See *Berachos* 17b (mishnah); see *Mordechai*, cited in *Beis Yosef*, “*Orach Chaim*,” beg. of sec. 72; Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 72, par. 1.

2.

LEVI AND YOSEF'S EMISSARIES

The explanation:

Rashi himself forestalls these questions by adding, “**In their stead**, Menasheh and Efraim shall carry it.” By adding this qualifying phrase, Rashi intends to clarify that not only did Menasheh and Efraim take Levi and Yosef’s places in terms of completing the twelve pallbearers, but that Menasheh and Efraim were “in their stead” — in place of Levi and Yosef, as their **emissaries**. This means that from the perspective of their physical bodies — their actual hands — Levi and Yosef did not carry Yaakov’s coffin. Nonetheless, Levi and Yosef did fulfill the mitzvah of carrying Yaakov’s coffin through **their emissaries**, who acted in the place of their dispatchers.

On this basis, another issue becomes better understood. Rashi begins his commentary by saying, “*His sons carried him* — but not his grandsons.” But Rashi then goes on to say that Menasheh and Efraim, though, carried Yaakov’s coffin!⁹

[Although Rashi clarifies at the beginning of his commentary, “For thus did Yaakov command them: ‘Do not allow any Egyptian man, nor any of your sons, **for they are from the daughters of Canaan**’” (and Menasheh and Efraim were the children of Osnas {and thus, this restriction did not apply to them}), Yaakov also made a positive statement, as Rashi explains: “Only you.”]

However, since Menasheh and Efraim carried Yaakov’s coffin “in their stead” — only as Levi and Yosef’s emissaries — this aligns with the verse “**His sons** carried him” — “you.” Meaning, the carrying of Yaakov’s coffin was attributed to those who sent the emissaries — Levi and Yosef — based on the principle (which Rashi also cites in his Torah commentary):¹⁰ “A person’s emissary is like the person himself.”

⁹ Although Yaakov had already said (in our *parshah* {*Bereishis*} 48:5), “Your two sons... will be considered mine, Efraim and Menasheh will be to me like Reuven and Shimon,” Rashi explains this means that “they will be counted with the rest of my sons, in terms of receiving a portion in the land, each in accordance with with his counterpart.” (See the commentators on Rashi for an extended discussion of this thought.) However, regarding other matters, they were not considered as Yaakov’s sons.

¹⁰ Rashi on *Shemos* 12:6; *Vayikra* 24:14; see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 7, p. 162 ff., and fn. 30, ad. loc.

3.

AN ISSUE WITH RASHI

However, this requires clarification (on a deeper level): It makes sense that Menasheh and Efraim substituted for Yosef since children take their father's place. However, what connection did Menasheh and Efraim have with **Levi** that enabled them to do so?

This will be understood by first addressing the issue raised by commentators¹¹ regarding Rashi's words, "Levi shall not carry it, for he is destined to carry the Ark": Scripture says that Moshe carried Yosef's Ark, as the verse explicitly states,¹² "Moshe took Yosef's bones with him...", even though Moshe was a Levite. Moreover, Moshe was from the family of Kehas, the Levite family responsible for actually carrying the Ark!

4.

PREVENTING ENSLAVEMENT

The explanation of all these difficulties:

As known, the Jewish people's **enslavement** in Egypt began after Yaakov's passing. As Rashi says at the beginning of the *parshah*,¹³ "Once our forefather Yaakov passed away, the eyes and hearts of the Jewish people were closed due to the suffering of the enslavement,¹⁴ for it was then that the Egyptians started to enslave them."

Yaakov's presence in Egypt had kept the "suffering of the enslavement" at bay, preventing the Egyptian exile. During his lifetime, only the descent (exile) from Canaan occurred.

As long as Yaakov lived, the Jewish people lacked nothing in Egypt. On the contrary, as Yosef had promised,¹⁵ "And I will give you the **best** of the land of Egypt... the choicest of the land."

¹¹ *Chizkuni*, cited in *Riva* on Rashi, *Bereishis* 50:13.

¹² *Shemos* 13:19.

¹³ {Rashi on *Bereishis* 47:28.}

¹⁴ But the actual enslavement began only after the death of Levi, as Rashi writes in his commentary on *Bereishis* 6:16 (cited below in the main text). See the commentaries on Rashi (*Re'em*, *Gur Aryeh*, *Divrei David*, *Maskil LeDavid* and others) at the beg. of *parshas Vayechi*; *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 15, p. 424, fn. 14.

¹⁵ *Bereishis* 45:18.

Thus, it is understood that removing Yaakov from Egypt (to bury him in the land of Israel) was another step that allowed for the possibility of exile and Egyptian enslavement.

On this basis, it is understood why Levi and Yosef did not (actually) participate in carrying Yaakov's coffin out of Egypt:

Levi and Yosef shared a common trait — both transcended enslavement in Egypt and impeded the onset of Egyptian servitude.

Regarding Yosef, the Midrash says:¹⁶

As long as Yosef lived, they did not bear the Egyptian burden. Once Yosef died, the burden¹⁷ was placed on them. Therefore, the verse says,¹⁸ “Who came,”¹⁹ as if they entered Egypt that day.

Regarding Levi, **Rashi** says:²⁰

Why were the years of Levi counted? To allow us to calculate the length of the enslavement. For as long as any of the brothers lived, there was no enslavement.²¹ As the verse intimates,²² “Yosef and all his brothers died,” and only subsequently,²³ “a new king arose”; and **Levi** outlived all of his brothers.²⁴

Moreover, regarding the tribe of Levi, we find that even after the enslavement and hardships began for all the Jewish people, “The servile labor of Egypt was not imposed upon the tribe of Levi.”²⁵

¹⁶ *Shemos Rabbah*, ch. 1, par. 4; *Midrash Tanchuma*, “*Shemos*,” sec. 3.

¹⁷ But not the **enslavement**; see fn. 15 above; the commentaries on the *Midrash*, ad. loc.; *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 6, p. 28.

¹⁸ *Shemos* 1:1.

¹⁹ {Lit. “who were coming”; in the present, perfect continuous tense.}

²⁰ Rashi on *Shemos* 6:16.

²¹ *Shemos Rabbah*, ch. 1, par. 8.

²² *Shemos* 1:6.

²³ *Shemos* 1:8.

²⁴ Since nothing happens by chance, Heaven forbid, it is understood that “Levi outlived all his brothers,” and “as long as Levi was alive, the Jews were not enslaved to Egypt... and after Levi died, the Egyptians begin to enslave them” (*Seder Olam Rabbah*, ch. 3), because Levi's essential nature was antithetical to the Egyptian bondage (more than the other tribes).

²⁵ Rashi on *Shemos* 5:4; see *Shemos Rabbah*, ch. 5, par. 16; *Midrash Tanchuma*, “*Vaeira*,” sec. 6.

5.

CLARIFYING FURTHER

On this basis, it is understood why Rashi says, concerning Yaakov's coffin, "Levi shall not carry it" and "Yosef shall not carry it": Since carrying Yaakov's coffin out of Egypt was connected with and triggered the enslavement, this task was not given to Levi and Yosef, who stood in the way of the Egyptian enslavement.

This is alluded to in the above mentioned reasons: "Levi shall not carry it, for he is destined **to carry the Ark**; and Yosef shall not carry it, for he is a **king**."

Commentators explain²⁶ that the tribe of Levi was not subjected to enslavement because they were destined to carry the Ark. ("The tribe of Levi were scholars and did not want to perform labor since they knew they were destined to carry the Ark, and consequently, they were free men.")²⁷ Their vocation — "to carry the Ark" — prevented their enslavement.

Since Yosef was "a king," he was not subject to Egyptian domination. On the contrary, it was he who ruled over Egypt, making it clear that Egyptian **slavery** could not occur {as long as he lived}.

In contrast, "Moshe took Yosef's bones with him" because, **on the contrary**, this was both a precondition for and something closely related to redemption. As it says,²⁸ "For he had adjured..., Hashem will surely remember you, and you shall bring my bones up from here with you." Consequently, redemption was **explicitly** associated with the tribe of Levi. Moreover, redemption was linked with the leader of the tribe of Levi — our teacher Moshe, the redeemer of Israel.

6.

ADDITIONAL CLARIFICATION

On this basis, we need to clarify the other side of the coin: Since Levi and Yosef did not carry Yaakov's coffin out of Egypt, as this was antithetical to their innate character, why did they need emissaries — "Menasheh and Efraim shall be in their stead"? Furthermore, in what respect **could** these emissaries be considered "**like them**"?!

²⁶ *Tosafos (Hadar Zekainim) on Shemos 1:13; Chizkuni on Shemos 5:4.*

²⁷ *Tosafos (Hadar Zekainim) on Shemos 1:13.*

²⁸ *Shemos 13:19.*

This issue can be understood by first addressing the following question: Since it was decreed at the “Covenant between the Parts” that “**Your offspring** shall be sojourners in a land not their own, they will enslave them, and they will oppress them for four hundred years,”²⁹ how did it come to be that one tribe was exempt?³⁰

Moreover, the promise,³¹ “And afterward, they shall leave with great wealth,” was contingent on prior servitude (as Rashi says,³² “So that that righteous man Avraham should not say, ‘He fulfilled in them the decree, *They will enslave them, and they will oppress them*, but He did not fulfill for them, *And afterward, they shall leave with great wealth*’”).

7.

A NECESSARY COMPONENT

We can clarify this as follows:

The tribe of Levi was exempted from servile labor not because they had no connection with the Egyptian exile. On the contrary, their exemption was a component of the Jewish people’s enslavement:

The purpose of Egyptian slavery for the Jewish people was not punitive, Heaven forbid. As stated in Scripture, the purpose was, “and I shall bring you up.”³³ Its purpose was for the Jewish people to **grow** as a consequence of their slavery. [Egypt was an “iron **crucible**”³⁴ — similar to a crucible in the plain sense of the word — which refined the Jewish people.]

However, due to the harshness of the servitude, there was a risk. Perhaps the Jewish people would not attain the elevation (through this enslavement). Perhaps they might plunge into the depravity of Egypt, a place called “the nakedness of the land.”³⁵ —

Therefore, there needed to be a segment of the Jewish people who surmounted the impending enslavement. This group would **inspire** all the Jewish people to fulfill the Divine purpose: “We came down,”³⁶ “They will enslave them” — so that “I shall bring you up,” and “They shall leave with great wealth.”

²⁹ *Bereishis* 15:13.

³⁰ As *Gur Aryeh* asks, in his commentary on *Shemos* 4:5.

³¹ {*Bereishis* 15:14.}

³² Rashi on *Shemos* 11:2 from *Berachos* 9a ff.

³³ *Bereishis* 46:4.

³⁴ *Devarim* 4:20.

³⁵ *Bereishis* 42:9, 12.

³⁶ {*Bereishis* 43:20.}

This was the mission of the tribe of Levi. As *Ramban* explains,³⁷ “The custom of every people is for wise men to teach its laws. Therefore, Pharaoh spared the tribe of Levi, the wise men and elders of the Jewish people, but **Hashem was the cause** of all this.”

Accordingly, the correct understanding is not that some of the Jewish people were not **subject** to the Egyptian enslavement — the Jewish people came to Egypt as one nation, one entity [in line with the nuanced wording of the verse,³⁸ “All **the soul** (in the singular)... who came to Egypt (— seventy)”].

Instead, it was a kind of “partnership” that enabled the Jewish people to endure enslavement. [Each “partner” did his part, which was also for the benefit of the second “partner.”] The interplay was similar to how every limb of a body and its soul fulfills its **own** function to promote the welfare of the entire soul and its overall mission.

Many Jews performed **actual** servile labor necessary to attain this elevation. The tribe of Levi partnered by providing the **strength**, being “**the teachers** of Torah (to all the Children of Israel),”³⁹ ensuring that the people did not succumb to hardships. In fact, the tribe of Levi helped the rest of the Jewish people (through enslavement) achieve this growth.

A similar relationship continued after the Giving of the Torah, during their journeys in the desert, and also after they entered the land of Israel:

The tribe of Levi received no portion or inheritance in the land of Israel.⁴⁰ Instead, “they were appointed to serve Hashem, to minister to Him, **and to teach** His just paths and righteous ways to the **multitude**”⁴¹ — “Hashem is their inheritance.”⁴² This role was conveyed simply by their service and ministry in the Sanctuary, including their vocation of carrying the Ark.

This came about because “**they were all charged** with {tending to} the needs of the Sanctuary, but the Levites came **in their stead, as their emissaries.**”⁴³ Conversely, the other tribes of Israel, through their divine service **while in the world**, remodeled it into a home for Hashem.

³⁷ *Ramban* on *Shemos* 5:4; *Rabbeinu Bachya* on *Shemos* 5:4; see *Chizkuni* on *Shemos* 5:4.

³⁸ *Bereishis* 46:27.; see *Rashi* on *Bereishis* 46:26.

³⁹ See *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Avodah Zarah*,” ch. 1, par. 3: Yaakov taught all his children. He selected Levi and appointed him as the leader. He established him [as the head of] the academy to teach.... He commanded his sons that the leadership should not depart from the descendants of Levi, so that the teachings would not be forgotten.... {As the stay of the Jews in Egypt was prolonged, however, the Jews learned from the (Egyptians’) deeds and they began worshiping the stars as the Egyptians did} with the exception of the tribe of Levi. They clung tenaciously to the mitzvos of the Patriarchs.

⁴⁰ *Devarim* 18:1-2; *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Shemitah VeYovel*,” ch. 13, par. 10.

⁴¹ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Shemitah VeYovel*,” ch. 13, par. 12.

⁴² *Devarim* 18:2.

⁴³ *Rashi* on *Bamidbar* 3:8; see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 13, p. 12 ff.

Accordingly, the tribe of Levi also merited to receive all the elevations and advantages experienced by the Jewish people through their enslavement and oppression.

8.

THE NEED FOR EMISSARIES

On this basis, we can also understand why Yosef and Levi needed Menasheh and Efraim to take their place — “Menasheh and Efraim shall be **in their stead**” — in carrying Yaakov’s coffin:

Even though Yosef and Levi themselves did not carry Yaakov’s coffin out of Egypt, as mentioned above, they still needed to **impart** the strength (to transcend the Egyptian enslavement) to the other Tribes. This was achieved through their **emissaries** participating in carrying Yaakov’s coffin.

Therefore, Yaakov chose Menasheh and Efraim to serve “in their stead” because they were an “extension” of Yosef and Levi. The strength **of** Yosef and Levi (who transcended the Egyptian enslavement) was present in their *avodah in* exile.

[This is especially poignant when considering that, in the simple sense, Menasheh and Efraim were born in the land of Egypt before Yaakov arrived there.]⁴⁴

Since Yosef and Levi represented two different approaches of non-engagement with the Egyptian enslavement (as will be explained), they also had separate “emissaries” — Menasheh and Efraim.

9.

MENASHEH AND EFRAIM

The explanation:

The verse says,⁴⁵ “These are the offspring of Yaakov: Yosef.” As explained,⁴⁶ Yaakov’s qualities were perpetuated through Yosef. Even as Yosef “had been brought down to Egypt,”⁴⁷ the exalted station of Yaakov radiated openly in him. Yaakov’s influence, which was outside

⁴⁴ *Bereishis* 48:5.

⁴⁵ *Bereishis* 37:2, see Rashi there.

⁴⁶ See for the following *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 15, p. 436, **and the sources cited there**.

⁴⁷ *Bereishis* 39:1.

the reach of Egypt, was evident in Yosef's *avodah*; therefore, Yosef was immune to Egypt's concealment and repression. Yosef ruled over Egypt and **impeded** (the concealment of) the Egyptian **exile**, as explained above.

In contrast, (the tribe of) Levi did not rule over Egypt. They lived during the Egyptian exile, during the hardships of slavery. Nevertheless, they were not submerged in it. On the contrary, the Jewish people drew their strength to endure the hardships of slavery from the tribe of Levi, as explained above. This dynamic continued until they attained the “added light from the darkness,”⁴⁸ and through Moshe and Aharon (from the tribe of Levi), the Jewish people experienced redemption. Levi had provided the power to **transform** exile.

From these two aspects (and through their emissaries) came the two types of *avodah* of Menasheh and Efraim:

This is alluded to in their names (as discussed on another occasion at length):⁴⁹

Menasheh {מְנַשֶּׁה} was so-called because: “Hashem had made me forget {נִשְׁכַּחְתִּי} all my hardship and all my father's household.”⁵⁰ This name reminded Yosef that he was now living in a place that fostered the forgetfulness of “all my father's household.” Therefore, he had to “spring away”⁵¹ from it. This name expresses his desire and determination **not** to forget but to remain firmly attached to “my father's household.”

He toiled to avoid being influenced by his surroundings by staying attached to “my father's household.”

A Jew in exile regularly reminds himself that he is in a situation that tries to make him forget “my Father's household.” This realization itself causes him **not** to forget. He realizes this is not his place. His place is in his Father's — the King's — house.

This aligns with the *avodah* of Yosef, who, in Egypt, had internalized Yaakov's influence (“my father's household”), placing him above exile and the concealment imposed by Egypt.

[We can posit that for this reason, Yosef interjected,⁵² “Not so, my father, for this one (**Menasheh**) is the firstborn; place your right hand on his head,” because from the perspective of Yosef's *avodah*, the main *avodah* was that of Menasheh.]⁵³

⁴⁸ *Koheles* 2:13.

⁴⁹ See at length, *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 15, p. 433 ff., **and the sources** cited **there**.

⁵⁰ *Bereishis* 41:51.

⁵¹ Rashi on *Bereishis* 32:33.

⁵² *Bereishis* 48:18.

⁵³ See *Noam Elimelech* on *Bereishis* 48:13.

In contrast, Efraim {אֶפְרַיִם} was given his name because: “Hashem has made me fruitful {הִפְרִינִי} **in the land** of my suffering.”⁵⁴ This highlights the elevation achieved specifically **in** the darkness of exile, to the extent that Hashem “made me fruitful.” **This avodah** stems from the *avodah* of the tribe of Levi, with whose strength and mission the Jewish people are given the ability to **transform** the darkness of exile — “But **as much as they would afflict them, they would increase, and so they would burst forth.**”⁵⁵

10.

IN PRACTICAL TERMS

It says,⁵⁶ “He who leads Yosef like a flock” — the Jewish people as a whole are referred to as “Yosef.”⁵⁷ Similarly, regarding Levi, *Rambam* writes that just like members of the tribe of Levi, “every person... who devotes his spirit... becomes holy... and Hashem will be his portion and inheritance....”⁵⁸

Every Jew possesses the power (from Yosef and Levi) to transcend exile. Not only does exile not rule over a Jew, but, on the contrary, a Jew rules over exile. There are two levels to this concept:

First comes the approach of “Yosef, for he is a king,” in the present: A Jew transcends exile and is entirely unaffected by the trials, etc., of exile.

Subsequently, we *will*, in the future, engage in the loftier approach: “Levi, for he *will* carry the Ark.” Through Torah (“the *luchos*”)⁵⁹ — the Torah of light — we will **transform** the darkness of exile into light: {We bring out} “added light **from** the darkness,” and {Hashem} “will illuminate **my darkness.**”⁶⁰

This will be revealed with the coming of our righteous Mashiach when the promise that “**the night** will shine like the day”⁶¹ will be fulfilled speedily in our days.

From a talk on Shabbos *parshas Vaaira*, 5740 (1980)

⁵⁴ *Bereishis* 41:52.

⁵⁵ *Shemos* 1:12.

⁵⁶ *Tehillim* 80:2.

⁵⁷ Rashi and *Metzudos David* on *Tehillim* 80:2.

⁵⁸ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Shemitah VeYovel*,” ch. 13, par. 13.

⁵⁹ {The two tablets, which were kept in the Ark.}

⁶⁰ *Tehillim* 18:29; clarified in Chanukah discourses (*Torah Or*, s.v., “*ki attah neiri*,” and its explanation; *Shaarei Orah*, s.v., “*ksiv ki attah neiri*”; *Or HaTorah (Yahel Or)*, *Tehillim* 18:29).

⁶¹ *Tehillim* 139:12.