

Rabbi Gewirtz's D'var Torah For Parshat B'shalach

The beginning of Parshat B'shalach maps the route by which G-d led the Jews away from Egypt, explains why a simpler route was not chosen, and identifies the means by which G-d led them on that route; a column of cloud by day and a column of fire at night. But two unrelated details are also included and written next to each other: that the Jews left armed with weapons, and that Moses fulfilled the oath taken by Joseph's brothers at Joseph's bedside, to bring his bones to Israel for burial. What could be the reason for including these two details and what could be their implied interconnection?

Rashbam explains that the Jews brought weapons because they knew that they were headed to inhabit the land of the Canaanites and expected to engage in battle. Rashbam apparently sees the verse's purpose as commending the Jews for accepting to do battle without military training, despite knowing that victory could only be obtained through G-d's miraculous intervention. One wonders where the Jews had learned this positive attitude of accepting responsibility. Throughout the months of the ten plagues, G-d had done everything for them! The Jews were merely spectators!

Perhaps this is why the Torah includes that Moshe brought out the bones of Joseph. Rabbi Ovadia Sforno explains that certainly Moshe, with so much to oversee and direct, could have delegated the transport of Joseph's bones to others. But Moshe understood that everybody was busy preparing for the journey and decided that the national responsibility to fulfill the oath to Joseph should be borne by the leader. Moshe's example of embracing responsibility may have inspired the Jewish people to act likewise, and do whatever they could to participate in the battle for the Holy Land.