

Rabbi David Wolpe's

Off The Pulpit

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You Can Take it With You

As the Israelites prepare to leave Egypt, Moses remembers the promise to carry Joseph's bones to the land of Israel (Ex. 13:9). The Rabbis note Joseph's original double phrasing to his family: "Hashbeah Hishbiah" — 'you shall surely promise' — because the promise is to be carried down through the generations.



A commitment can be taken with you, from one age to the next, with a sense of continuity and sanctity. Indeed the oath sworn to Joseph does not end there. For Moses, who took upon himself the fulfillment of the task, would never have the privilege of entering the land of Israel. He had to trust those who came after would complete the undertaking that he had begun. The Talmud teaches that one who takes upon himself an obligation and fulfills it to the extent possible, even if unable to complete it, is credited with the mitzvah.

Every Jew is given the bones of his or her ancestors, the promise and the heritage, to carry forward. You cannot take material possessions with you after you die, but you can take the spiritual gifts of those who have died with you as you live.