Hi everybody, this is Rabbi David Fohrman and you are watching Aleph Beta. Welcome to Parshat Vayigash.

This week’s parsha opens with Judah’s impassioned plea to the high Egyptian official who is really his long-lost brother Joseph. Now there’s a fascinating undercurrent, I want to argue, that lies just under the surface of Judah’s words.

What he’s saying is actually eerily reminiscent of an event that occurred a long time ago – way back in the Garden of Eden of all things. So I want to explore that echo with you. Is the echo really there, and what might it mean?

# Joseph Frames Benjamin

So the connection kinda begins with Judah’s explanation as to why Benjamin can’t stay behind in Egypt. Binyamin, of course, has been framed by Yosef for stealing his silver goblet. Yosef, this high Egyptian official, has suggested that the thief remain behind as his personal slave, while all the other brothers return to their father in Canaan. And Yehudah now begins to speak about why that can’t be allowed to happen; why Binyamin, at all costs, has to be allowed to return to his father. Here are Judah’s words:

יוכלא־ הנער לעזב אביואת־ל

The lad is unable to leave his father (Genesis 44:22)

Now, if you listen to those words, that phrase את־,אביו לעזב“to leave his father,” you know, you’ve heard that phrase before. It is constructed precisely the same way as a phrase we hear all the way back in the Garden of Eden. A phrase that describes marriage, of all things:

כןעל־ אישיעזב־ אביואת־ אמוואת־

Because of this – in other words, because Eve was formed from Adam’s rib – a man leaves behind his father and his mother (Genesis 2:24)

Kind of interesting, right: That phrase – la’azov et aviv – leaving behind father, is now showing up again, in Judah’s speech about Benjamin of all things. It’s kind of strange.

# Echoes to

Joseph

# and Benjamin's

Story

So that lone echo of Eden might be dismissed as mere coincidence, except that there is another echo too. Go back to the opening words of Judah’s speech to Joseph, and you will find him saying this:

קטן זקנים וילד זקן אב לנוישׁ־– we have an older father, and a son born to him in his old age. And then he says:

ואחיו מת ויותר הוא לבדו לאמו

His brother is dead, so he alone remains of his mother (Genesis 44:20)

“He alone remains…” Right? There’s that word in the Garden. We had a levado there too.

.לבדוWhich of course reminds you of something back

Adam was levado, alone, and God had not thought that that was very good, so He created Eve to be Adam’s companion in marriage. And now, for some reason, Judah is using that very word, levado, to describe Benjamin.

Except if these connections, if they are really there, and not just the product of our overactive imagination, they seem a little strange. Why are they there? Benjamin isn’t getting married. There’s no romance in our story. So why would such echoes exist? What is the Torah trying to tell us here?

So here’s the theory I want to share with you. Maybe the connection between these two stories has to do with what is about to happen next.

# Joseph

and Benjamin's Missing

# Connection

You see, Adam is alone… and he is about to meet Eve, another person, and what’s she going to do? She is going to complete him. And Benjamin too is “alone” and, although he doesn’t know it yet, he is about to meet his long-lost brother: He and Yehudah are about to discover that this high Egyptian official before whom they are pleading, is actually their long-lost brother, Joseph.

Which means that each of these people, Adam on the one hand, Benjamin on the other, has “another half,” as it were – a person he is deeply connected to, someone who completes him – and each is alone, sort of separated from that person.

For Adam, that person is Eve, a woman quite literally created from his own rib. Without her, he is missing something essential, he’s missing his feminine side. He is only a part of what he needs to be. With her, he is complete.

Man was once a part of his father and mother. And what makes him ready to leave that unity? Only to seek another unity. Because he understands that in order to really be whole, he has to come together with that lost rib, with that feminine side of himself, that he’s missing.

And it’s only because he understands that he’s missing that lost feminine side that he can bring himself to leave his father and mother.

כןעל־ אישיעזב־ אביואת־ אמוואת־ ודבק באשׁתו והיו לבשר אחד׃

This is why a man leaves behind his mother and his father and clings to his wife, and they become one

flesh. (Genesis 2:24)

But it is not only when we are missing a spouse that we feel alone and fragmented. We can feel only a shell of ourselves, only a part of ourselves, when we’re missing someone who, by rights, should be with us, should be at our side in our family too.

When we become estranged from someone in our family, the painful sense of loss and fragmentation is… palpable. And on the other side, when, against all odds, we find a way to seek one another out again, when brothers somehow find a way to put aside that which separates them, when they find one each other again, the pull that brings them close is magnetic, virtually irresistible.

# Joseph and Benjamin's Family Link

Benjamin and Joseph: Together, they were a deeply entwined pair – the only two children of Rachel. And yet fate would separate them. Joseph would be sold of f as a slave to Egypt. And it wasn’t just geographical distance that would separate them. Joseph would eventually become “estranged” from the family, part of a whole new culture, a whole new life.

And of course, even in Egypt, Joseph remains a God-fearing man; except in this moment, as Judah faces off against him in the episode of the silver goblet, reconciliation with his family seems to be the furthest thing from his mind.

Yosef has just framed his brothers. He’s falsely accusing them of stealing his silver goblet. Joseph seems truly estranged from his family.

But, through the power of Judah’s words, Yosef is somehow transformed. Judah describes the “aloneness” of Benjamin – him being all that is left of Rachel, their mother – and Joseph’s heart seems to melt at that portrayal.

In tears, he unmasks himself. He reveals himself to be Benjamin’s long-lost “other half.” Almost like Adam and Eve, Joseph and Benjamin, they find themselves drawn to each other. They embrace with tears of joy as they revel in their newfound sense of “completion”. They have found each other at long last.

# Joseph

Saves His Family:

# from

Benjamin to

His

# Brothers

I want to close by adding one more point: Joseph’s embrace of Benjamin is dramatic and emotional, but it also serves as a hopeful entry point into something larger. Because look what happens right after Benjamin and Joseph embrace:

וינשׁק אחיולכל־ ויבך עליהם ואחרי כן דברו אחיו אתו׃

And then he kissed all his [other] brothers, too, and cried upon them, and afterwards, his brothers spoke

with him. (Genesis 45:15)

So in the end it wasn’t just Benjamin. There was a larger circle of brothers from whom Joseph was estranged, and now Joseph, he first reaches out to Benjamin, but then reaches out to the other brothers, embraces them, and kisses them, too.

It is as if Benjamin is a kind of stepping stone for Joseph, a way back into connection with the larger family, the children of Leah, more broadly.

But here’s the thing: The conclusion of the verse we just read, is a bit odd:

ואחרי כן דברו אחיו אתו׃

And afterwards, his brothers spoke with him. (Genesis 45:15)

It seems like the ultimate anticlimax. Here are Joseph and his brothers: they haven’t seen each other for years; the brothers had thrown him in a pit; he, in turn, had very nearly taken them all as his slaves; and now they reunite in tears and hugs. And it’s all wonderful.

Why add “and afterwards, his brothers spoke with him”? Who cares about that? And besides: What did they even speak about? We don’t know, and the Torah doesn’t bother telling us. So why is it so important to relate this seemingly trivial detail?

Unless... it’s not trivial at all.

# Joseph Helps His Family Heal

Go back to the very beginning of the Joseph story, and you’ll see what’s going on. The Torah, with a grand arc, is closing a circle. Because all the way back at the beginning… the estrangement between brothers that we’ve been talking about, how did it start?

It expressed itself... through the brothers’ inability to speak to Joseph:

ויראו אחיו אתוכי־ אהב אביהם אחיומכל־ וישנאו אתו ולא יכלו דברו לשלם׃

And the brothers saw that it was he who their father loved from among all his brothers—and they hated him, and could not speak to him in peace. (Genesis 37:4)

So let’s add it all up: At the very beginning, the brothers, their hatred of Joseph, was so intense that they “could not speak to him in peace.” But now… at the end of the story, when all is said and done, what really changed, most of all?

What changed is that deafening silence in the relationship between brothers... That silence is gone. The

brothers, at long last, can speak with him again.

As we reach Vayigash, the deafening silence of hatred is finally over. Now whether the wounds of the past will truly and finally heal, or whether the reconciliation of Parshat Vayigash will prove to be merely a passing truce in a larger war, that we do not know yet.

Joseph and his brothers will spend a long time together, still, in Egypt, and what transpires between them later will decide this issue. But for now, a little slice of wholeness has been brought back into a family torn by pain.

What, in the end, did Joseph and the brothers speak about? It doesn’t even matter. Brothers are once again on speaking terms; and for now, that is a victory of unimaginable proportions.

This is Rabbi David Fohrman and welcome to Parshat Vayigash. This week's Parsha contains one of the most dramatic moments in [Sefer B'Reshit](https://www.alephbeta.org/torah/genesis), in which Yehuda comes to the aid of his brother Binyamin.

# The

Story of

# Judah and

Joseph's

# Confrontation

Binyamin is imprisoned, framed by Yosef, the brothers don't know that Yosef is Yosef, he is just a high Egyptian official. Yosef has placed his silver goblet in the sack of Binyamin and as the brothers leave the city, Yosef dispatches his armed guards to track them down.

Yehuda said, 'Search our belongings, we have nothing to hide and if you find anything, the person that's found to have taken the goblet of the king, shall die.' Well, they found the goblet in Binyamin's sack.

What Yehuda is going to say now?

Yosef says, 'No, don't worry, I am not going to kill the thief, I will just take him as my slave. The rest of you can go.' What is Yehuda is supposed to do?

Yehuda had promised his father that he would bring Binyamin back alive but he had never thought that Binyamin would steal the cup of the King, he doesn't know he was framed.

Most of us would have gone back to Yaakov and said, 'Look what we are going to do? It's true, Binyamin was taken captive. We should count ourselves lucky that Binyamin is still alive.' But that is not what Yehuda does.

Yehuda made a last-ditch attempt to save Binyamin by any means possible and those means include an impassioned speech that he makes to Yosef. In that speech, he tells the whole story, the painful story.

'You don't understand,' he said, 'Our father had already lost a child, a child of his beloved wife Rachel. If you take this last child, Binyamin, from him, the last remaining vestige of Rachel,' he says, "nafsho kshura b'nafsho," my father's soul is bound up with Binyamin's soul. If you take Binyamin from him, he'll die. Please take me instead.'

# Judah's Redemption

for

# Selling

Joseph?

There was a time when Yehuda had allowed a brother, a child of Rachel, to be sold in slavery because Father loved Rachel more, because Father loved that child more. But now would not be that time.

Now Yehuda says, I know that my father loved Rachel more than my mother. I know that he loves Binyamin more than me, I know that his soul is bound up with Binyamin but that's okay. Take me instead. Let Binyamin go back to his father.

It's perhaps Yehuda's finest moment and it succeeds in ending the long painful story of the sale of Yosef. Yosef cries, reveals who he really is, and the long charade is over.

But let me ask you this question, where else in the Torah do we hear these words "nafsho kshura b'nafsho"? One person's soul bound up with another person's soul.

So it turns out that the language appears in the book of Samuel, in Sefer Shmuel Alef, perek yud-chet, chapter 18. Let's read together some of these verses.

# Parallels to

Judah and

# Joseph's

Story

# in the Bible

The verses appear in the story of David and Goliath. In that story, Goliath, Goli'at, had threatened the first king of Israel, Shaul. No one from the Jews thought that they could fight him and then this little shepherd boy David rises to the challenge and miraculously fells the giant with a stone from his sling.

"U'chshuv David mahakot et-ha-plishti," and when David returned from killing the Philistine, "vayikach oto Avner," Avner took him, "vayviahu lifnei Shaul," and brought him before Shaul, the King, "v'rosh ha-plishti b'yado," and the head of the Philistine was in his hands. "Vayomer elav Shaul," and Shaul said, "ben mi atah ha-na'ar?" Whose child are you my son? "Vayomer David ben-avdcha Ishai bayt ha- lachmi," I am the child of Ishai from Bethlehem.

It's very strange, by the way, that Shaul should be asking this: whose child are you? The truth is Shaul knows who David is. Before this David had already played the harp for Shaul; they knew one another.

But somehow he gets this question and, by the way, listen to the question… not just 'who are you?' Whose child are you?' David's response, 'I am the child of Ishai.'

Next words: "vayihi k'chaloto l'daber el-Shaul," and after David said this to Shaul, "nefesh Yehonatan nikshra b'nefesh David," the soul of Yehonatan became bound up with the soul of David. It's like an intertwining of the souls, "vayehvehu Yehonatan k'nafsho," and Yehonatan loved him like his own self.

Here we've got these echoes, these echoes of the Yosef story. Yehuda had once talked about this. Yehuda said that Yaakov's soul was bound up with Binyamin, and now the Torah is using the same language to describe Jonathan falling in love with David.

Why are we quoting from Yosef's story? What does this mean? "Vayikachehu Shaul b'yom ha-hu," the next words, and Shaul took David that day, "lo natno lashuv bayt aviv," and didn't let him return to his father's house, kept him in the palace.

"Vayichrot Yehonatan v'David brit," and at that moment Yehonatan and David made a covenant one to the other, "b'ahavato oto k'nafsho," because Yehonatan loved him like his own self, "vayitpashet Yehonatan et-ha-me'il," and Yehonatan took off his cloak, "vayitnehu l'David," and gave it to David.

What's going on here?

What's going on is that we are hearing the ripple effects of the Yosef story because these men are the descendants of the two prime actors in the Yosef story… because who is Shaul and who is Yehonatan his

son?

Shaul is a king from the tribe of Benjamin. Oh and who is David? David is from the tribe of Yehuda. Yehuda and Benjamin one more time.

# Judah Transcends the Rivalry of

Joseph

# and His

Brothers

In the story of Yosef and his brothers, Yehuda risked his life for Binyamin. Yehuda came face-to-face with the recognition that his father loves Binyamin more, would rather have Binyamin home with him than Yehuda, and that was okay. Yehuda says, take me instead. It's okay, you can love him more.

When did Binyamin ever repay Yehuda for that? Yehonatan repays that debt because what does it look like from Yehonatan's perspective, when David comes back triumphant?

If you're Yehonatan, who is next in line to become king? You are. Who does your father love? You.

Now, who does your father love? Look at how Shaul is treating David. Shaul took him, adopted him as his own son that day, and didn't allow David to return back to his father's house. You are mine.

Shaul knows that David will one day become king and what would that mean for Yehonatan? For Yehonatan, it is the greatest threat that he could possibly imagine.

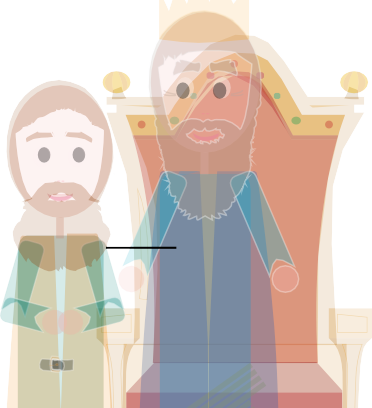
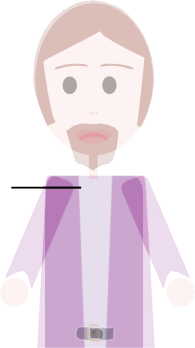
But that's not how Yehonatan sees it. "V'nefesh Yehonatan nikshra b'nefesh David." The heroism of this child of Binyamin mirrors the heroism of the original Yehuda. Yehuda had once said this for Binyamin, now a child of Binyamin will say it for Yehuda.

It's not threatening for me that Father would love another child more than me. Let Father take David, I love David like my own soul. And then he takes off his cloak. Strips himself off of his cloak and gives it to David.

What does that remind you of? Oh yes, there was a time when a child of Rachel's did have a cloak stripped by Yehuda, forcibly in the sale of Yosef.

Now, it's not forcible. Now the child of Rachel, child of Binyamin, willingly strips his cloak and gives it to the child of Yehuda. It's a moment of healing, a moment in history where at least, at that brief point, the two sides of the family were reconciled; because of the moment, when a man faced his greatest possible threat, he turned his back on his own welfare and loved his brother from the other side of the family like his own self.

The memories of the sale of Yosef run deep but the heroism of Yehonatan is that he didn't remember just the animosity, he remembered the sacrifice too; he remembered the love and in that remembrance lies Yehonatan's greatness.



**VAYIGASH: THE EPIC CONFRONTATION BETWEEN JUDAH AND JOSEPH**

Vay

igash!

Welcome to the Aleph Beta Study Guide to Parshat

**A Step Towards Healing**

Parshat Vayigash contains one of the most dramatic moments in the Book of Genesis, in which Judah comes to the aid of his brother Benjamin. Courageously, Judah stands before a high Egyptian official (who is actually his brother Joseph in disguise) and he makes an impassioned plea for Benjamin’s freedom. It’s perhaps Judah’s finest moment, a chance for him to vindicate himself after the nasty ordeal of selling his brother Joseph into slavery, all those years before. It seems to bring that long and painful story to a close, allowing the brothers -- the children of Jacob -- to finally move forward in their relationships.

But it turns out that there’s more to this story than meets the eye. Judah’s speech bears an eerie resemblance to a conversation which takes place hundreds of years later, in the land of Israel, in the king’s palace. If we want to

understand what’s really happening here in Parshat Vayigash as Judah stands up for Benjamin, we’ll need to study these two conversations in parallel.

### INSTRUCTIONS

There are a lot of divrei Torah on the parsha. How is this different?

At Aleph Beta, we believe that the Torah is a guidebook that answers life’s biggest questions, offering profound insights about how we should live our lives. Moreover, we believe that Jewish tradition has always recognized the right of all readers, in every generation, to look at the text themselves and try to decide what they think it means. That means you. That’s why you are the most important author of this quest through the sources. We think that this guide offers a fun, stimulating and relevant path through the sources, but if you get wrapped up in a stimulating discussion and never make it past page 2, we’ll consider that a success!

Is this guide for self-study or should I study it with others?

Either works! You can gather a small group of friends to explore it together, share it with a chevruta (learning partner), or go through it by yourself.

Do I need to prepare anything or can I just jump in?

Just jump in! Even if you’re planning to use this for a group discussion, just open up to page 1 and get going. (If you read it in advance, it will spoil the fun!) The only thing you should do in advance is print out copies of the “Source Sheet” for the other participants, so everyone can follow along and engage with the sources.

About the Author

Most of the material within – although not the particular language contained in this guide - was first developed and taught by Rabbi David Fohrman, founder and CEO of Aleph Beta, and is presented in his video, “Parshat Vayigash: The Epic Confrontation Between Judah and Joseph” (available for viewing at www.alephbeta.org). This guide was written by Ami Silver, edited by Rivky Stern and Beth Lesch, and arranged by Laura Schembre.

What is that other conversation? It comes from the Book of Samuel, from the story of David and Goliath. In that story, the giant Goliath had threatened the first king of Israel, Saul. No one from the Jews thought that they could fight him… and then David, a little shepherd boy, had the audacity to rise to the challenge. He miraculously felled the giant with a stone from his sling. Saul was suddenly very curious to know more about this new hero in Israel. But whatever does this have to do with Judah?

### LOOK INSIDE: Comparing The Verses



Take a look at this account of David, Saul and Saul’s son Jonathan, and compare it to Judah’s speech (both accounts are below). Can you find any words or phrases which are repeated?

## THE DAVID STORY THE JUDAH STORY

**1 Samuel 17:57 - 18:4**

**שמואל א יז:נז–יח:ד**

**Genesis 44:30-34**

**בראשית מד:ל-לד**

**נז** ּו ְכ ׁש ּוב ָ ּד ִוד, ֵמ ַה ּכ ֹות ֶאת-ה ְּפ ִל ׁ ְש ִּתי, ַו ִ ּי ַּקח אֹת ֹו ַא ְב ֵנר,

**ל** ְו ַע ָּתה, ּכב ִאי ֶאל-ע ְב ְ ּד ָך ָא ִבי, ְו ַה ַּנ ַער, ֵאי ֶנ ּנ ּו ִא ָּתנ ּו; ְו ַנ ְפ ׁש ֹו,

ו ְי ִב ֵאהו ל ְפ ֵני ׁ ָשאול; ְורֹא ׁש ה ְּפ ִל ׁ ְש ִּתי, ּב ָיד ֹו. **נח** ַו ּיֹאמֶר

ק ׁש ּורָה ב ַנ ְפ ׁש ֹו. **לא** ְו ָה ָיה, ּכ ְראות ֹו ּכי-אין ה ַּנ ַער--ו ֵמת;

א ָליו ָשאול, ּבן-מי ַא ָּתה ה ָּנ ַער; ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ָ ּד ִוד, ּבן-ע ְב ְ ּד ָך ִי ׁ ַשי

והו ִריד ּו ֲע ָב ֶדי ָך ֶאת- ֵׂשי ַבת ַע ְב ְ ּד ָך ָא ִבינ ּו, ּב ָיג ֹון-- ׁשאֹ ָלה. **לב**

**א** ַו ְי ִהי, ּכ ַכ ּלֹת ֹו ל ַד ֵּבר ֶאל- ׁשאול, ְו ֶנ ֶפ ׁש ְיהו ָנ ָתן,ּבית ה ַּל ְחמִי.

ּכי ַע ְב ְ ּד ָך ָע ַרב ֶאת-ה ַּנ ַער, ֵמ ִעם ָא ִבי ֵלאמֹר: אם-לֹא ֲא ִבי ֶא ּנ ּו

נ ְק ׁ ְש ָרה ּב ֶנ ֶפ ׁש ָ ּד ִוד; ויאהב ֶו ( ַאו ּיֱ ה ֵבהו) ְיהו ָנ ָתן, ּכ ַנ ְפ ׁש ֹו. **ב**

א ֶלי ָך, ְו ָח ָטאתי ל ָא ִבי ּכל-ה ָ ּי ִמים. **לג** ְו ַע ָּתה, ֵי ׁ ֶשב-נא ַע ְב ְ ּד ָך

ו ִ ּי ָּק ֵחהו ׁ ָשאול, ּב ּי ֹום ההוא; ְולֹא ְנ ָתנ ֹו, ָל ׁש ּוב ּבית ָא ִביו. **ג**

ַת ַחת ה ַּנ ַער--ע ֶבד, ַלאדֹ ִני; ְו ַה ַּנ ַער, ַי ַעל ִעם-א ָחיו. **לד** ּכי-איְך

ו ִ ּי ְכ ֹרת ְיהו ָנ ָתן ְו ָד ִוד, ּב ִרית, ּב ַא ֲה ָבת ֹו אֹת ֹו, ּכ ַנ ְפ ׁש ֹו. **ד** ַו ִ ּיתְ ַּפ ׁ ֵּשט

אעֱ לה ֶאל-א ִבי, ְו ַה ַּנ ַער ֵאי ֶנ ּנ ּו א ִּתי: ֶפן ֶא ְר ֶאה ב ָרע, ֲא ׁ ֶשר

יהו ָנ ָתן, ֶאת-ה ְּמ ִעיל ֲא ׁ ֶשר ָע ָליו, ַו ִ ּי ְּת ֵנהו, ל ָד ִוד; ּו ַמ ָ ּדיו, ְו ַעד-

ַח ְר ּב ֹו ְו ַעד-ק ׁ ְש ּת ֹו ְו ַעד-ח ֹגר ֹו.

י ְמ ָצא ֶאת-א ִבי.

**57** And as David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand. **58** And Saul said to him: ‘Whose son art thou, thou young man?’ And David answered: ‘I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Beth-lehemite.’ **1** And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. **2** And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father’s house. **3** Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. **4** And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his apparel, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.

**30** “Now, if I come to your servant my father and the boy is not with us—since his own life is so bound up with his— **31** when he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will send the white head of your servant our father down to Sheol in grief. **32** Now your servant has pledged himself for the boy to my father, saying, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, I shall stand guilty before my father

forever.’ **33** Therefore, please let your servant remain as a slave to my lord instead of the boy, and let the boy go back with his brothers. **34** For how can I go back to my father unless the boy is with me? Let me not be witness to the woe that would overtake my father!”

In verse 30, Judah uses this unusual phrase:

**Genesis 44:30**

ׁש ּורָה בְ ַנפְ ׁש ֹו ק

נפְ ׁש ֹו

his soul is bound up in his soul.

He’s talking about his father and Benjamin. Did you see the echo in the David story?

**1 Samuel 18:1**

בּ ֶנפֶ ׁש ָ ּדוִד

נפֶ ׁש ְיהו ָנ ָתן ִנ ְק ׁ ְשרָה

Jonathan’s soul was bound up in the soul of David.

Nowhere else in the *entire* Torah do we find a phrase anything like it. Even though these conversations take place against wildly different backdrops, the connection is hard to ignore.1

The question is: what are we supposed to learn from this parallel?

To answer that, we’ll need to unpack this phrase -- “soul bound in soul” -- and try to understand what it means in both of these contexts.

## A Vital Connection

Let’s begin by turning our attention to the Judah story. What does Judah mean when he says that his father’s soul is bound up with Benjamin’s soul?

*You don’t understand*, Judah says before Joseph, *if my father loses Benjamin, he’ll die. Please don’t take Benjamin from him. Take me instead.* Judah is suggesting that the emotional relationship between Jacob and Benjamin is so intense, so vital, that Benjamin’s existence literally sustains his father’s life.

That sounds like a pretty powerful bond. What could possibly account for so intense a relationship between Jacob and Benjamin? The answer reaches back into the painful history of this family. Jacob’s beloved wife Rachel bore him only two children, and one of them -- Joseph -- is assumed to be dead. The pain of that first loss nearly

killed Jacob. He’s been mourning for Joseph ever since. But there is one last remaining vestige of Rachel, and that’s Benjamin. In this moment, as Judah stands unknowingly before his brother Joseph, he realizes that his father loves Benjamin more than any of his other sons. Jacob loves Benjamin so much that he feels that life without him is not worth living. That’s what it means for one’s soul to be tied up with the other.

It’s a heartbreaking truth for Judah to face: **that his father loves another child more than him.** Yet, Judah doesn’t react by feeling threatened or jealous. He makes peace with his reality and moves forward with courage, willing to sacrifice himself for his brother Benjamin. There was a time when Judah had allowed a brother, a child of Rachel, to be sold into slavery, because their father loved a child of Rachel more. But now would not be that time.

1 And that’s not the only parallel between these two accounts. If you take a look at the very next verse from the David story, you’ll find something curious. After Jonathan declares his love for David, he strips off his robe, his uniform, and his weapons and he gifts them to David (1 Samuel 18:4). Doesn’t that sound an awful lot like the story of Joseph and his brothers, right before they sold him into slavery? (See Genesis 37:23: “And it was, when Joseph came to his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his coat, the coat of many colors that was on him.”) The same verb is used in both cases: טשפ - to strip off, to undress. In Joseph’s case, the **forcible** stripping of Jonathan’s coat was the beginning of a tale of **hatred**. Here, the **voluntary** stripping of his robe is the beginning of a tale of **love**. It’s as if one story is the exact mirror image of the other.

## Shifting Lenses

### PONDER THIS



Now, how might all of this change the way that we read the David story?

**Hint:** Is there a person in the David story who might feel rejected or replaced?

Could it be that in this moment in the David story, Saul starts to see David almost as a **son**, as a potential successor to his throne? It seems far-fetched - and yet look again at verse 2:

**1 Samuel 18:2**

ַו ִ ּי ָּק ֵחהו ׁ ָשאול, ַּב ּי ֹום ַההוא; ְולֹא ְנ ָתנ ֹו, ָל ׁש ּוב ֵּבית ָא ִביו

And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father’s house.

It *really* does sound as if Saul is adopting David as a son.

### PONDER THIS



Now, if you are Jonathan, Saul’s real son, how do you feel about all of this?

You are the king’s true son. You’re next in line to succeed him as king. And then this young upstart waltzes into the palace, into your father’s life, and your father seems to take a special liking to him. Father may even love this other “child” more than you. All of the sudden, you’re faced with the greatest threat that you could possibly imagine.

If we were Jonathan, we would have jealousy coming out of our ears. We would despise this little shepherd boy. We would wonder: “Who does this David think he is, acting like he’s the king’s son? He ought to go home to his flocks.” We might even plot to eliminate David from the scene - by any means necessary - to prevent him from usurping our rightful inheritance.

But that’s not what Jonathan does.. Jonathan doesn’t react with jealousy. He responds with love:

**1 Samuel 18:1**

ּכ ַנ ְפ ׁש ֹו

ֵבהו) ְיהו ָנ ָתן, ה

ּב ֶנ ֶפ ׁש ָ ּד ִוד; ויאהב ֶו ( ַאו ּיֱ

ל ַד ֵּבר ֶאל- ׁשאול, ְו ֶנ ֶפ ׁש ְיהו ָנ ָתן, ִנ ְק ׁ ְש ָרה

ַכ ּלֹת ֹו ּכ

ו ְי ִהי,

And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

Jonathan allows himself to see what his father sees. There is something deeply endearing about brave young David, no matter the threat he may pose. And so Jonathan gives himself over to a feeling of love for David. Their souls were bound up in love.

Hundreds of years ago, Judah realized that his father loved another child more than him. Instead of feeling threatened, he accepted his reality and was willing to sacrifice for the favored son, Benjamin. Now, in the king’s palace, we have another son -- Jonathan -- who suspects that his father loves another child more than him -- in this case, the adopted figure of David. Instead of feeling threatened, Jonathan accepts his reality and is potentially

willing to sacrifice his throne to the favored son. That’s the common link at the heart of this unique phrase, this talk of souls being bound up in one another.

## Of Generations Past

There’s one last link between these accounts - and it’s the most remarkable connection of all. It has to do not with what these men did, but with where they came from. Take a look at this genealogy of David, as it’s recorded in the Book of Ruth:

**Ruth 4:18-22**

**18** And these are the generations of Perez: Perez begot Hezron. **19** And Hezron begot Ram, and Ram begot Amminadab. **20** And Amminadab begot

**רות ד:יח–כב**

ֶּלה ּת ֹו ְלד ֹות ָּפ ֶרץ, ֶּפ ֶרץ הו ִליד ֶאת-ח ְצר ֹון. **יט** ִליד ֶאת-רם, ְו ָרם הו ִליד ֶאת-ע ִּמי ָנ ָדב. **כ יח** ו ֵא ָנ ָדב הו ִליד ֶאת-נ ְח ׁש ֹון, ְו ַנ ְח ׁש ֹון הו ִלי ו ֶח ְצר ֹון הו ְו ַע ִּמי

Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmah. **21** And Salmah

ו ַׂש ְלמ ֹון הו ִליד ֶאת- ּב ַעז, ּו ֹב ַעז

**ד** ֶאת- ַׂש ְל ָמה. **כא**

begot Boaz, and Boaz begot Obed. **22** And Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David.

ועֹ ֵבד הו ִליד ֶאת- ִי ׁ ָשי, ְו ִי ׁ ַשי

הו ִליד ֶאת-ע ֹו ֵבד. **כב**

הו ִליד ֶאת- ָ ּד ִוד.

**PONDER THIS**



According to this genealogy, David is a descendant of Perez. Where does Perez come from? What do we know about him? (Think back to the Book of Genesis.)

Perez was one of Judah’s sons, borne to him by Tamar, his daughter-in-law. Do you realize what that means? It’s not merely that David’s actions *remind* us of an ancient speech that Judah once made. David is actually a descendant of Judah himself!

Now - what if we could trace Jonathan’s lineage back in the same sort of way?

Well, take a look at this passage from the Book of Samuel in which we are first introduced the Saul, the father of Jonathan:

**1 Samuel 9:1**

**שמואל א ט:א**

**1** Now there was a man of Benjamin, whose name

ִבי ֵאל ּבן-א

ׁש קי

**א** ו ְי ִהי-אי ׁש מבן ימין (מ ִּב ְנ ָי ִמין,) ּו ׁ ְשמ ֹו

was Kish, the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of

ח ִיל. **ב**

ּב ֹור, ּג

ִפי ַח-- ֶבן-אי ׁש ְי ִמי ִני: ּבן-א

ְבכ ֹו ַרת ּבן-

ּבן-צר ֹור

Becorath, the son of Aphiah, the son of a Benjamite, a mighty man of valour. **2** And he had a son, whose name was Saul, young and goodly...

ָוט ֹוב... ּבחור

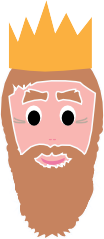
בן ּו ׁ ְשמ ֹו ׁ ָשאול,

ול ֹו-ה ָיה

Drumroll please….. it turns out that Saul, and by extension Jonathan, descends from none other than Benjamin. **Jonathan and David are descendants of the two prime actors in the Genesis** story. It’s Judah and Benjamin, together again.

## Benjamin



**Saul & Jonathan**



## Judah

**David**



## Wrestling With Memories

What we find in the story of David and Jonathan is a replaying, generations later, of the original family drama -- except that the roles are reversed.

**THE JUDAH STORY**

Father favors Benjamin over Judah

**THE DAVID STORY**

Father favors Judah’s descendant over Benjamin’s descendant

In both stories, the rejected son musters the strength to face his reality and sacrifice for his brother. In both stories, the same key phrase is used.

Think of friends and family who will love it as much as you did - and share it with them!

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What’s going on here is so much deeper than a mere similarity of themes: father favors one son, rejected son takes the high road. It’s more than a clever literary parallel. This is the moment in which **Benjamin repays Judah** for his sacrifice from all those years ago, when Judah stood before the Egyptian official and offered his freedom in

exchange for Benjamin’s. Jonathan too makes a sacrifice. *It’s not threatening for me that my father would love another child more than me,* Jonathan seems to say. *Let Father take David. I love David like my own soul.*

In Parshat Vayigash, Judah’s impassioned speech on behalf of Benjamin seems to signal an end to the harsh sibling rivalry that plagued the children of Jacob. Upon hearing the speech, Joseph cries and he reveals himself to his brothers. The long charade is over. But it turns out that the story isn’t yet finished. The memories of the sale of Joseph run deep, and they suffuse Jewish history, rearing their head in unexpected places. The story of David and Jonathan is one of those places. This moment of love shared between them: it’s a moment of healing, however brief, where the two sides of the family are reconciled. This child of Benjamin repays his debt to this child of Judah. The greatness of Jonathan is that he knew where he came from, and he didn’t just remember the animosity; he remembered the sacrifice, too.



Vayigash: The Epic Confrontation Between

Judah and Joseph Source Sheet Page 1

**Genesis 44:30-34**

**בראשית מד:ל-לד**

**30** “Now, if I come to your servant my father and the boy is not

ב ִאי ֶאל-ע ְב ְ ּד ָך ָא ִבי, ְו ַה ַּנ ַער, ֵאי ֶנ ּנ ּו

**ל** ְו ַע ָּתה, ּכ

with us—since his own life is so bound up with his— **31** when he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will

ּו ָרה ב ַנ ְפ ׁש ֹו. **לא** ְו ָה ָיה, ֵמת; ְוהו ִריד ּו ֲע ָב ֶדי ָך ק ׁש ה ַּנ ַער--ו

ּו; ְו ַנ ְפ ׁש ֹו, ֹו ּכי-אין א ָּתנ ּכ ְראות

send the white head of your servant our father down to Sheol in

ָיג ֹון-- ׁשאֹ ָלה. **לב** כּי ּב

את- ֵׂשי ַבת ַע ְב ְ ּד ָך ָא ִבינ ּו,

grief. **32** Now your servant has pledged himself for the boy to

ע ְב ְ ּד ָך ָע ַרב ֶאת-ה ַּנ ַער, ֵמ ִעם ָא ִבי ֵלאמֹר: אם-לֹא

my father, saying, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, I shall stand guilty before my father forever.’ **33** Therefore, please let your

ּכל-ה ָ ּי ִמים. **לג**

ה ַּנ ַער--ע ֶבד, ַלאדֹ ִני;

ּנ ּו ֵא ֶלי ָך, ְו ָח ָטאתי ל ָא ִבי ֵי ׁ ֶשב-נא ַע ְב ְ ּד ָך ַּת ַחת א ִבי ֶא ו ַע ָּתה,

servant remain as a slave to my lord instead of the boy, and let

ּכי-א ֶיאְךעֱ לה

ו ַה ַּנ ַער, ַי ַעל ִעם-א ָחיו. **לד**

the boy go back with his brothers. **34** For how can I go back to my father unless the boy is with me? Let me not be witness to the woe that would overtake my father!”

ב ָרע, ֲא ׁ ֶשר

ֶא ְר ֶאה ֶפן

ִּתי: א

ִבי, ְו ַה ַּנ ַער ֵאי ֶנ ּנ ּו ֶאל-א

י ְמ ָצא ֶאת-א ִבי.

**1 Samuel 17:57 - 18:4**

**57** And as David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine,

#### שמואל א יז:נז–יח:ד

**נז** ּו ְכ ׁש ּוב ָ ּד ִוד, ֵמ ַה ּכ ֹות ֶאת-ה ְּפ ִל ׁ ְש ִּתי, ַו ִ ּי ַּקח אֹת ֹו

Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the head of

ָיד ֹו. ּב

ה ְּפ ִל ׁ ְש ִּתי,

ל ְפ ֵני ׁ ָשאול; ְורֹא ׁש

א ְב ֵנר, ַו ְי ִב ֵאהו

the Philistine in his hand. **58** And Saul said to him: ‘Whose son

ַא ָּתה ה ָּנ ַער; ּבן-מי

**נח** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ֵא ָליו ָשאול,

art thou, thou young man?’ And David answered: ‘I am the son

ְח ִמי. **א** ַו ְיהִי, ה ַּל

ּבית

ּבן-ע ְב ְ ּד ָך ִי ׁ ַשי

ו ּיֹא ֶמר ָ ּד ִוד,

of thy servant Jesse the Beth-lehemite.’ **1** And it came to pass,

ל ַד ֵּבר ֶאל- ׁשאול, ְו ֶנ ֶפ ׁש ְיהו ָנ ָתן, ִנ ְק ׁ ְש ָרה

ּכ ַכ ּלֹת ֹו

when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul

ְפ ׁש ֹו. ּכ ַנ

ֵבהו) ְיהו ָנ ָתן, ה

ּב ֶנ ֶפ ׁש ָ ּד ִוד; ויאהב ֶו ( ַאו ּיֱ

of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved

ְולֹא ְנ ָתנ ֹו, ָל ׁש ּוב ההוא;

ּי ֹום ּב

**ב** ַו ִ ּי ָּק ֵחהו ׁ ָשאול,

him as his own soul. **2** And Saul took him that day, and would

ֲה ָבת ֹו ּב ַא

ִרית, ּב

ֵּבית ָא ִביו. **ג** ַו ִ ּי ְכרֹת ְיהו ָנ ָתן ְו ָד ִוד,

let him go no more home to his father’s house. **3** Then Jonathan

ּכ ַנפְ ׁש ֹו. **ד** ַו ִ ּי ְת ַּפ ׁ ֵּשט ְיהו ָנ ָתן, ֶאת-ה ְּמ ִעיל

אֹת ֹו,

made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own

ל ָד ִוד; ּו ַמ ָ ּדיו, ְו ַעד-ח ְר ּב ֹו

א ׁ ֶשר ָע ָליו, ַו ִ ּי ְּת ֵנהו,

soul. **4** And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his apparel, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.

ו ַעד-ק ׁ ְש ּת ֹו ְו ַעד-ח ֹגר ֹו.

**Ruth 4:18-22**

**18** And these are the generations of Perez: Perez begot Hezron. **19** And Hezron begot Ram, and Ram begot Amminadab. **20** And Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmah. **21** And

#### רות ד:יח–כב

ֶּלה ּת ֹו ְלד ֹות ָּפ ֶרץ, ֶּפ ֶרץ הו ִליד ֶאת-ח ְצר ֹון. **יט** ִליד ֶאת-רם, ְו ָרם הו ִליד ֶאת-ע ִּמי ָנ ָדב. **כ יח** ו ֵא ָנ ָדב הו ִליד ֶאת-נ ְח ׁש ֹון, ְו ַנ ְח ׁש ֹון הו ִלי ו ֶח ְצר ֹון הו ְו ַע ִּמי

Salmah begot Boaz, and Boaz begot Obed. **22** And Obed begot

ו ַׂש ְלמ ֹון הו ִליד ֶאת- ּב ַעז, ּו ֹב ַעז

**ד** ֶאת- ַׂש ְל ָמה. **כא**

Jesse, and Jesse begot David.

ועֹ ֵבד הו ִליד ֶאת- ִי ׁ ָשי, ְו ִי ׁ ַשי

הו ִליד ֶאת-ע ֹו ֵבד. **כב**

הו ִליד ֶאת- ָ ּד ִוד.



Vayigash: The Epic Confrontation Between

Judah and Joseph Source Sheet Page 2

**1 Samuel 9:1**

#### שמואל א ט:א

**1** Now there was a man of Benjamin, whose name was Kish, the

ׁש קי

**א** ו ְי ִהי-אי ׁש מבן ימין (מ ִּב ְנ ָי ִמין,) ּו ׁ ְשמ ֹו

son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Becorath, the son of

ִפי ַח-- ֶבן-אי ׁש ּבן-א

ְבכ ֹו ַרת ּבן-

ֹור ּבן-צר

ּבן-א ִבי ֵאל

Aphiah, the son of a Benjamite, a mighty man of valour. **2** And he

בן ּו ׁ ְשמ ֹו ׁ ָשאול,

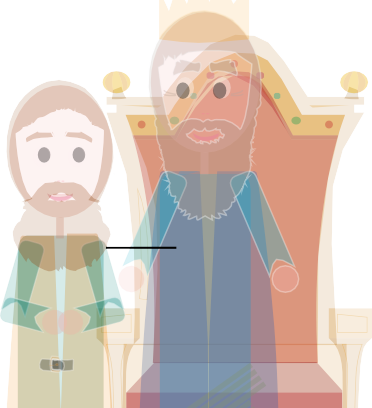
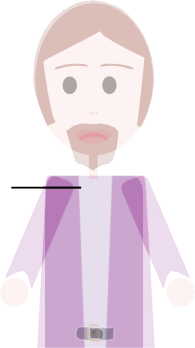
ֹו-ה ָיה ול

חיִל. **ב**

ּב ֹור, ּג

יְ ִמי ִני:

had a son, whose name was Saul, young and goodly ֹוב ָוט ּבחור



**VAYIGASH: THE EPIC CONFRONTATION BETWEEN JUDAH AND JOSEPH**

Vay

igash!

Welcome to the Aleph Beta Study Guide to Parshat

## A Step Towards Healing

Parshat Vayigash contains one of the most dramatic moments in the Book of Genesis, in which Judah comes to the aid of his brother Benjamin. Courageously, Judah stands before a high Egyptian official (who is actually his brother Joseph in disguise) and he makes an impassioned plea for Benjamin’s freedom. It’s perhaps Judah’s finest moment, a chance for him to vindicate himself after the nasty ordeal of selling his brother Joseph into slavery, all those years before. It seems to bring that long and painful story to a close, allowing the brothers -- the children of Jacob -- to finally move forward in their relationships.

But it turns out that there’s more to this story than meets the eye. Judah’s speech bears an eerie resemblance to a conversation which takes place hundreds of years later, in the land of Israel, in the king’s palace. If we want to

understand what’s really happening here in Parshat Vayigash as Judah stands up for Benjamin, we’ll need to study these two conversations in parallel.

### INSTRUCTIONS

There are a lot of divrei Torah on the parsha. How is this different?

At Aleph Beta, we believe that the Torah is a guidebook that answers life’s biggest questions, offering profound insights about how we should live our lives. Moreover, we believe that Jewish tradition has always recognized the right of all readers, in every generation, to look at the text themselves and try to decide what they think it means. That means you. That’s why you are the most important author of this quest through the sources. We think that this guide offers a fun, stimulating and relevant path through the sources, but if you get wrapped up in a stimulating discussion and never make it past page 2, we’ll consider that a success!

Is this guide for self-study or should I study it with others?

Either works! You can gather a small group of friends to explore it together, share it with a chevruta (learning partner), or go through it by yourself.

Do I need to prepare anything or can I just jump in?

Just jump in! Even if you’re planning to use this for a group discussion, just open up to page 1 and get going. (If you read it in advance, it will spoil the fun!) The only thing you should do in advance is print out copies of the “Source Sheet” for the other participants, so everyone can follow along and engage with the sources.

About the Author

Most of the material within – although not the particular language contained in this guide - was first developed and taught by Rabbi David Fohrman, founder and CEO of Aleph Beta, and is presented in his video, “Parshat Vayigash: The Epic Confrontation Between Judah and Joseph” (available for viewing at www.alephbeta.org). This guide was written by Ami Silver, edited by Rivky Stern and Beth Lesch, and arranged by Laura Schembre.

What is that other conversation? It comes from the Book of Samuel, from the story of David and Goliath. In that story, the giant Goliath had threatened the first king of Israel, Saul. No one from the Jews thought that they could fight him… and then David, a little shepherd boy, had the audacity to rise to the challenge. He miraculously felled the giant with a stone from his sling. Saul was suddenly very curious to know more about this new hero in Israel. But whatever does this have to do with Judah?

### LOOK INSIDE: Comparing The Verses



Take a look at this account of David, Saul and Saul’s son Jonathan, and compare it to Judah’s speech (both accounts are below). Can you find any words or phrases which are repeated?

## THE DAVID STORY THE JUDAH STORY

**1 Samuel 17:57 - 18:4**

**שמואל א יז:נז–יח:ד**

**Genesis 44:30-34**

**בראשית מד:ל-לד**

**נז** ּו ְכ ׁש ּוב ָ ּד ִוד, ֵמ ַה ּכ ֹות ֶאת-ה ְּפ ִל ׁ ְש ִּתי, ַו ִ ּי ַּקח אֹת ֹו ַא ְב ֵנר,

**ל** ְו ַע ָּתה, ּכב ִאי ֶאל-ע ְב ְ ּד ָך ָא ִבי, ְו ַה ַּנ ַער, ֵאי ֶנ ּנ ּו ִא ָּתנ ּו; ְו ַנ ְפ ׁש ֹו,

ו ְי ִב ֵאהו ל ְפ ֵני ׁ ָשאול; ְורֹא ׁש ה ְּפ ִל ׁ ְש ִּתי, ּב ָיד ֹו. **נח** ַו ּיֹאמֶר

ק ׁש ּורָה ב ַנ ְפ ׁש ֹו. **לא** ְו ָה ָיה, ּכ ְראות ֹו ּכי-אין ה ַּנ ַער--ו ֵמת;

א ָליו ָשאול, ּבן-מי ַא ָּתה ה ָּנ ַער; ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ָ ּד ִוד, ּבן-ע ְב ְ ּד ָך ִי ׁ ַשי

והו ִריד ּו ֲע ָב ֶדי ָך ֶאת- ֵׂשי ַבת ַע ְב ְ ּד ָך ָא ִבינ ּו, ּב ָיג ֹון-- ׁשאֹ ָלה. **לב**

**א** ַו ְי ִהי, ּכ ַכ ּלֹת ֹו ל ַד ֵּבר ֶאל- ׁשאול, ְו ֶנ ֶפ ׁש ְיהו ָנ ָתן,ּבית ה ַּל ְחמִי.

ּכי ַע ְב ְ ּד ָך ָע ַרב ֶאת-ה ַּנ ַער, ֵמ ִעם ָא ִבי ֵלאמֹר: אם-לֹא ֲא ִבי ֶא ּנ ּו

נ ְק ׁ ְש ָרה ּב ֶנ ֶפ ׁש ָ ּד ִוד; ויאהב ֶו ( ַאו ּיֱ ה ֵבהו) ְיהו ָנ ָתן, ּכ ַנ ְפ ׁש ֹו. **ב**

א ֶלי ָך, ְו ָח ָטאתי ל ָא ִבי ּכל-ה ָ ּי ִמים. **לג** ְו ַע ָּתה, ֵי ׁ ֶשב-נא ַע ְב ְ ּד ָך

ו ִ ּי ָּק ֵחהו ׁ ָשאול, ּב ּי ֹום ההוא; ְולֹא ְנ ָתנ ֹו, ָל ׁש ּוב ּבית ָא ִביו. **ג**

ַת ַחת ה ַּנ ַער--ע ֶבד, ַלאדֹ ִני; ְו ַה ַּנ ַער, ַי ַעל ִעם-א ָחיו. **לד** ּכי-איְך

ו ִ ּי ְכ ֹרת ְיהו ָנ ָתן ְו ָד ִוד, ּב ִרית, ּב ַא ֲה ָבת ֹו אֹת ֹו, ּכ ַנ ְפ ׁש ֹו. **ד** ַו ִ ּיתְ ַּפ ׁ ֵּשט

אעֱ לה ֶאל-א ִבי, ְו ַה ַּנ ַער ֵאי ֶנ ּנ ּו א ִּתי: ֶפן ֶא ְר ֶאה ב ָרע, ֲא ׁ ֶשר

יהו ָנ ָתן, ֶאת-ה ְּמ ִעיל ֲא ׁ ֶשר ָע ָליו, ַו ִ ּי ְּת ֵנהו, ל ָד ִוד; ּו ַמ ָ ּדיו, ְו ַעד-

ַח ְר ּב ֹו ְו ַעד-ק ׁ ְש ּת ֹו ְו ַעד-ח ֹגר ֹו.

י ְמ ָצא ֶאת-א ִבי.

**57** And as David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand. **58** And Saul said to him: ‘Whose son art thou, thou young man?’ And David answered: ‘I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Beth-lehemite.’ **1** And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. **2** And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father’s house. **3** Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. **4** And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his apparel, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.

**30** “Now, if I come to your servant my father and the boy is not with us—since his own life is so bound up with his— **31** when he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will send the white head of your servant our father down to Sheol in grief. **32** Now your servant has pledged himself for the boy to my father, saying, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, I shall stand guilty before my father

forever.’ **33** Therefore, please let your servant remain as a slave to my lord instead of the boy, and let the boy go back with his brothers. **34** For how can I go back to my father unless the boy is with me? Let me not be witness to the woe that would overtake my father!”

In verse 30, Judah uses this unusual phrase:

**Genesis 44:30**

ׁש ּורָה בְ ַנפְ ׁש ֹו ק

נפְ ׁש ֹו

his soul is bound up in his soul.

He’s talking about his father and Benjamin. Did you see the echo in the David story?

**1 Samuel 18:1**

בּ ֶנפֶ ׁש ָ ּדוִד

נפֶ ׁש ְיהו ָנ ָתן ִנ ְק ׁ ְשרָה

Jonathan’s soul was bound up in the soul of David.

Nowhere else in the *entire* Torah do we find a phrase anything like it. Even though these conversations take place against wildly different backdrops, the connection is hard to ignore.1

The question is: what are we supposed to learn from this parallel?

To answer that, we’ll need to unpack this phrase -- “soul bound in soul” -- and try to understand what it means in both of these contexts.

## A Vital Connection

Let’s begin by turning our attention to the Judah story. What does Judah mean when he says that his father’s soul is bound up with Benjamin’s soul?

*You don’t understand*, Judah says before Joseph, *if my father loses Benjamin, he’ll die. Please don’t take Benjamin from him. Take me instead.* Judah is suggesting that the emotional relationship between Jacob and Benjamin is so intense, so vital, that Benjamin’s existence literally sustains his father’s life.

That sounds like a pretty powerful bond. What could possibly account for so intense a relationship between Jacob and Benjamin? The answer reaches back into the painful history of this family. Jacob’s beloved wife Rachel bore him only two children, and one of them -- Joseph -- is assumed to be dead. The pain of that first loss nearly

killed Jacob. He’s been mourning for Joseph ever since. But there is one last remaining vestige of Rachel, and that’s Benjamin. In this moment, as Judah stands unknowingly before his brother Joseph, he realizes that his father loves Benjamin more than any of his other sons. Jacob loves Benjamin so much that he feels that life without him is not worth living. That’s what it means for one’s soul to be tied up with the other.

It’s a heartbreaking truth for Judah to face: **that his father loves another child more than him.** Yet, Judah doesn’t react by feeling threatened or jealous. He makes peace with his reality and moves forward with courage, willing to sacrifice himself for his brother Benjamin. There was a time when Judah had allowed a brother, a child of Rachel, to be sold into slavery, because their father loved a child of Rachel more. But now would not be that time.

1 And that’s not the only parallel between these two accounts. If you take a look at the very next verse from the David story, you’ll find something curious. After Jonathan declares his love for David, he strips off his robe, his uniform, and his weapons and he gifts them to David (1 Samuel 18:4). Doesn’t that sound an awful lot like the story of Joseph and his brothers, right before they sold him into slavery? (See Genesis 37:23: “And it was, when Joseph came to his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his coat, the coat of many colors that was on him.”) The same verb is used in both cases: טשפ - to strip off, to undress. In Joseph’s case, the **forcible** stripping of Jonathan’s coat was the beginning of a tale of **hatred**. Here, the **voluntary** stripping of his robe is the beginning of a tale of **love**. It’s as if one story is the exact mirror image of the other.

## Shifting Lenses

### PONDER THIS



Now, how might all of this change the way that we read the David story?

**Hint:** Is there a person in the David story who might feel rejected or replaced?

Could it be that in this moment in the David story, Saul starts to see David almost as a **son**, as a potential successor to his throne? It seems far-fetched - and yet look again at verse 2:

**1 Samuel 18:2**

ַו ִ ּי ָּק ֵחהו ׁ ָשאול, ַּב ּי ֹום ַההוא; ְולֹא ְנ ָתנ ֹו, ָל ׁש ּוב ֵּבית ָא ִביו

And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father’s house.

It *really* does sound as if Saul is adopting David as a son.

### PONDER THIS



Now, if you are Jonathan, Saul’s real son, how do you feel about all of this?

You are the king’s true son. You’re next in line to succeed him as king. And then this young upstart waltzes into the palace, into your father’s life, and your father seems to take a special liking to him. Father may even love this other “child” more than you. All of the sudden, you’re faced with the greatest threat that you could possibly imagine.

If we were Jonathan, we would have jealousy coming out of our ears. We would despise this little shepherd boy. We would wonder: “Who does this David think he is, acting like he’s the king’s son? He ought to go home to his flocks.” We might even plot to eliminate David from the scene - by any means necessary - to prevent him from usurping our rightful inheritance.

But that’s not what Jonathan does.. Jonathan doesn’t react with jealousy. He responds with love:

**1 Samuel 18:1**

ּכ ַנ ְפ ׁש ֹו

ֵבהו) ְיהו ָנ ָתן, ה

ּב ֶנ ֶפ ׁש ָ ּד ִוד; ויאהב ֶו ( ַאו ּיֱ

ל ַד ֵּבר ֶאל- ׁשאול, ְו ֶנ ֶפ ׁש ְיהו ָנ ָתן, ִנ ְק ׁ ְש ָרה

ַכ ּלֹת ֹו ּכ

ו ְי ִהי,

And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

Jonathan allows himself to see what his father sees. There is something deeply endearing about brave young David, no matter the threat he may pose. And so Jonathan gives himself over to a feeling of love for David. Their souls were bound up in love.

Hundreds of years ago, Judah realized that his father loved another child more than him. Instead of feeling threatened, he accepted his reality and was willing to sacrifice for the favored son, Benjamin. Now, in the king’s palace, we have another son -- Jonathan -- who suspects that his father loves another child more than him -- in this case, the adopted figure of David. Instead of feeling threatened, Jonathan accepts his reality and is potentially

willing to sacrifice his throne to the favored son. That’s the common link at the heart of this unique phrase, this talk of souls being bound up in one another.

## Of Generations Past

There’s one last link between these accounts - and it’s the most remarkable connection of all. It has to do not with what these men did, but with where they came from. Take a look at this genealogy of David, as it’s recorded in the Book of Ruth:

**Ruth 4:18-22**

**18** And these are the generations of Perez: Perez begot Hezron. **19** And Hezron begot Ram, and Ram begot Amminadab. **20** And Amminadab begot

**רות ד:יח–כב**

ֶּלה ּת ֹו ְלד ֹות ָּפ ֶרץ, ֶּפ ֶרץ הו ִליד ֶאת-ח ְצר ֹון. **יט** ִליד ֶאת-רם, ְו ָרם הו ִליד ֶאת-ע ִּמי ָנ ָדב. **כ יח** ו ֵא ָנ ָדב הו ִליד ֶאת-נ ְח ׁש ֹון, ְו ַנ ְח ׁש ֹון הו ִלי ו ֶח ְצר ֹון הו ְו ַע ִּמי

Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmah. **21** And Salmah

ו ַׂש ְלמ ֹון הו ִליד ֶאת- ּב ַעז, ּו ֹב ַעז

**ד** ֶאת- ַׂש ְל ָמה. **כא**

begot Boaz, and Boaz begot Obed. **22** And Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David.

ועֹ ֵבד הו ִליד ֶאת- ִי ׁ ָשי, ְו ִי ׁ ַשי

הו ִליד ֶאת-ע ֹו ֵבד. **כב**

הו ִליד ֶאת- ָ ּד ִוד.

**PONDER THIS**



According to this genealogy, David is a descendant of Perez. Where does Perez come from? What do we know about him? (Think back to the Book of Genesis.)

Perez was one of Judah’s sons, borne to him by Tamar, his daughter-in-law. Do you realize what that means? It’s not merely that David’s actions *remind* us of an ancient speech that Judah once made. David is actually a descendant of Judah himself!

Now - what if we could trace Jonathan’s lineage back in the same sort of way?

Well, take a look at this passage from the Book of Samuel in which we are first introduced the Saul, the father of Jonathan:

**1 Samuel 9:1**

**שמואל א ט:א**

**1** Now there was a man of Benjamin, whose name

ִבי ֵאל ּבן-א

ׁש קי

**א** ו ְי ִהי-אי ׁש מבן ימין (מ ִּב ְנ ָי ִמין,) ּו ׁ ְשמ ֹו

was Kish, the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of

ח ִיל. **ב**

ּב ֹור, ּג

ִפי ַח-- ֶבן-אי ׁש ְי ִמי ִני: ּבן-א

ְבכ ֹו ַרת ּבן-

ּבן-צר ֹור

Becorath, the son of Aphiah, the son of a Benjamite, a mighty man of valour. **2** And he had a son, whose name was Saul, young and goodly...

ָוט ֹוב... ּבחור

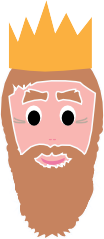
בן ּו ׁ ְשמ ֹו ׁ ָשאול,

ול ֹו-ה ָיה

Drumroll please….. it turns out that Saul, and by extension Jonathan, descends from none other than Benjamin. **Jonathan and David are descendants of the two prime actors in the Genesis** story. It’s Judah and Benjamin, together again.

## Benjamin



**Saul & Jonathan**



## Judah

**David**



## Wrestling With Memories

What we find in the story of David and Jonathan is a replaying, generations later, of the original family drama -- except that the roles are reversed.

**THE JUDAH STORY**

Father favors Benjamin over Judah

**THE DAVID STORY**

Father favors Judah’s descendant over Benjamin’s descendant

In both stories, the rejected son musters the strength to face his reality and sacrifice for his brother. In both stories, the same key phrase is used.

Think of friends and family who will love it as much as you did - and share it with them!

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What’s going on here is so much deeper than a mere similarity of themes: father favors one son, rejected son takes the high road. It’s more than a clever literary parallel. This is the moment in which **Benjamin repays Judah** for his sacrifice from all those years ago, when Judah stood before the Egyptian official and offered his freedom in

exchange for Benjamin’s. Jonathan too makes a sacrifice. *It’s not threatening for me that my father would love another child more than me,* Jonathan seems to say. *Let Father take David. I love David like my own soul.*

In Parshat Vayigash, Judah’s impassioned speech on behalf of Benjamin seems to signal an end to the harsh sibling rivalry that plagued the children of Jacob. Upon hearing the speech, Joseph cries and he reveals himself to his brothers. The long charade is over. But it turns out that the story isn’t yet finished. The memories of the sale of Joseph run deep, and they suffuse Jewish history, rearing their head in unexpected places. The story of David and Jonathan is one of those places. This moment of love shared between them: it’s a moment of healing, however brief, where the two sides of the family are reconciled. This child of Benjamin repays his debt to this child of Judah. The greatness of Jonathan is that he knew where he came from, and he didn’t just remember the animosity; he remembered the sacrifice, too.



Vayigash: The Epic Confrontation Between

Judah and Joseph Source Sheet Page 1

**Genesis 44:30-34**

**בראשית מד:ל-לד**

**30** “Now, if I come to your servant my father and the boy is not

ב ִאי ֶאל-ע ְב ְ ּד ָך ָא ִבי, ְו ַה ַּנ ַער, ֵאי ֶנ ּנ ּו

**ל** ְו ַע ָּתה, ּכ

with us—since his own life is so bound up with his— **31** when he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will

ּו ָרה ב ַנ ְפ ׁש ֹו. **לא** ְו ָה ָיה, ֵמת; ְוהו ִריד ּו ֲע ָב ֶדי ָך ק ׁש ה ַּנ ַער--ו

ּו; ְו ַנ ְפ ׁש ֹו, ֹו ּכי-אין א ָּתנ ּכ ְראות

send the white head of your servant our father down to Sheol in

ָיג ֹון-- ׁשאֹ ָלה. **לב** כּי ּב

את- ֵׂשי ַבת ַע ְב ְ ּד ָך ָא ִבינ ּו,

grief. **32** Now your servant has pledged himself for the boy to

ע ְב ְ ּד ָך ָע ַרב ֶאת-ה ַּנ ַער, ֵמ ִעם ָא ִבי ֵלאמֹר: אם-לֹא

my father, saying, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, I shall stand guilty before my father forever.’ **33** Therefore, please let your

ּכל-ה ָ ּי ִמים. **לג**

ה ַּנ ַער--ע ֶבד, ַלאדֹ ִני;

ּנ ּו ֵא ֶלי ָך, ְו ָח ָטאתי ל ָא ִבי ֵי ׁ ֶשב-נא ַע ְב ְ ּד ָך ַּת ַחת א ִבי ֶא ו ַע ָּתה,

servant remain as a slave to my lord instead of the boy, and let

ּכי-א ֶיאְךעֱ לה

ו ַה ַּנ ַער, ַי ַעל ִעם-א ָחיו. **לד**

the boy go back with his brothers. **34** For how can I go back to my father unless the boy is with me? Let me not be witness to the woe that would overtake my father!”

ב ָרע, ֲא ׁ ֶשר

ֶא ְר ֶאה ֶפן

ִּתי: א

ִבי, ְו ַה ַּנ ַער ֵאי ֶנ ּנ ּו ֶאל-א

י ְמ ָצא ֶאת-א ִבי.

**1 Samuel 17:57 - 18:4**

**57** And as David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine,

#### שמואל א יז:נז–יח:ד

**נז** ּו ְכ ׁש ּוב ָ ּד ִוד, ֵמ ַה ּכ ֹות ֶאת-ה ְּפ ִל ׁ ְש ִּתי, ַו ִ ּי ַּקח אֹת ֹו

Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the head of

ָיד ֹו. ּב

ה ְּפ ִל ׁ ְש ִּתי,

ל ְפ ֵני ׁ ָשאול; ְורֹא ׁש

א ְב ֵנר, ַו ְי ִב ֵאהו

the Philistine in his hand. **58** And Saul said to him: ‘Whose son

ַא ָּתה ה ָּנ ַער; ּבן-מי

**נח** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ֵא ָליו ָשאול,

art thou, thou young man?’ And David answered: ‘I am the son

ְח ִמי. **א** ַו ְיהִי, ה ַּל

ּבית

ּבן-ע ְב ְ ּד ָך ִי ׁ ַשי

ו ּיֹא ֶמר ָ ּד ִוד,

of thy servant Jesse the Beth-lehemite.’ **1** And it came to pass,

ל ַד ֵּבר ֶאל- ׁשאול, ְו ֶנ ֶפ ׁש ְיהו ָנ ָתן, ִנ ְק ׁ ְש ָרה

ּכ ַכ ּלֹת ֹו

when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul

ְפ ׁש ֹו. ּכ ַנ

ֵבהו) ְיהו ָנ ָתן, ה

ּב ֶנ ֶפ ׁש ָ ּד ִוד; ויאהב ֶו ( ַאו ּיֱ

of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved

ְולֹא ְנ ָתנ ֹו, ָל ׁש ּוב ההוא;

ּי ֹום ּב

**ב** ַו ִ ּי ָּק ֵחהו ׁ ָשאול,

him as his own soul. **2** And Saul took him that day, and would

ֲה ָבת ֹו ּב ַא

ִרית, ּב

ֵּבית ָא ִביו. **ג** ַו ִ ּי ְכרֹת ְיהו ָנ ָתן ְו ָד ִוד,

let him go no more home to his father’s house. **3** Then Jonathan

ּכ ַנפְ ׁש ֹו. **ד** ַו ִ ּי ְת ַּפ ׁ ֵּשט ְיהו ָנ ָתן, ֶאת-ה ְּמ ִעיל

אֹת ֹו,

made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own

ל ָד ִוד; ּו ַמ ָ ּדיו, ְו ַעד-ח ְר ּב ֹו

א ׁ ֶשר ָע ָליו, ַו ִ ּי ְּת ֵנהו,

soul. **4** And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his apparel, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.

ו ַעד-ק ׁ ְש ּת ֹו ְו ַעד-ח ֹגר ֹו.

**Ruth 4:18-22**

**18** And these are the generations of Perez: Perez begot Hezron. **19** And Hezron begot Ram, and Ram begot Amminadab. **20** And Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmah. **21** And

#### רות ד:יח–כב

ֶּלה ּת ֹו ְלד ֹות ָּפ ֶרץ, ֶּפ ֶרץ הו ִליד ֶאת-ח ְצר ֹון. **יט** ִליד ֶאת-רם, ְו ָרם הו ִליד ֶאת-ע ִּמי ָנ ָדב. **כ יח** ו ֵא ָנ ָדב הו ִליד ֶאת-נ ְח ׁש ֹון, ְו ַנ ְח ׁש ֹון הו ִלי ו ֶח ְצר ֹון הו ְו ַע ִּמי

Salmah begot Boaz, and Boaz begot Obed. **22** And Obed begot

ו ַׂש ְלמ ֹון הו ִליד ֶאת- ּב ַעז, ּו ֹב ַעז

**ד** ֶאת- ַׂש ְל ָמה. **כא**

Jesse, and Jesse begot David.

ועֹ ֵבד הו ִליד ֶאת- ִי ׁ ָשי, ְו ִי ׁ ַשי

הו ִליד ֶאת-ע ֹו ֵבד. **כב**

הו ִליד ֶאת- ָ ּד ִוד.



Vayigash: The Epic Confrontation Between

Judah and Joseph Source Sheet Page 2

**1 Samuel 9:1**

#### שמואל א ט:א

**1** Now there was a man of Benjamin, whose name was Kish, the

ׁש קי

**א** ו ְי ִהי-אי ׁש מבן ימין (מ ִּב ְנ ָי ִמין,) ּו ׁ ְשמ ֹו

son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Becorath, the son of

ִפי ַח-- ֶבן-אי ׁש ּבן-א

ְבכ ֹו ַרת ּבן-

ֹור ּבן-צר

ּבן-א ִבי ֵאל

Aphiah, the son of a Benjamite, a mighty man of valour. **2** And he

בן ּו ׁ ְשמ ֹו ׁ ָשאול,

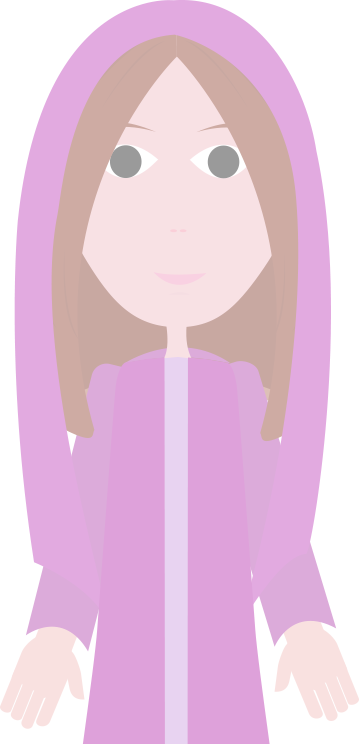
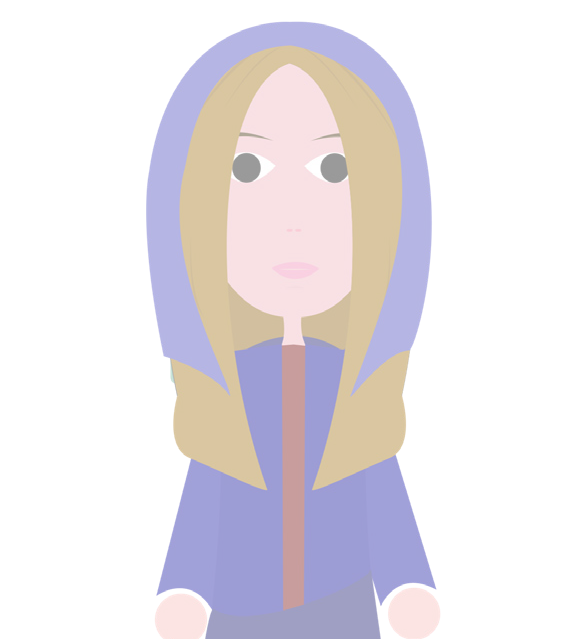
ֹו-ה ָיה ול

חיִל. **ב**

ּב ֹור, ּג

יְ ִמי ִני:

had a son, whose name was Saul, young and goodly ֹוב ָוט ּבחור



**VAYIGASH: DOES GOD SPEAK TO US TODAY? PART III**

Welcome to the Aleph Beta Study Guide to Parshat Vayigash!

This guide is the third in a 4-part series, which deals with *Parshat Vayeishev* through *Parshat Vayechi:* the whole of the epic Joseph story.

## An Observation and a Question

In Parts I and II of this series of guides, we’ve been wondering about this question: Could there be such a thing as non- prophetic communication between God and man? And if so, what would it look like? We’ve been looking at Joseph’s interpretation of Pharaoh’s dream in *Parshat Miketz* as a possible model, and we’d like to continue to explore that line of thinking with you in this guide.

In Part II, we left off with an observation and a question.

**THE OBSERVATION:** The *run-up* to Pharaoh’s re-telling of his dream to Joseph is a **mirror image** of an earlier event in Joseph’s life: when his brothers threw him into a pit and he was sold into slavery. Everything that happened to Joseph all of those years ago in the land of Canaan is now being inverted and replayed here, thirteen years later, in the land of Egypt.

**THE QUESTION:** As Pharaoh begins to share his dream, does that pattern continue? Are there links between Pharaoh’s dream and what happened early in Joseph’s life, before he was cast into the pit?

Let’s take a look at the language of Pharaoh’s dream, and we’ll see for ourselves.

## Who Else Is Described As “Beautiful”?

**Genesis 41:17-18**

**פת ּתֹאַר**…

ּב ָ ׂשר, **ִוי**

ִריאות ּב

ה ְיאֹר. ְו ִה ֵּנה ִמן-ה ְיאֹר, עֹלֹת ׁ ֶש ַבע ָּפר ֹות,

ִני עֹ ֵמד ַעל- ְש ַפת ה ְנ

ֲחלֹ ִמי, ּב

ו ְי ַד ֵּבר ַּפ ְרעֹה, ֶאל-י ֹו ֵסף:

And Pharaoh spoke unto Joseph: ‘In my dream, behold, I stood upon the brink of the river. And, behold, there came up out of the river seven kine, fat-fleshed and **beautiful of form**…

**INSTRUCTIONS**

There are a lot of divrei Torah on the parsha. How is this different?

At Aleph Beta, we believe that the Torah is a guidebook that answers life’s biggest questions, offering profound insights about how we should live our lives. Moreover, we believe that Jewish tradition has always recognized the right of all readers, in every generation, to look at the text themselves and try to decide what they think it means. That means you. That’s why you are the most important author of this quest through the sources. We think that this guide offers a fun, stimulating and relevant path through the sources, but if you get wrapped up in a stimulating discussion and never make it past page 2, we’ll consider that a success!

Is this guide for self-study or should I study it with others?

Either works! You can gather a small group of friends to explore it together, share it with a chevruta (learning partner), or go through it by yourself.

Do I need to prepare anything or can I just jump in?

Just jump in! Even if you’re planning to use this for a group discussion, just open up to page 1 and get going. (If you read it in advance, it will spoil the fun!) The only thing you should do in advance is print out copies of the “Source Sheet” for the other participants, so everyone can follow along and engage with the sources.

About the Author

Most of the material within – although not the particular language contained in this guide - was first developed and taught by Rabbi David Fohrman, founder and CEO of Aleph Beta, and is presented in his video, “Parshat Vayigash: Does God Speak To Us Today? Part III” (available for viewing at [www.alephbeta.org](http://www.alephbeta.org/)). This guide was written by Beth Lesch, edited by Rivky Stern, and arranged by Laura Schembre.

Stop right there. If you were Joseph, and you were hearing Pharaoh say this to you — that the cows were *yefat to’ar*, “beautiful of form” — would that remind you of anything?

There are only two people in the entire Five Books of Moses who are ever described with this kind of language. One person is Joseph himself. The other is his mother, Rachel.

**Genesis 29:17**

**ְי ַפת-תֹ ַאר,** ִוי ַפת ַמ ְר ֶאהה ְי ָתה,

ו ָר ֵחל,

Rachel was of **beautiful form** and fair to look upon

**Genesis 39:6**

ַו ְי ִהי י ֹוסֵף, **ְי ֵפה-תֹ ַאר** ִוי ֵפה ַמ ְר ֶאה

And Joseph was of **beautiful form**, and fair to look upon

So if you are Joseph, listening to Pharaoh speak… you are thinking: “Oh my goodness! These cows, they remind me of my mother. They remind me of… myself.”

And as Pharaoh continues to speak, you’ll hear yet more clues that seem, inescapably, to point in this direction:

**Genesis 41:18**

**ָ**ב**אחו**

ויפת ּתֹ ַאר; ַו ִּת ְר ֶעי ָנה,

They were beautiful of form; and they were grazing in the **swamp**



At first glance, this verse about cows grazing in the swamp has little to do with Joseph’s life. But the trick is in the

translation. We’ve chosen to follow Rashi and translate the word ּו ּבאָח (*ba’achu*) as “in the swamp.” But it’s not such

an easy word to translate. The word appears nowhere else in the entire Five Books of Moses, which is perhaps why Onkelos, an even earlier commentator than Rashi, suggests an alternative interpretation: *be’echav*, “with his brothers.” In other words, those fat, healthy cows were grazing *with their cow brothers*. And what about the word ָנה ֶעי ִּתרְ ַו (*vatir’ena*), “and they were grazing”? This verb actually has two meanings. When applied to animals, it means “to graze,” which is how we translated it above. But when applied to people, it has a different meaning: “to shepherd.” *The seven beautiful cows were shepherding with their brothers.* If you were Joseph, hearing Pharaoh speak, what would that remind you of?

There was a time when Joseph was shepherding with *his* brothers. It’s the very first verse of the Joseph story:

**Genesis 37:2**

ב ְל ָהה ְו ֶאת- ְב ֵני ִז ְל ָּפה, ְנ ׁ ֵשי ָא ִביו; ַו ָ ּי ֵבא י ֹו ֵסף ֶאת- ִ ּד ָּב ָתם ָר ָעה,

ְוהוא ַנ ַער ֶאת- ְב ֵני ּב ּצֹאן,

אֶל-אֲ ִבי ֶהם.

ָיה **רֹ ֶעה אֶת-אֶ ָחיו** ה

ּבן- ׁש ַבע-ע ְ ׂש ֵרה ׁ ָש ָנה

א ֶּלה ּתֹ ְלד ֹות ַי ֲעקֹב, י ֹו ֵסף

These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was **shepherding with his brothers**, being still a lad even with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father’s wives; and Joseph brought evil report of them unto their father.

## Rachel Cows and Leah Cows

It’s kind of crazy, right? In Pharaoh’s dream, there are these two sets of cows: the beautiful cows and their “brothers,” the ugly cows. It almost seems as if the beautiful cows are supposed to correspond to the children of Rachel (who are described as being *yefat to’ar*), while the ugly cows correspond to the children of Leah!

But that sounds pretty far-fetched. Does the text give us any further indication of this, any evidence that it is so? As a matter of fact, it does. Listen to how Pharaoh describes those seven ugly cows:

**Genesis 41:19**

**רַ ּק ֹות** ָבּ ָ ׂשר

ו ִה ֵּנה ׁ ֶש ַבע- ּפר ֹות ֲא ֵחר ֹות, עֹל ֹות ַא ֲח ֵרי ֶהן, ַ ּד ּל ֹות ְו ָרע ֹות ּתֹ ַאר ְמאֹד,

And, behold, seven other kine came up after them, poor and very ill-favoured and **lean**-fleshed

*Rakot*, lean - where have you heard a word like that before? There is only other time in the entire Five Books of Moses that we encounter such a word. In that other place, it is spelled differently, but pronounced the same: *rako*t. It is used to describe a woman:

**Genesis 29:17**

ְו ֵעי ֵני ֵלאָה**רַ ּכ ֹות**

And the eyes of Leah were **thin**

Indeed, this is the only physical description that we ever get of Leah, and it’s from the very same verse that we quoted earlier, the verse which describes Rachel as *yefat to’ar*, beautiful. These seven ugly cows — they really do seem to be Leah cows, and the beautiful cows are Rachel cows… and they’re grazing together.

Joseph, hearing Pharaoh describe all of this, must have been thinking: *It’s like he’s narrating my life.* But the next thing that Pharaoh says must have made Joseph’s blood run cold:

ּכ ֲא ׁ ֶשר

**Genesis 41:19-20**

ֶאל-ק ְר ֶּב ָנה, ּו ַמ ְר ֵאי ֶהן ַרע, ּכי-באו

באנה ֶאל-ק ְר ֶּב ָנה, ְולֹא נ ֹו ַדע

ְּב ִריאֹת. ַו ָּת ה

ַּב ְּתחִ ָּלה.

ִרא ׁשֹנ ֹות, ה

ָּפר ֹות ה

ה ַר ּק ֹות, ְו ָה ָרע ֹות--את ׁ ֶש ַבע

ָּפר ֹות, ה

ו ּתֹא ַכ ְל ָנה,

And the lean and ill-favoured kine did eat up the first seven fat kine. And when they had eaten them up, it could not be known that they had eaten them; but they were still ill-favoured as at the beginning.

The ugly cows devoured the beautiful cows. If you were Joseph, what would this remind you of? Was there a time when the children of Leah “devoured” the children of Rachel? It’s when his brothers threw him into a pit. It was as if they *swallowed him alive*. And Pharaoh says that the ugly cows didn’t even *look any different* after they swallowed the beautiful cows. They looked exactly the same. It was the *perfect crime.* The beautiful cows were gone, without a trace. Just like Joseph: he vanished from that pit, was wiped clean off of the map of the family, and his brothers returned home to their father, looking just as they had when they left. It wasn’t apparent that they had just swallowed someone alive. This dream: it is *retelling Joseph’s life.*

But now, before we get too excited here, we have to confront a problem with this line of thinking, a problem that must have bothered Joseph too, if Joseph had seen these patterns. It is the *number of cows.*

If the beautiful cows were really meant to represent the children of Rachel, then there shouldn’t have been *seven* of them. There should have been just one or two of them (one for Joseph, two if you count Benjamin). And the ugly cows — if they’re supposed to represent the children of Leah, then there shouldn’t have been seven of them, either. There were only six brothers from the children of Leah. Why were there two sets of *seven cows?*

## Turning Towards An Answer

We think that we found an answer — and we want to show you how we got there. Go back to that key verse from Genesis chapter 29, the one that gives the physical descriptions of Rachel and Leah:

**Genesis 29:17**

ְי ַפת-תֹ ַאר, ִוי ַפת ַמ ְר ֶאה. ה ְי ָתה,

ו ֵעי ֵני ֵל ָאה, ַר ּכ ֹות; ְו ָר ֵחל,

And Leah’s eyes were thin; but Rachel was of beautiful form and fair to look upon.

This one verse was the key to interpreting Pharaoh’s dream. Right there, in one verse, was the key for Joseph to understand how everything in Pharaoh’s dream mirrored his own life. Now take a look at the *next* verse, and we’re going to hear about that magic number *seven:*

**Genesis 29:18**

ְּק ַט ָּנה. ה

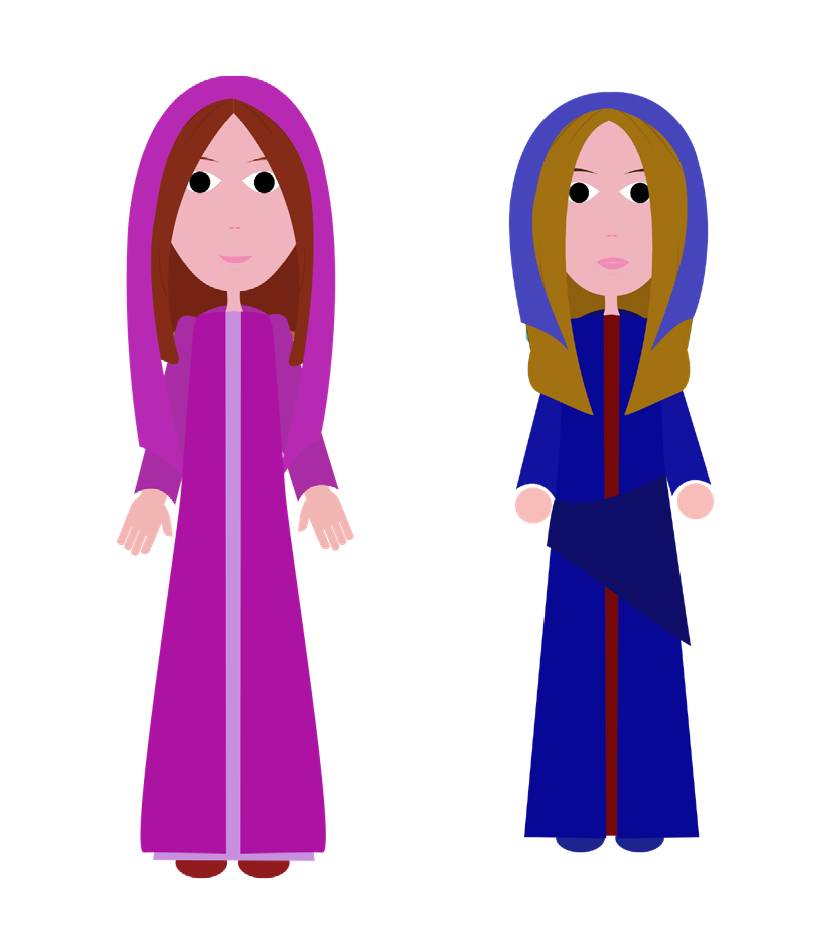
ְּת ָך, ּב

ָר ֵחל ּב

ו ֶ ּי ֱא ַהב ַי ֲעקֹב, ֶאת-ר ֵחל; ַו ּיֹא ֶמר, ֶא ֱע ָב ְד ָך **ׁ ֶשבַע ׁ ָש ִנים**,

And Jacob loved Rachel; and he said [to Laban]: ‘I will serve you **seven years** for Rachel your younger daughter.’

Not just seven, but *seven years.* Jacob worked for seven years for Rachel, but she was switched for Leah under the chuppah. He needed to work another seven years to earn her hand in marriage. *Two sets of seven years.*

And suddenly it dawns on Joseph: *the cows are years.* The beautiful cows **don’t** represent me or my mother, not directly. The ugly cows **don’t** represent my brothers, the children of Leah. The two sets of cows represent years:

the years that my father worked for Rachel and Leah. When I was out in the field, shepherding with my brothers, we were the *fruits* of those years. It was as if the seven long years that my father worked for Rachel… they were out in the fields, those years, shepherding with the seven long years that my father worked for Leah. And when they swallowed me, it is like one set of years swallowed the other: it was like my father had worked for *naught* for those seven years for Rachel, because the fruits of those years vanished, I vanished.

Joseph is hearing the dream through the prism of his own life experience, and that gives him the key that he needs to interpret it. That’s how he’s able to interpret Pharaoh’s dream. God uses Joseph’s life as the key that unlocks the meaning of Pharaoh’s dream.

When Pharaoh is talking to Joseph, God is speaking too — but only Joseph can hear Him.1

1 In looking back at everything that we’ve said about Pharaoh and Joseph’s dream, you need to distinguish between what it is that we (as readers of the Torah) hear and what it is that Joseph heard when Pharaoh spoke. The Torah is written in Hebrew, but Pharaoh and Joseph almost certainly weren’t speaking Hebrew to one another. They were probably speaking Egyptian. That means that the exact language that we see in our text is a paraphrase, at best. If so, you might well say, then if Pharaoh didn’t really use the phrase *yefat to’ar* to describe the beautiful cows (Hebrew for “beautiful of form”), then it doesn’t match up with Rachel right? Then the whole reading of “cows shepherding with their brothers” goes out the window, as does the *rakot* (“thin”) nature of Leah’s eyes… right?

So no, we don’t necessarily think that you have to follow that line of thinking. Here’s why: the Torah is using these connections to speak to you, the reader. It is a literary device that God is employing in order to communicate with you what it was like for Joseph to listen to Pharaoh’s dreams. For example, the Torah uses the word *bor,* “pit,” to describe the prison. It’s a literary device intended to convey the following to you: that as Joseph was being pulled out of prison, he had some *déjà vu* sense that he was being pulled out of the pit, all over again. And as Pharaoh bedecked him in new clothes, it felt for Joseph like that moment when, thirteen years prior, his clothes were stripped from him. There was something about the way that Pharaoh described the cows that recalled, for Joseph, his mother. This is all the Torah’s way of clueing us in, placing these words in strategic places to help us to make the connections. These are connections that were very much going on in Joseph’s mind — *yefat to’ar* or no *yefat to’ar* — because the events just seemed so uncannily similar.

## Past, Present… And Future?

It turns out that, as remarkable as this is, there is yet a third layer of meaning in Pharaoh’s dream. We’ve already suggested that the dream conveys meaning that relates to Joseph’s *past*, as well as meaning that relates to Pharaoh’s *present.* But we also believe that there’s meaning, encoded in this dream, that will relate to Joseph’s *future.* Joseph can’t understand it

just yet, as he stands before Pharaoh, but he’ll be able to understand it nine years hence.

To see it, you have to look back at the dream interpretation that Joseph gives to Pharaoh. In essence, what he was saying to Pharaoh was:

*Your dream isn’t a reason for despair. Yes, the ugly cows swallow the beautiful cows — but that doesn’t mean that we’re doomed. It doesn’t mean that famine is destined*

*to wipe us out. We can survive! Those beautiful cows… just because they’re going to be swallowed up doesn’t mean that they can’t have an impact. They have a job to do. The job of the beautiful cows — the beautiful years — is to sustain everyone.*

*And that’s despite the fact that, once those years are over and famine strikes, no one will remember them! During the years of famine, you’ll ask the average Egyptian on the street: ‘Hey, do you remember the good years?’ He’ll respond: ‘What good years? All I can remember is starvation.’ But he’ll be mistaken. For the crust of bread that he’ll still be holding in his hand is a testament to those good years that once were, keeping him alive even now, even though they have been forgotten. The good years can still have an impact even after they have vanished. The beautiful years have to give their bounty to the bad years. Then they will have done their job.*

What is the implication of this message, for Joseph’s future? Nine years later his brothers will show up at his door in Egypt. They won’t recognize him, but he will recognize them and hide his true identity from them… until something happens:

**Genesis 42:9**

ַלם ָל ֶהם ח

ה ֲחלֹמ ֹות, ֲא ׁ ֶשר

ו ִ ּי ְז ּ ֹכר י ֹו ֵסף--את

And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them

The most straightforward read of this verse is that Joseph remembered *his* dreams from all of those years before: about the sheaves of wheat bowing down, about the sun and the moon and stars. But maybe, just maybe, one of the dreams that Joseph remembered was *this* dream, Pharaoh’s dream. And if he did, then he would have remembered how that dream *characterized* the people standing in front of him now: they were the fruit of the *rakot* cows, the gaunt, thin years. And in the language of the dream, who is he, Joseph? He is the fruit of the *yefat to’ar* cows, the beautiful years. And what did he tell Pharaoh is the *job* of the beautiful years? To sustain the terrible years. The job of the beautiful cows is to *take care* of the ugly ones — even though they would swallow them alive. So perhaps, in that moment, as Joseph looks at his brothers, although he is filled with righteous anger — this is just the nudge that he needs to temper that anger, ever so slightly: not to send them home rashly and refuse them the life-saving grain that they seek.

And when Joseph finally does reveal himself to them, what does he say?

ְפ ֵני ֶכם… ל

**Genesis 45:4**

**למִ ְח ָיה**, ׁ ְש ָל ַח ִני ֱאלֹקים

ּכי

ה ָּנה:

ַכ ְר ֶּתם אֹ ִתי, ּכי-מ

ֵעי ֵני ֶכם, ּב

א ִני י ֹו ֵסף ֲא ִחי ֶכם, ֲא ׁ ֶשר-מ ַכ ְר ֶּתם אֹ ִתי, ִמ ְצ ָר ְי ָמה. ְו ַע ָּתה ַאל- ּת ָע ְצב ּו, ְו ַאל- ִי ַחר

ֶרץ ִמ ְצ ָר ִים. ּב ָכל-א

ל ָכל- ֵבית ֹו, ּומֹ ׁ ֵשל,

ּו ְל ָאד ֹון ל ַפ ְרעֹה,

ל ָאב

ה ֱאלֹקים; ַו ְי ִ ׂשי ֵמ ִני

ּכי,

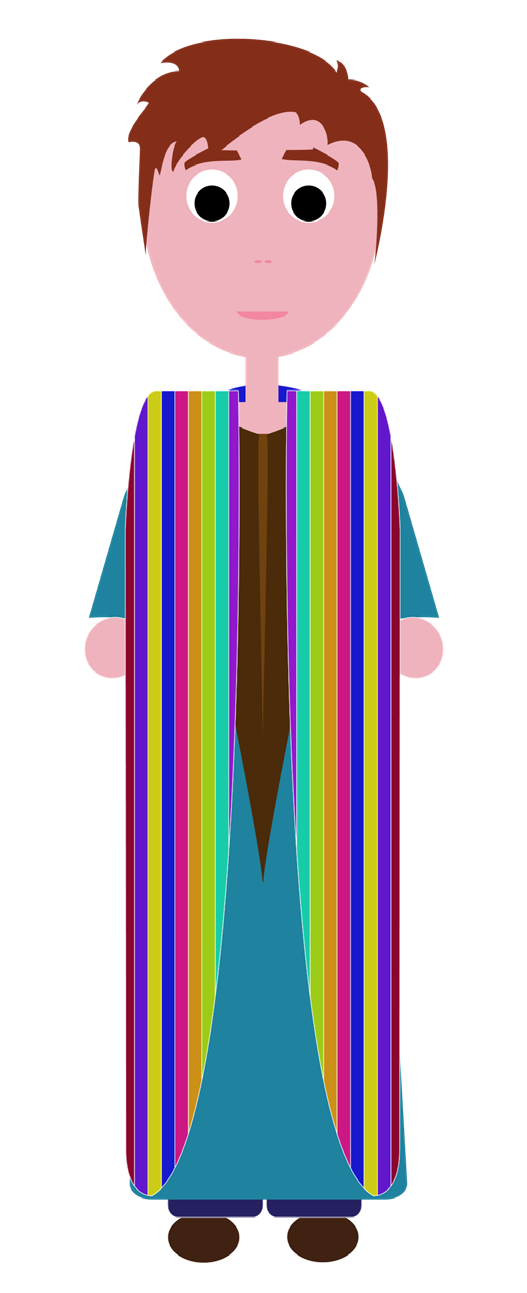
ה ָּנה,

ו ַע ָּתה, לֹא-א ֶּתם ׁ ְש ַל ְח ֶּתם אֹ ִתי

I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. And now be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that you sold me here; for God did send me before you **to preserve life**

The first thing that he says is: *Don’t be upset about what happened. I know why God put me here: it was so I could* ***sustain***

*you.* How did he know that? *He knew it from Pharaoh’s dream.*

Joseph saw his own *past* in that dream. He saw Pharaoh’s *present* in the dream. And finally he comes to see, reflected in that self-same dream, the meaning of his *future*. Joseph’s brothers will swallow him, but God wants Joseph to care for them, nonetheless.

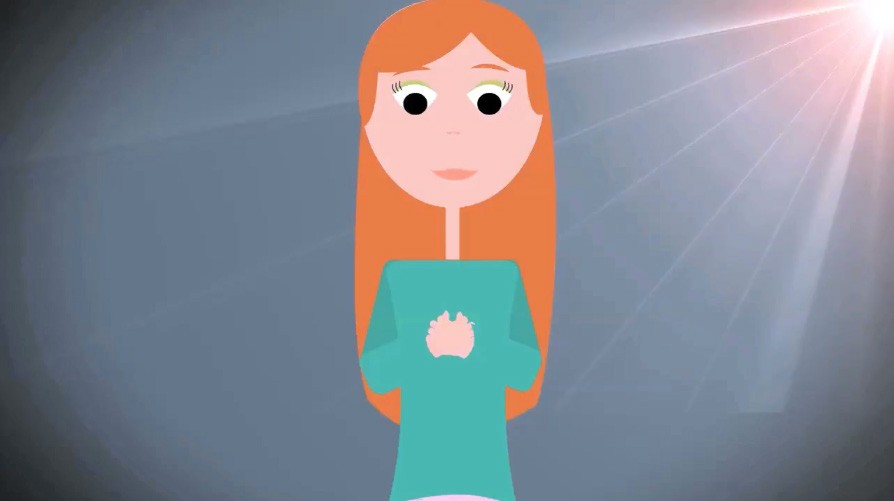
Look at the kindness of Joseph. Kindness usually makes us feel all fuzzy inside, right? But there’s a certain kind of kindness, that *doesn’t* make you feel warm. A kind of kindness that is not so easy to do. What happens when someone from your own family doesn’t care about you? They forget about you, you don’t matter to them; but one day, years later, they are in need. Can you find it within yourself to take care of them? What about if they don’t even know that the help is coming from you? This is what Joseph does. It’s one thing to engage in warm and fuzzy kindness, but Joseph is modeling for us what it looks like to engage in the more painful kind.

## Our Day

And finally, that brings us to the grand and intensely personal question with which we opened this series of guides: How, if at all, does God speak to humankind in the absence of prophecy? We have seen, it seems, that there is such a way. That God *does* speak to people without speaking: that God spoke to Joseph. And if that is so: then what about our own day and age? Might it be that God speaks that way *to us?*

We want to humbly submit that the answer is yes. For we will all come to a time, after 120 years, when we will go to heaven, and we may say to God: *God, I prayed to you! I talked to you. Sometimes I wasn’t really concentrating... but there were times that I really reached out to you, in moments of pain, and I want to know, God: Where were you? Where was your response? Did you ever say anything back to me?*

Is it possible that God’s response would be: *Did you ever look at your life? Did you ever watch for the patterns? As you were going through events, did you ever have that feeling of déjà vu — that things had happened before? Did that ever happen to you? This is how I talked to you. It’s like we have this private message board — Me and you — this slate that no one else can understand, the set of our shared experiences: your life — it’s the way I talk to you. And you may not always understand the messages that I’m “writing” out to you on this little blank slate that we have together. You have to work hard to listen. Even Joseph didn’t understand immediately. It took him nine years after he heard it all to finally really understand. And you too: you may not understand it all. But you understand enough, sometimes, to know that it’s not a coincidence. You understand enough to know that I’m tapping you on the shoulder. And even if you don’t know what I mean, if you just know that I am speaking to you: sometimes that’s enough.*

What we’re describing is a beautiful, radical idea: that we all have a kind of private communication channel with the divine. The slate is our own lives. It’s a personal kind

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of language that means something *only* to us — the same way that Pharaoh’s dream meant something *only* to Joseph. And the

communication comes from the most unlikely of sources. For who would have thought

that God would speak to Joseph not so much through his own dreams as through Pharaoh’s? But Joseph was wise enough to

hear the echoes resonate in his life, to discern God’s voice. Maybe we can pick up a little bit

of that wisdom, too — and be ready to hear His voice in the most unlikely of places.

We’re almost through with this series, but we would like to take the final installment to explore some personal implications of this theory. Join us for Part IV in the guide to *Parshat Vayechi*.



Vayigash: Does God Speak To Us Today? Part III

Source Sheet Page 1

**Genesis 41:1-32**

**בראשית מא:א–לב**

על-ה ְיאֹר. **ב**

חֹ ֵלם, ְו ִה ֵּנה עֹ ֵמד ו ַפ ְרעֹה

מ ֵּקץ ׁ ְש ָנ ַת ִים ָי ִמים;

**א** ַו ְי ִהי,

**1** And it came to pass at the end of two full years, that

ו ְב ִריאֹת ּב ָ ׂשר;

ֹות, ְיפות מ ְר ֶאה, ָפר

ו ִה ֵּנה מן-ה ְיאֹר, עֹלֹת ׁ ֶש ַבע

Pharaoh dreamed: and, behold, he stood by the river. **2**

ֲח ֵרי ֶהן מן- א

ו ִּת ְר ֶעי ָנה, ּב ָאחו. **ג** ְו ִה ֵּנה ׁ ֶש ַבע ָפר ֹות א ֵחר ֹות, עֹל ֹות

And, behold, there came up out of the river seven kine, well-

ְש ַפת על-

מ ְר ֶאה, ְו ַד ּק ֹות ּב ָ ׂשר; ַו ַּת ֲעמֹ ְד ָנה א ֶצל ה ָּפר ֹות,

ה ְיאֹר, ָרע ֹות

favoured and fat-fleshed; and they fed in the reed-grass.

**3** And, behold, seven other kine came up after them out

ה ָּפר ֹות, ָרע ֹות ה ַּמ ְר ֶאה ְו ַד ּקֹת ה ָּב ָ ׂשר, את ׁ ֶש ַבע

הַ ְיאֹר. **ד** ַו ּתֹא ַכ ְל ָנה

of the river, ill favoured and lean-fleshed; and stood by the

ַפ ְרעֹה. **ה** וַ ִ ּיי ׁ ָשן, וַ ַ ּי ֲחלֹם

ה ָּפר ֹות, ְיפת ה ַּמ ְר ֶאה ְו ַה ְּב ִריאֹת; ַו ִ ּיי ַקץ,

other kine upon the brink of the river. **4** And the ill-favoured

ָחד-- ְב ִריאות ְוטֹב ֹות. א

ָק ֶנה ּב

ֵש ִנית; ְו ִה ֵּנה ׁ ֶש ַבע ׁ ִש ֳּב ִלים, עֹל ֹות

and lean-fleshed kine did eat up the seven well-favoured

ֲח ֵרי ֶהן. א

פת ָק ִדים--צֹ ְמחות,

ו ׁ ְשד ּו

**ו** ְו ִה ֵּנה ׁ ֶש ַבע ׁ ִש ֳּב ִלים, ַ ּד ּק ֹות

and fat kine. So Pharaoh awoke. **5** And he slept and

ה ׁ ִּש ֳּב ִלים, ה ְּב ִריאות

את ׁ ֶש ַבע

ה ׁ ִּש ֳּב ִלים ה ַ ּד ּק ֹות,

**ז** ַו ִּת ְב ַל ְע ָנה,

dreamed a second time: and, behold, seven ears of corn

חל ֹום. **ח** ַו ְי ִהי ב ּ ֹב ֶקר, ַו ִּת ָּפ ֶעם ר ּוחו,

ו ַה ְּמ ֵלאות; ַו ִ ּיי ַקץ ַפ ְרעֹה, ְו ִה ֵּנה

came up upon one stalk, rank and good. **6** And, behold,

ו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ַלח ַו ִ ּי ְק ָרא את- ָכל-ח ְר ֻט ֵּמי מ ְצ ַר ִים, ְו ֶאת- ָכל-ח ָכ ֶמי ָה; ַו ְי ַס ֵּפר

seven ears, thin and blasted with the east wind, sprung up

after them. **7** And the thin ears swallowed up the seven

ל ֶהם את-חלֹמ ֹו, ְו ֵאין-פ ֹו ֵתר או ָתם ל ַפ ְר ֹעה. **ט** ַו ְי ַד ֵּבר ׂשר

ַפ ְרעֹה

rank and full ears. And Pharaoh awoke, and, behold, it

ה ַּמ ׁ ְש ִקים, את- ּפ ְר ֹעה לאמֹר: את-ח ָט ַאי, א ִני מ ְז ִּכיר ה ּי ֹום. **י** ַפרְעֹה,

was a dream. **8** And it came to pass in the morning that

על-ע ָב ָדיו; ַו ִ ּי ֵּתן אֹ ִתי ּב ִמ ׁ ְש ַמר, ּבית ׂשר ה ַּט ָּב ִחים--אֹ ִתי, ְו ֵאת

ק ַצף

his spirit was troubled; and he sent and called for all the

ְתר ֹון ּכ ִפ

ׁש אי

ִני ָוהוא: א

ָחד, א

ְי ָלה ּב ַל

ֹום חל

ׂשר הָאֹ ִפים. **יא** ַו ַּנ ַח ְל ָמה

magicians of Egypt, and all the wise men thereof; and

ע ֶבד ל ַ ׂשר ה ַּט ָּב ִחים, ַו ְּנ ַס ֶּפר-

ְב ִרי, ע

חֲלֹמ ֹו, חָ ָל ְמנ ּו. **יב** ְו ׁ ָשם א ָּתנ ּו ַנ ַער

Pharaoh told them his dream; but there was none that

ָפ ָתר. **יג** ַו ְי ִהי ּכ ֲא ׁ ֶשר

ֵתינ ּו: אי ׁש ּכ ֲחלֹמ ֹו, את-חלֹמֹ

ל ֹו, ַו ִ ּי ְפ ָּתר- ָלנ ּו

could interpret them unto Pharaoh. **9** Then spoke the

ה ׁ ִשיב על- ַכ ִּני, ְואֹת ֹו ת ָלה. **יד** ַו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ַלח ַפ ְרעֹה

ָפ ַתר- ָלנ ּו, ּכן ה ָיה: אֹ ִתי

chief butler unto Pharaoh, saying: ‘I make mention of my faults this day: **10** Pharaoh was wroth with his servants, and put me in the ward of the house of the captain of the guard, me and the chief baker. **11** And we dreamed

מן-ה ּב ֹור; ַו ְי ַג ַּלח ַו ְי ַח ֵּלף ׂש ְמלֹ ָתיו, ַו ָ ּיבא אל-

ֹו ֵסף, חל ֹום ח ַל ְמ ִּתי, ופ ֵתר אין אֹת ֹו; חל ֹום, ל ְפ ּתֹר אֹת ֹו. **טז** ַו ַ ּי ַען י ֹו ֵסף אל-י ִת ׁ ְש ַמע

ו ִ ּי ְק ָרא את-י ֹו ֵסף, ַו ְי ִרי ֻצהו

ַפרְ ֹעה. **טו** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ַפ ְרעֹה,

ו ֲא ִני, ׁ ָש ַמ ְע ִּתי ע ֶלי ָך לאמֹר,

a dream in one night, I and he; we dreamed each man

ְרעֹה. **יז** ַו ְידַ ֵּבר ַפ

את- ׁ ְשל ֹום

ַי ֲע ֶנה אלֹקים,

ָע ָדי: ּב ְל

לאמֹר,

את- ַּפ ְרעֹה

according to the interpretation of his dream. **12** And there

ְיאֹר. **יח** ְו ִה ֵּנה מן- ה

ִני עֹ ֵמד על- ְש ַפת ה ְנ

ֲחלֹ ִמי, ּב

ַפ ְר ֹעה, אל-י ֹו ֵסף:

was with us there a young man, a Hebrew, servant to the

ּב ָ ׂשר, ִויפת תֹ ַאר; ַו ִּת ְר ֶעי ָנה, ּב ָאחו.

ה ְיאֹר, ֹעלֹת ׁ ֶש ַבע ָפר ֹות, ּב ִריאות

captain of the guard; and we told him, and he interpreted

א ֲח ֵרי ֶהן, ַ ּד ּל ֹות ְו ָרע ֹות תֹ ַאר

**יט** ְו ִה ֵּנה ׁ ֶש ַבע- ּפר ֹות א ֵחר ֹות, עֹל ֹות

to us our dreams; to each man according to his dream he

did interpret. **13** And it came to pass, as he interpreted

ַע. **כ** לרֹ

ְצ ַר ִים, מ

מאֹד, ְו ַר ּק ֹות ּב ָ ׂשר: לֹא-ר ִאי ִתי כ ֵה ָּנה ּב ָכל-א ֶרץ

to us, so it was: I was restored unto mine office, and he

ִרא ׁשֹנ ֹות, ה

ָּפר ֹות ה

ה ַר ּק ֹות, ְו ָה ָרע ֹות--את ׁ ֶש ַבע

ָּפר ֹות, ה

ו ּתֹא ַכ ְל ָנה,

was hanged.**’ 14** Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph,

ְר ֶּב ָנה, אל-ק

ּכי-באו

ְר ֶּב ָנה, ְולֹא נ ֹו ַדע אל-ק

באנה

ה ְּברִיאֹת. **כא** ַו ָּת

and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon. And he

ּב ֲחלֹ ִמי; ְו ִה ֵּנה ׁ ֶש ַבע

ָּלה; ָו ִאי ָקץ. **כב** ָו ֵא ֶרא, ּב ְּת ִח

ּכ ֲא ׁ ֶשר

ו ַמ ְר ֵאי ֶהן ַרע,

shaved himself, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh. **15** And Pharaoh said unto Joseph: ‘I have dreamed a dream, and there is none that can interpret it; and I have heard say of thee, that when thou hearest a dream thou canst interpret it.’ **16** And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying: ‘It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an

ִש ֳּב ִלים, ֹעלֹת ּב ָק ֶנה א ָחד--מ ֵלאֹת ְוטֹב ֹות. **כג** ְו ִה ֵּנה ׁ ֶש ַבע ׁ ִש ֳּב ִלים,

צ ֻנמ ֹות ַ ּד ּק ֹות ׁ ְש ֻדפות ָק ִדים--צֹ ְמחות, א ֲח ֵרי ֶהם. **כד** ַו ִּת ְב ַלעְןָ

ה ׁ ִּש ֳּב ִלים ה ַ ּד ּקֹת, את ׁ ֶש ַבע ה ׁ ִּש ֳּב ִלים ה ּטֹב ֹות; ָואֹ ַמר, אל-ה ַח ְר ֻט ִּמים,

ו ֵאין מ ִּגיד, לי. **כה** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר י ֹו ֵסף אל- ּפ ְר ֹעה, חל ֹום ַפ ְר ֹעה א ָחד הוא: את א ׁ ֶשר ה ֱאלֹקים עֹ ֶ ׂשה, ה ִּגיד ל ַפ ְר ֹעה. **כו** ׁ ֶש ַבע ָ ֹפרת ה ּ ֹטבת, ׁ ֶש ַבע

answer of peace.’ **17** And Pharaoh spoke unto Joseph: ‘In

ָחד א

ֹום, חל

ה ָּנה:

בת, ׁ ֶש ַבע ׁ ָש ִנים

ה ּ ֹט

ה ׁ ִּש ֳּב ִלים

ה ָּנה, ְו ׁ ֶש ַבע

ָש ִנים

my dream, behold, I stood upon the brink of the river. **18**

א ֲח ֵרי ֶהן, ׁ ֶש ַבע ׁ ָש ִנים

העֹלֹת

ּק ֹות ְו ָה ָרעֹת ה ַר

ָּפר ֹות ה

הוא. **כז** ְו ׁ ֶש ַבע



Vayigash: Does God Speak To Us Today? Part III

Source Sheet Page 2

And, behold, there came up out of the river seven kine, fat-

ה ָּק ִדים-- ִי ְהי ּו, ׁ ֶש ַבע ׁ ְש ֵני ָר ָעב.

ה ֵרקות, ׁ ְש ֻדפות

ה ׁ ִּש ֳּב ִלים

ה ָּנה, ְו ׁ ֶש ַבע

fleshed and well-favoured; and they fed in the reed-grass.

ְר ָאה ה

ה ֱאלֹקים עֹ ֶ ׂשה,

א ׁ ֶשר

ּפ ְרעֹה: אל-

א ׁ ֶשר ִ ּד ַּב ְר ִּתי

ה ָ ּד ָבר,

**כח** הוא

**19** And, behold, seven other kine came up after them, poor

ָש ָבע ָּגד ֹול, ּב ָכל-א ֶרץ ּבאות--

את- ּפ ְר ֹעה. **כט** ה ֵּנה ׁ ֶש ַבע ׁ ָש ִנים,

and very ill-favoured and lean-fleshed, such as I never saw

ּכל-ה ָּ ׂש ָבע, ּב ֶא ֶרץ

מ ְצרָ ִים. **ל** ְו ָקמ ּו ׁ ֶש ַבע ׁ ְש ֵני ָר ָעב, א ֲח ֵרי ֶהן, ְו ִנ ׁ ְש ַּכח

in all the land of Egypt for badness. **20** And the lean and

את-ה ָא ֶרץ. **לא** ְולֹא- ִי ָ ּו ַדע ה ָּ ׂש ָבע ּב ָא ֶרץ, מ ְּפ ֵני

ָר ָעב, ה

מ ְצ ָר ִים; ְו ִכ ָּלה

ill-favoured kine did eat up the first seven fat kine. **21** And

when they had eaten them up, it could not be known that

ּכי-כ ֵבד הוא, מאֹד. **לב** ְו ַעל ה ׁ ָּשנ ֹות ה ֲחל ֹום

ה ָר ָעב ההוא א ֲח ֵרי-כן:

they had eaten them; but they were still ill-favoured as at

ה ֱאלֹקים, ו ְמ ַמ ֵהר ה ֱאלֹקים מ ִעם

ה ָ ּד ָבר

ָמ ִים-- ִכי-נכ ֹון ַפ ֲע

אל- ּפ ְרעֹה,

the beginning. So I awoke. **22** And I saw in my dream, and, behold, seven ears came up upon one stalk, full and good. **23** And, behold, seven ears, withered, thin, and blasted with the east wind, sprung up after them. **24** And the thin ears swallowed up the seven good ears. And I told it unto the magicians; but there was none that could declare it to me.’ **25** And Joseph said unto Pharaoh: ‘The dream of Pharaoh is one; what God is about to do He has declared unto Pharaoh. **26** The seven good kine are seven years; and

the seven good ears are seven years: the dream is one.

**27** And the seven lean and ill-favoured kine that came up after them are seven years, and also the seven empty ears blasted with the east wind; they shall be seven years of famine. **28** That is the thing which I spoke unto Pharaoh: what God is about to do He has shown unto Pharaoh. **29** Behold, there come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt. **30** And there shall arise after them seven years of famine; and all the plenty shall be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine shall consume the land; **31** and the plenty shall not be known in the land by reason of that famine which followeth; for it shall be very grievous. **32** And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice, it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.

שֹת ֹו.

לעֲ

**Genesis 29:17-18**

#### בראשית כט:יז-יח

**17** And Leah’s eyes were thin; but Rachel was of beautiful

ְר ֶאה. **יח** מ

ַר ּכ ֹות; ְו ָר ֵחל, ה ְי ָתה, ְי ַפת-תֹ ַאר, ִוי ַפת ל ָאה,

**יז** ו ֵעי ֵני

form and fair to look upon. **18** And Jacob loved Rachel; and he said [to Laban]: ‘I will serve you seven years for Rachel your younger daughter.’

ּב ְּת ָך, ּב ָר ֵחל

את-ר ֵחל; ַו ּיֹא ֶמר, א ֱע ָב ְד ָך ׁ ֶש ַבע ׁ ָש ִנים,

ו ֶ ּי ֱא ַהב ַי ֲעקֹב,

ַה ְּקטַ ָּנה.



Vayigash: Does God Speak To Us Today? Part III

Source Sheet Page 3

**Genesis 37:2**

#### בראשית לז:ב

**2** These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being

ָיה רֹ ֶעה את-א ָחיו ה

תֹ ְלד ֹות ַי ֲעקֹב, י ֹו ֵסף ּבן- ׁש ַבע-ע ְ ׂש ֵרה ׁ ָש ָנה

**ב** א ֶּלה

seventeen years old, was shepherding with his brothers, being still a lad even with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father’s wives; and Joseph brought evil report of them unto their father.

**Genesis 39:6**

א ִביו; ַו ָ ּי ֵבא י ֹו ֵסף

את- ְב ֵני ב ְל ָהה ְו ֶאת- ְב ֵני ִז ְל ָּפה, ְנ ׁ ֵשי

אל-א ִבי ֶהם.

ּב ּצֹאן, ְוהוא ַנ ַער

את- ִ ּד ָּב ָתם ָר ָעה,

#### בראשית לט:ו

**6** And he left all that he had in Joseph’s hand; and, having

אם-

ָמה, ּכי מאו

**ו** ו ַ ּי ֲע ֹזב ּכל-א ׁ ֶשר-ל ֹו, ּב ַיד-י ֹו ֵסף, ְולֹא- ָי ַדע א ּת ֹו

him, he knew not aught save the bread which he did eat. And Joseph was of beautiful form, and fair to look upon.

ְר ֶאה. מ

א ׁ ֶשר-הוא או ֵכל; ַו ְי ִהי י ֹו ֵסף, ְי ֵפה-תֹ ַאר ִוי ֵפה

ה ֶּל ֶחם

**Genesis 42:9**

#### בראשית מב:ט

**9** And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed

ֵל ֶהם א

ַלם ל ֶהם; ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ח

ה ֲחלֹמ ֹות, א ׁ ֶשר

**ט** ו ִ ּי ְז ּ ֹכר י ֹו ֵסף--את

of them, and said unto them: ‘Ye are spies; to see the nakedness of the land ye are come.’

ּבאתם.

ְר ַות ה ָא ֶרץ את-ע

מ ַר ְּג ִלים א ֶּתם, ל ְראות

**Genesis 45:4-8**

#### בראשית מה:ד–ח

**4** And Joseph said unto his brethren: ‘Come near to me, I

א ַלי, ַו ִ ּי ָּג ׁש ּו; ַו ּיֹא ֶמר, א ִני י ֹו ֵסף

**ד** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר י ֹו ֵסף אל-א ָחיו ְּג ׁש ּו-נא

pray you.’ And they came near. And he said: ‘I am Joseph

א ׁ ֶשר-מ ַכ ְר ֶּתם אֹ ִתי, מ ְצ ָר ְי ָמה. **ה** ְו ַע ָּתה אל- ּת ָע ְצב ּו, ְו ַאל-

א ִחי ֶכם,

your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. **5** And now be not

ל ִמ ְח ָיה, ׁ ְש ָל ַח ִני אלֹקים

ָּנה: ּכי ה

י ַחר ּב ֵעי ֵני ֶכם, ּכי-מ ַכ ְר ֶּתם אֹ ִתי,

grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that you sold me hither;

for God did send me before you to preserve life. **6** For

ּב ֶק ֶרב ה ָא ֶרץ; ְוע ֹוד ח ֵמ ׁש ׁ ָש ִנים,

לפְ ֵני ֶכם. **ו** ּכי-זה ׁ ְש ָנ ַת ִים ה ָר ָעב,

these two years has the famine been in the land; and there

ל ְפ ֵני ֶכם, לש ּום ל ֶכם אלֹקים

אין-ח ִרי ׁש ְו ָק ִציר. **ז** ַו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ָל ֵח ִני

א ׁ ֶשר

are yet five years, in which there shall be neither plowing

ָטה ְּגדֹ ָלה. **ח** ְו ַע ָּתה, לֹא-א ֶּתם ל ְפ ֵלי

ֶכם, ל

ַה ֲחי ֹות ו ְל

ָא ֶרץ, ּב

ְש ֵא ִרית

nor harvest. **7** And God sent me before you to give you

ל ָכל-

ְל ָאד ֹון ו

ַפ ְרעֹה, ל

ָאב ל

ה ֱאלֹקים; ַו ְי ִ ׂשי ֵמ ִני

ּכי,

ָּנה, ה

ְש ַל ְח ֶּתם אֹ ִתי

a remnant on the earth, and to save you alive for a great deliverance. **8** So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

ְצ ָר ִים. מ

ָכל-א ֶרץ ּב

ומֹ ׁ ֵשל,

ּבית ֹו,



**THE PARSHA EXPERIMENT**

**PARSHAT VAYIGASH: A SPEECH THAT TURNS THE TIDE**

This guide corresponds to the video: [How Did Judah Change Joseph’s Mind?](https://www.alephbeta.org/playlist/story-of-judah-and-benjamin)

**SABBATH TABLE OUTLINE**



1. Left off Parshat Miketz in the middle of a story - Joseph sentences Benjamin to slavery after finding his goblet in Benjamin’s bag
   1. This week’s parsha picks up at the most dramatic part of the story - Judah appeals to Joseph for his brother Benjamin
      1. Then, just a few verses later, Joseph reveals himself as their long lost brother
      2. They hug and kiss, and the whole saga, all the family drama, is resolved

Guide by Dr. Sarah Levy

* 1. This story swings our emotions back forth --- from one extreme to the other
     1. One moment, the world has come to end, Benjamin is gone, Jacob will die mourning over the loss of his son
     2. Then, out of nowhere, not only is Benjamin saved, but Jacob’s whole family reunites
  2. What changed?
     1. What made the plotline swing so abruptly and unexpectedly from disaster to celebration?
     2. What happened is that Judah appeals to Joseph
  3. What about Judah’s speech so drastically turned the tide?
     1. A speech that ends a decades-long rift in the family must be the most heartwarming speech ever
     2. If you look at the speech, it seems pretty unremarkable
        + Judah recaps a conversation with his father, Jacob, before they returned to Egypt with Benjamin
        + How did such a pedestrian appeal have so great an impact?

1. 20-second parsha recap
   1. Judah appeals to Jacob in attempt to save Benjamin from slavery
   2. Joseph reveals himself to the brothers
   3. Joseph sends an entourage to bring his father down to Egypt
   4. On his way down, God tells Jacob that he’ll be with

him down in Egypt, and after 17 years, Joseph and Jacob reunite



* 1. Jacob and the brothers meet Pharaoh, and Pharaoh gives them the land of Goshen
  2. Finally, Joseph then establishes a sort of feudalism in Egypt

1. In order to understand the impact of Judah’s speech, we can’t look at it in isolation
   1. There’s a backstory, there’s a conversation that the brothers had with Jacob before bringing Benjamin to Egypt, a conversation recapped in Judah’s speech
   2. We’re going to try an experiment
      1. We’re going to try to read through that original conversation
      2. Let’s try to experience it from the brothers’ perspective
         * How did they feel during this conversation with Jacob?
         * Brothers come back from Egypt with one less person than they left with
         * But Jacob isn’t thrilled with sending Benjamin, potentially losing him
         * Jacob said: No, I will not allow my son to go with you for his brother has died, and Benjamin is the only one left (Genesis 42:38)
2. Now let’s look at that from the brothers’ perspective
   1. We know Jacob meant that Benjamin was the only remaining son of Rachel
   2. If you were one of Leah’s sons and lived your whole life knowing that your mother was the unfavored wife and that your father seems to love you less, can you imagine how painful it must have been to hear your father call Benjamin his only remaining son?
   3. Also, think about the implications of Jacob’s decision
      1. Not letting Benjamin go doesn’t just mean that they can’t go back to Egypt to get food
      2. Simeon can’t get back – seems like Jacob was choosing Benjamin over Simeon
   4. Look at why Jacob won’t let Benjamin go
      1. He says: If something were to happen to Benjamin, you – my sons – will bring me to my grave in terrible misery
      2. Does that sound familiar?
         * The brothers have heard these words before
         * After the loss of Joseph, Jacob refused to be consoled (Genesis 37:35)
           + He said: I will go down to my grave mourning my son, Joseph
           + Jacob felt that his world was over when he lost Joseph, and now, he says he’ll feel the way again if he loses Benjamin
           + But you know who Jacob doesn’t feel that way about? Simeon
           + Jacob isn’t going to his grave mourning the loss of Leah’s children, only Rachel’s children
           + How must this feel to Leah’s sons?
3. What’s happening here is tragic
   1. Again, brothers are forced to relive the painful favoritism that Jacob showed Joseph
      1. Jacob is choosing Benjamin, Rachel’s child, over the children of Leah
      2. And it continues - Judah takes responsibility for bringing Benjamin back safely
      3. This time, Jacob finally gives in, but says: God should grant you mercy before this man, and may he release your other brother and Benjamin (Genesis 43:14)
      4. That’s strange – Jacob calls Benjamin by name, but refers to Simeon as “your other brother”



* 1. Nahmonides picks up on this, and explains that Jacob doesn’t refer to Simeon endearingly because Simeon wasn’t preferred in Jacob’s eyes
     1. He says: had they had enough bread at home, Jacob still would not have sent Benjamin, and would have left Simeon in Egypt
     2. This is a favoritism replay
        + The first time, Joseph’s favoritism, the brothers just got rid of Joseph 3.But what would they do this time, with Benjamin?
        + What happens next really pushes them to brink
  2. The brothers take Benjamin down to Egypt, and everything seems to go well
     1. They get Simeon back, they get food, and they start heading back to Canaan - mission accomplished
     2. But then something terrible happens
        + Joseph finds his goblet in Benjamin’s bag
        + If you’re the brothers, if you’re Judah, who took responsibility for Benjamin - what might you be feeling at this very moment? Outrage!
        + They don’t know that he didn’t steal the cup!
          - Benjamin is an entitled thief - he takes whatever he wants!
          - All the jealousy, the hatred, the bitterness that has been building over the years from being unfavored reaches a boiling point
        + But it’s not just a replay of favoritism and hurt feelings
          - The brothers find themselves exactly in the same position that they were in when father favored one brother over the rest
          - What did they do to Joseph? They sold him into slavery
          - Benjamin’s sentence for stealing the goblet? Slavery
          - The brothers can easily stand back, let Benjamin become a slave
          - The opportunity is ripe for a Sale of Joseph replay

1. That’s not what happens
   1. Judah – the person who suggested selling Joseph – stands up and makes a direct appeal
      1. We have a an elderly father, and he has a young son in his old age - referring to Benjamin - and his father loves him (Genesis 44:20)
      2. Does that sound familiar?
         * Earlier, the text said: and Israel, Jacob, loved Joseph more than any of his other sons because he was a son of a father old in age (Genesis 37:3)
         * Joseph is the only one other person in the Torah referred to that way - as a child of old age
         * That verse in the Joseph story captures what caused the sale of Joseph in the first place - Blatant, unbridled favoritism of one son over the rest
      3. The very next verse says: the brothers saw that Jacob loved Joseph the most, and they hated Joseph for it (Genesis 37:4)
         * Here, Judah’s calling on the verse that so terribly ripped his family apart



* + - * Only this time, it’s not followed by hatred
      * Judah sees the favoritism, he many not like it, but he’s able to accept it
  1. Later, Judah says: Jacob’s soul is bound with Benjamin’s soul (Genesis 44:30)
     1. For the first time, Judah is able to name the reality that Benjamin is more loved
        + It doesn’t mean Jacob was right to favor one child, but there’s a transformation
        + With Joseph, the brothers didn’t confront the issue
          - They never voiced their concerns
          - They were never open with Joseph
        + This time, they’re not hiding or trying to change reality with deception
          - They’re admitting it – at the very least, to themselves
          - As we learned in the story of Judah and Tamar, recognition of your mistakes is crucial, but it’s not enough for real change
          - You also have to mend the relationships that you broke 2.Judah can’t fix his relationship with Joseph, he doesn’t know Joseph’s alive
        + Look at what he says: please take me as a slave instead of Benjamin. Let him return home with his brothers (Genesis 44:33)
        + And that’s it – It’s not just that Judah is so heroic in this moment, in that he places another before himself
        + It’s that he’s doing what he should have done with Joseph years before
        + The brothers kicked Joseph of the family, out of brotherhood, but Judah won’t let that happen again - he acts as a brother
        + He won’t sell another brother into slavery; he’d become a slave himself

1. There’s another layer to this story – who is Judah really reconciling with?
   1. It’s Jacob, his father
   2. He said: If I don’t come back with Benjamin, I will have sinned against my father for eternity (Genesis 44:32)
      1. And when Joseph hears that, he cries
      2. When he hears the whole backstory, he realizes his brothers caused tremendous pain to Jacob when they sold him
      3. More importantly, Joseph realizes is that he’s been perpetuating that pain too
   3. By holding back Simeon, by demanding Benjamin and by hiding his own identity, he’s guilty of causing his father pain as well and resolves not to do it anymore
      1. This story isn't just about repairing personal past deeds
      2. It’s about realizing who you’ve hurt along the way and repairing that too
   4. Throughout the Jacob story, we’ve seen different dynamics replay themselves - Jacob’s deception with the blessings, Laban’s deception, Dina and Shechem, the Sale of Joseph, Judah and Tamar - Each time, the person is faced with a choice
      1. Allow the scenario to replay itself just like it did before – continue the cycle? 2.Or will they take responsibility and redeem a mistake and repair a relationship?



David: Welcome to Parshat Vayigash. We left off Parshat Miketz in the middle of a story. Joseph sentences Benjamin to slavery after finding his goblet in Benjamin's bag.

This week's parsha picks up at the most dramatic part of the story – Judah appeals to Joseph for his brother Benjamin…. And then, just a few verses later, Joseph reveals himself as their long lost brother. They hug and kiss, and the whole saga, all the family drama, is resolved.

Immanuel: This story swings our emotions back forth, from one extreme to the other. One moment, the world has come to end, Benjamin is gone, Jacob will die mourning over the loss of his son. Then, out of nowhere, not only is Benjamin saved, but Jacob's whole family reunites!

What changed? What happened to make the plotline swing so abruptly and unexpectedly from disaster to celebration? What happened is that Judah appeals to Joseph.

# Understanding the

Story of

# Judah and Benjamin

David: What was it about Judah's speech that so drastically turned the tide? A speech that ends a decades- long rift in the family must be the most heartwarming speech in the history of time. But if you look at the speech, it seems pretty... unremarkable.

Judah recaps a conversation with his father, Jacob, before they returned to Egypt with Benjamin. You told us to get Benjamin, so we asked our father, and he said… and then we said… and then he said. It's

hard to understand how such a pedestrian appeal had so great an impact.

Immanuel: Let's explore what exactly happened, this week on the Parsha Experiment. David: Hi, I'm David Block.

Immanuel: And I'm Immanuel Shalev, and welcome to the Parsha Experiment. Let's bring up our 20- second parsha recap.

Judah appeals to Jacob in an attempt to save Benjamin from slavery. Joseph reveals himself to the brothers.

Joseph sends an entourage to bring his father down to Egypt, on his way down, God tells Jacob that he'll be with him down in Egypt, and after 17 years, Joseph and Jacob reunite.

Jacob and the brothers meet Pharaoh, and Pharaoh gives them the land of Goshen. Finally, Joseph then establishes a sort of feudalism in Egypt.

# Benjamin,

Jacob's

# Favorite

Remaining

# Son?

David: In order to understand the impact of Judah's speech, we can't look at it in isolation. There's a backstory, there's a conversation that the brothers had with Jacob before bringing Benjamin to Egypt, a conversation recapped in Judah's speech.

So we're gonna try an experiment, we're going to try to read through that original conversation, but let's try to experience it from the brothers' perspective. How did they feel during this conversation with Jacob?

The brothers come back from Egypt with one less person than they had when they left: Simeon is being held captive… And they need to bring Benjamin to Egypt in order to get Simeon back.

The problem is, Jacob isn't too thrilled with the idea of sending Benjamin and potentially losing another

you. with go to son my allow not will I No, said: Jacob –וַיֹ ּאמֶר, לֹא י ֵ ֵרד בְּנ ִי עִמָּכֶם son.

left. one only the is Benjamin and died, has brother his for –כִּי אָחִיו מֵת וְהו ּא לְבַדּו נ ִשׁאָר

Immanuel: Now let's look at that from the brothers' perspective… We know Jacob meant that Benjamin was the only remaining son of Rachel. But if you were one of Leah's sons and lived your whole life knowing that your mother was the unfavored wife, that your father seems to love you less, can you imagine how painful it must have been to hear your father call Benjamin his only remaining son?

Furthermore, think about the implications of Jacob's decision. Not letting Benjamin go doesn't just mean that they couldn't go back to Egypt to get food. It means that Jacob was gonna let Simeon stay in Egypt forever! It seems like Jacob was actually choosing one son over the other – he was choosing Benjamin over Simeon!

David: And look at why Jacob won't let Benjamin go. He says: If something were to happen to

terrible in grave my to me bring will sons, my you, –וְהורדתֶּם אֶת שֵׂיבָתִי בְּי ָגון, שְׁאולָה Benjamin,

misery. Does that sound familiar? The brothers have heard these words before.

# Connections to

Judah and Benjamin's

# Story

in the Bible

After the loss of Joseph, Jacob refused to be consoled. " "שְׁאֹלָה אָבֵל ִי בְּנ אֶל אֵרד כִּי ויאמר– he said: I will go down to my grave mourning my son, Joseph. Jacob felt that his world was over when he lost Joseph, and now, he says he'll feel the way again if he loses Benjamin.

But you know who Jacob doesn't feel that way about? Simeon. Jacob isn't going to his grave mourning the loss of Leah's children, only Rachel's children. How must this feel to Leah's sons?

Immanuel: What's happening here is tragic. The brothers are being forced to relive the terribly painful and unequivocal favoritism that Jacob showed to Joseph – it's all happening again. Jacob is choosing Benjamin, Rachel's child, over the children of Leah.

And it continues: Judah steps in and takes responsibility for bringing Benjamin back safely. This time, Jacob begrudgingly gives in, but when he agrees, he says: "God should grant you mercy before this man, ָמִין ְי בִּנ וְאֶת ,אַחֵר אֲחִיכֶם אֶת לָכֶם וְשִׁלַּח; – and may he release your other brother and Benjamin."

That's very strange... Jacob calls Benjamin by his name, but he refers to Simeon as "your other brother."

He's "that other guy."

David: The Ramban, Nachmanides picks up on this, and explains that Jacob doesn't refer to Simeon endearingly because Simeon wasn't preferred in Jacob's eyes… Ramban says "had they had enough bread at home, Jacob still would not have sent Benjamin, and would have left Simeon in Egypt." This is a favoritism replay!

The first time, with Joseph's favoritism, the brothers deceived. They didn't confront anyone… they just got rid of Joseph. But what would they do this time, with Benjamin? We don't have to wait long to find out. What happens next really pushes them to the brink.

Immanuel: The brothers take Benjamin down to Egypt, and everything seems to go well: they get Simeon back, they get food, and they start heading back to Canaan – mission accomplished! But then something terrible happens. Joseph finds his goblet in Benjamin's bag.

If you're the brothers – if you're Judah, who took responsibility for Benjamin – what might you be feeling at this very moment? Outrage! They don't know that he didn't steal the cup! Benjamin is an entitled thief – he takes whatever he wants!

All the jealousy, the hatred, the bitterness that has been building over the years from being unfavored reaches a boiling point. "This is who we put our necks on the line for? Who our father favors?"

But it's not just a replay of favoritism and hurt feelings. The brothers find themselves exactly in the same position that they were in, years ago, when Father favored one brother over the rest. What did they do to Joseph? They sold him into slavery.

And what was Benjamin's sentence for stealing the goblet? Oh yes...slavery... the brothers can so easily stand back and let Benjamin become a slave. The opportunity is ripe for a sale of Joseph replay.

# Judah

Confronts

# His Father's

Favoritism

David: But that's not what happens. Judah – the very person who suggested selling Joseph – stands up and makes a direct appeal. ָקֵן ז ּאָב לָנו ֶשׁ יwe have an elderly father – קָטָן ִים ְקֻנ ז ֶלֶד וְי– and he has a young son in his old age, referring to Benjamin, אֲהֵבו וְאָבִיו– and his father loves him.

–וְי ִשׂ ָראֵל, אָהַב אֶת יוסֵף מִכָּל בָּנ ָיו says: text the Joseph, of sale the before Back familiar? sound that Does

and Israel, Jacob, loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, לו ,ּא הו ִים ְקֻנ ז בֶן כִּי– because he was a

son of a father, old in age. Joseph is the only one other person in the entire Torah who is referred to that

way – as a child of ,זקניםold age…

That verse in the Joseph story captures what caused the sale of Joseph in the first place. Blatant, unbridled favoritism of one son over the rest.

The very next verse says: אֶחָיו מִכָּל אֲבִיהֶם אָהַב אֹתו כִּי ,ּאֶחָיו ְראו ּ ִ וַי– אֹתו ,ּ ְאו ּשׂנ ִ וַי– the brothers saw that Jacob loved Joseph the most… and they hated Joseph for it. Here, Judah's calling on the verse that so terribly ripped his family apart. Only this time, it's not followed by hatred. Judah sees the favoritism, he may not like it but he's able to accept it.

with bound is soul Jacob's –וְנ ַפְשׁ ֹו, קְשׁו ּ ָרה בְנ ַפְשׁ ֹו says: he speech, Judah's in later And Immanuel:

Benjamin's soul! Look at what's happening! For the first time, Judah is able to name the reality that Benjamin is more loved.

It doesn't mean Jacob was right to favor one child over another, but there's a transformation that's taking place here. With Joseph, the brothers didn't confront the issue. They never voiced their concerns, they were never open with Joseph.

This time, they're not hiding from it or trying to change the reality with deception. They're admitting it

– at the very least, to themselves. But as we learned in the story of Judah and Tamar, recognition of your actions and mistakes is crucial, but it alone is not enough for real change. You also have to mend the relationships that you broke.

# Judah's Redemption

Through

# Benjamin

Judah can't fix his relationship with Joseph, because he doesn't know Joseph's alive… But look at what he says:ַּעַר הַנ תַּחַת עַבְדּךָ ָא נ ֵשׁב י–ִי לַאדֹנ ,עֶבֶד; please take me as a slave instead of Benjamin.

it. that's And brothers. his with home return him let –וְהַנ ַּעַר, י ַעַל עִם אֶחָיו

It's not just that Judah is so heroic in this moment, in that he places another before himself – it's that he's doing precisely what he should have done with Joseph years before.

The brothers kicked Joseph out of the family, out of brotherhood. But Judah won't let that happen again

– he acts as a brother. He won't sell another brother into slavery… he'd sooner become a slave himself.

David: But there's another layer to this story. Who is Judah really reconciling with? It's actually not Joseph. Or Benjamin. It's Jacob, his father. He said: If I don't come back with Benjamin,

ּמִים ָ הַי כָּל לְאָבִי וְחָטָאתִי– I will have sinned against my father for eternity. And when Joseph hears that, he cries.

When he hears the whole backstory, he realizes that his brothers caused tremendous pain to Jacob when they sold him. More importantly, Joseph realizes that he's been perpetuating that pain, too; by holding back Simeon, by demanding Benjamin and by hiding his own identity, he's guilty of causing his father pain as well and resolves not to do it anymore.

This story isn't just about repairing personal past deeds. It's about realizing who you've hurt along the way, and repairing that too. Throughout the Jacob story, we've seen different dynamics replay themselves: Jacob's deception with the blessings, Laban's deception, Dinah and Shechem, the sale of

Joseph, Judah and Tamar.

Each time, the person is faced with a choice: Allow the same scenario to replay itself just like it did before

– mistreat others because they have been mistreated? Will they continue this cycle? Or will they bravely take responsibility and redeem a mistake and repair a relationship?

Immanuel: Join us next week as the [book of Genesis](https://www.alephbeta.org/torah/genesis) draws to a close, and we brace ourselves for the jump into [Exodus](https://www.alephbeta.org/torah/exodus).

This guide corresponds to the video: [Joseph and Benjamin: The Way Back to the Family](https://www.alephbeta.org/playlist/joseph-and-benjamin-save-the-family)



**PARSHAT VAYIGASH: JOSEPH AND BENJAMIN:THE WAY BACK TO THE FAMILY**

**SABBATH TABLE OUTLINE**

#### Introduction

1. This week’s parsha opens with Judah’s impassioned plea to the high Egyptian official who is really his long-lost brother Joseph.
   1. Now there’s fascinating undercurrent, I want to argue, that lies just under the surface of Judah’s words.
   2. What he’s saying is actually eerily reminiscent of an event that occurred a long time ago—way back in the Garden of Eden of all things.
   3. So I want to explore that echo with you. Is the echo really there, and what might it mean?
2. So the connection kind of begins with Judah’s explanation as to why Benjamin can’t stay behind in Egypt.

Guide by Dr. Sarah Levy

* 1. Binyamin, of course, has been framed by Yosef for stealing his silver goblet. Yosef, this high Egyptian official has suggested that the thief remain behind as his personal slave, while all the other brothers return to their father in Canaan.
  2. And Yehudah now begins to speak about why that can’t be allowed to happen; why Binyamin, at all costs, has to be allowed to return to his father.

1. Now, if you listen to those words, that phrase את־אביו זב you’ve heard that phrase before.

, “to leave his father,” you know,

* 1. It is constructed precisely the same way as a phrase we hear all the way back in the Garden of Eden.
  2. Kind of interesting, right: That phrase – la’azov et aviv – leaving behind father, is now showing up again, in Judah’s speech about Benjamin of all things. It’s kind of strange.

#### A Further Echo

1. So that lone echo of Eden might be dismissed as mere coincidence, except that there is another echo too. Go back to the opening words of Judah’s speech to Joseph, and you will find him saying this: *We have an older father, and a son born to him in his old age.* And then he says: *His brother is dead, so he alone remains of his mother* (Genesis 44:20)
   1. “He alone remains…” Right? There’s that word בלדו. Which of course reminds you of something back in the Garden.
   2. We had a *levado* there too. Adam was *levado*, alone, and God had not thought that that was very good, so He created Eve to be Adam’s companion in marriage.
   3. And now, for some reason, Judah is using that very word, *levado,* to describe Benjamin.
2. Except if these connections, if they are really there, and not just the product of our overactive imagination – they seem a little strange.
   1. Why are they there? Benjamin isn’t getting married.
   2. There’s no romance in our story. So why would such echoes exist? What is the Torah trying to tell us here?



#### Road to a Solution

1. So here’s the theory I want to share with you. Maybe the connection between these two stories has to do with what is about to happen next.
   1. You see, Adam is alone… and he is *about to* meet Eve, another person, and what’s she going to do?
   2. She is going to *complete* him.
   3. And Benjamin too is “alone” and, although he doesn’t know it yet, he is *about to* meet his long-lost brother: He and Yehudah are about to discover that this high Egyptian official before whom they are pleading is, in actually, their long-lost brother, Joseph.
2. Which mean that each of these people, Adam on the one hand, Benjamin on the other, has “another half,” as it were—a person he is deeply connected to, someone who completes him— and each is alone, sort of separated from that person.
   1. For Adam, that person is Eve, a woman quite literally created from his own rib. Without her, he is missing something essential, he’s missing his feminine side. He is only a part of what he needs to be. With her, he is complete.
   2. Man was once a part of his father and mother. And what makes him ready to leave that unity? Only to seek another unity. Because he understands that in order to really be whole, he has to come together with that lost rib, with that feminine side of himself, that he’s missing.
   3. And it’s only because he understands that he’s missing that lost feminine side that he can bring himself to leave his father and mother.
3. But it is not only when we are missing a spouse that we feel alone and fragmented.
   1. We can feel only a shell of ourselves, only a part of ourselves, when we’re missing someone who, by rights, should be with us, should be at our side in our family too.
   2. When we become estranged from someone in our family, the painful sense of loss and fragmentation is… *palpable*. And on the other side, when, against all odds, we find a way to seek one another out again, when brothers somehow find a way to put aside that which separates them, when they find one each other again, the pull that brings them close is magnetic, virtually irresistible.
4. Benjamin and Joseph. Together, they were a deeply entwined pair- the only two children of Rachel.
   1. And yet fate would separate them. Joseph would be sold off as a slave to Egypt. And it wasn’t just geographical distance that would separate them.
   2. Joseph would eventually become “estranged” from the family, part of a whole new culture, a whole new life. And of course, even in Egypt, Joseph remains a God-fearing man – except in this moment, as Judah faces off against him in the episode of the silver goblet, reconciliation with his family seems to be the furthest thing from his mind.
   3. Yosef has just framed his brothers. He’s falsely accusing them of stealing his silver goblet. Joseph seems truly estranged from his family.
5. But, through the power of Judah’s words, Yosef is somehow transformed.
   1. Judah describes the “aloneness” of Benjamin -- him being all that is left of Rachel, their mother – and Joseph’s heart seems to melt at that portrayal.
   2. In tears, he unmasks himself. He reveals himself to be Benjamin’s long-lost “other half.”
   3. Almost like Adam and Eve, Joseph and Benjamin, they find themselves drawn to each other.
   4. They embrace with tears of joy as they revel in their newfound sense of “completion.” They have found each other at long last.



#### Full Circle

1. Joseph’s embrace of Benjamin is dramatic and emotional, but it also serves as a hopeful entry point into something larger.
   1. Because look what happens right after Benjamin and Joseph embrace: *And then he kissed all his [other] brothers, too, and cried upon them—and afterwards, his brothers spoke with him.*
   2. So in the end it wasn’t just Benjamin. There was a larger circle of brothers from whom Joseph was estranged, and now Joseph, he first reaches out to Benjamin, but then reaches out to the other brothers, embrace *them*, and kisses *them*, too. It is as if Benjamin is a kind of stepping stone for Joseph, a way back into connection with the larger family, the children of Leah, more broadly.
2. But here’s the thing: The conclusion of the verse we just read, is a bit odd: *And afterwards, his brothers spoke with him.*
   1. It seems like the ultimate anticlimax. Here are Joseph and his brothers: they haven’t seen each other for years; the brothers had thrown him in a pit; he, in turn, had very nearly taken them all as his slaves—and now they reunite in tears and hugs.
   2. And it’s all wonderful. Why add “and afterwards, his brothers spoke with him”? Who cares about *that*? And besides: What did they even speak about? We don’t know, and the Torah doesn’t bother telling us. So why is it so important to relate this seemingly trivial detail?
   3. Unless... it’s not trivial at all. Go back to the very beginning of the Joseph story, and you’ll see what’s going on. The Torah, with a grand arc, is closing a circle. Because all the way back at the beginning… the estrangement between brothers that we’ve been talking about, how did it start?
3. It expressed itself... *through the brothers’ inability to speak to Joseph: And the brothers saw that it was he who their father loved from among all his brothers—and they hated him, and could not speak to him in peace.*
   1. So let’s add it all up: At the very beginning, the brothers- their hatred of Joseph was so intense that they “could not speak to him in peace.” But now… at the end of the story, when all is said and done, *what really changed, most of all?* What changed is that deafening silence in the relationship between brothers... That silence is gone. The brothers, at long last, can speak with him again:
   2. As we reach Vayigash, the deafening silence of hatred is finally over. Now whether the wounds of the past will truly and finally heal, or whether the reconciliation of Parshat Vayigash will prove to be merely a passing truce in a larger war—that we do not know yet.
   3. Joseph and his brothers will spend a long time together, still, in Egypt, and what transpires between them later will decide this issue. But for now, a little slice of wholeness has been brought back into a family torn by pain.
4. What, in the end, did Joseph and the brothers speak about? It doesn’t even matter. Brothers are once again on speaking terms—and for now, that is a victory of unimaginable proportions.

