

D'var on 10 Tevet, 5781 (25 December)
Parashah: Vayigash ([Genesis 44:18-47:27](#))

Shabbat Shalom, everyone. I hope your meal of Chinese food was tasty. (Ours was.)

It is an honor and pleasure to give the D'var tonight because this set of stories towards the end of Genesis are favorites of mine from the Bible. In the parashah, Vayigash, nearly all the loose ends are tied up in the Joseph narrative (that I think you know): after Judah offers to take the heat for an alleged crime of Benjamin, Joseph reveals his identity, the brothers are united, their father Jacob is overjoyed that his son Joseph is alive, the clan moves down to Egypt, Pharaoh treats them kindly on Joseph's account, and they all survive the famine. All this is prelude to the Exodus – the Israelites' return to the Land. The story, incidentally, is also found in the Koran.

Where do you enter the story? Like other myths – those stories that shape our identities and our communities—there are several points of entry. What are they for you?

A. Maybe it is a specific character that you relate to: The estranged son reunited with his brothers, the youngest son framed for a crime he did not commit, the father overjoyed that his son is (incredibly) still living despite his long-held grief at his loss. Have you noticed that all of the characters seem to mature in this story?

1) Joseph's dreams of prophecy are not ones he boasts about anymore. He recognizes them as an important gift for all, and he tells the brothers that God caused something good to come out of the situation, and he bears no recrimination since he has enough insight to see the full story.

2) Judah matures: After the loss of two of his sons and an embarrassing episode with a daughter-in-law Tamar, he offers himself as a slave to spare Benjamin and their father any grief or harm.

3) Jacob matures as well: He has one final dream resulting in him trusting God about going to Egypt. He can see the longer story arc.

B. Maybe you notice that the family traits that keep playing out in the generations:

1) There is still trickster energy – Joseph plays a game with his goblet hidden in a bag of grain just like his grandmother played a trick on his grandfather.

2) There is still favoritism – Joseph gives a lot more clothes and silver to his kid brother Benjamin just as his great-grandfather favored his grandfather over his ...um... half-grandfather.

3) There is still family dreaming going on – Jacob has one last dream: It is safe to go to Egypt because God promises that the clan will come back some day.

C. Maybe the coat of many colors holds something for you? In that case, notice also that “clothes make the man” (or person) as the saying goes: They vest and invest a certain identity on the wearer. Joseph goes from wearing a garment identifying him as “Jacob's

favorite son,” to wearing Egyptian garments of power identifying him as “Pharaoh’s favorite one.”

Allow Thomas Mann to tell the story of the reunion from a translation of his massive work, *Joseph und seine Brüder*. This is on page 1377.

[The scene is in a large courtroom in the palace of the Pharaoh. The eleven brothers are assembled on the lower part of the room wondering what will happen next – slavery, death, or worse. Joseph is on a raised part of the room clothed in his Egyptian robes that show his high position.]

“Let all Egyptians go out from here,” [Joseph] said, “everyone out. For I invited God and the world to be guests at my game, but now God alone shall be its spectator.”

With reluctance they obeyed. after first giving a wink to the scribes on the dais, [Joseph] put his hands to their back and politely helped them on their way; and the servants cleared the doorways as well – not that we could convince anyone they moved all that far off. Instead they stood a little outside the hall –and some inside the library, each leaning forward on one leg in the direction of the scene now unfolding, a hand cupped to one ear.

There, however, Joseph, ignoring the gemstones on his cheeks, spread his arms wide and made himself known. He had made himself known often before this, setting people aback by letting them see that something higher than he was revealed in him, so that this higher power was then merged in a dreamy, seductive way with his own person. Now he simply said—and despite outspread arms, even said it with a little modest laugh--“Children, it is I. I truly am your brother Joseph.”

“But of course he is!” Benjamin cried almost choking with elation, and dashing forward up the steps of the dais, he fell on his knees and passionately embraced the legs of the brother who was found again.

“Yashub, Joseph-el, Jehosiph!” he sobbed, looking up at him with his head thrown back. “it’s you, it’s you, but of course it’s you, it has to be! You are not dead, you have toppled the great dwelling place of the shadow of death, you have ascended to the seventh level and been invested as Metatron and Innermost Prince –I knew it, I knew it, you have been raised up very high, and the Lord has made for you a throne like His own. But you still know. me, your mother’s son, and you waved my hand in the breeze.”

“Little brother,” Joseph said. “Little brother,” he said, lifting Benjamin up and putting their heads together. “Do not speak, it is not that great and not that far removed, and my glory is not of that sort, and the main thing is that we are twelve again.”

[Thomas Mann, *Joseph und seine Brüder*, Book IV: *Joseph, the Provider*, p. 1377.]

With any story, there will be parts that speak to you louder than others. For me, this reunion is moving, and I am still captivated by the clothing.

Allow me to let Andrew Lloyd Webber & Tim Rice to conclude. This is from the last song of their musical, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*.

*May I return to the beginning
The light is dimming, and the dream is too
The world and I, we are still waiting
Still hesitating
Any dream will do.
Give me my colored coat
My amazing colored coat!*

[Andrew Lloyd Webber & Tim Rice, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, “Finale”]

May you each be blessed with color in your clothing by which others will recognize the valuable, powerful person you really are. Kein y’hi ratzon. (May it be so.)

At this point in the D’var I could go one of two directions, but there is not time for both.

Direction #1 – A brief exploration of four “takes” on Vayigash.

Direction #2 – A fairy tale called “The Turkey Maiden” that has among other things clothes that transform the situation.

Koran, Chapter 12

88. Then, when they entered into his presence, they said, “Mighty governor, adversity has befallen us, and our family. We have brought scant merchandise. But give us full measure, and be charitable towards us—God rewards the charitable.”

89. He said, “Do you realize what you did with Joseph and his brother, in your ignorance?”

90. They said, “Is that you, Joseph?” He said, “I am Joseph, and this is my brother. God has been gracious to us. He who practices piety and patience—God never fails to reward the righteous.”

91. They said, “By God, God has preferred you over us. We were definitely in the wrong.”

92. He said, “There is no blame upon you today. God will forgive you. He is the Most Merciful of the merciful.”

And now allow Fyodor Dostoevsky to speak through one of his characters, Zosima the monk in *The Brothers Karamazov*:

Zosima (the elder) says: "The passing earthly show and the eternal verity are brought together. In the face of the earthly truth, the eternal truth is accomplished.... Much on earth is hidden from us, but to make up for that we have been given a precious mystic sense of our living bond with the other world, with the higher heavenly world, and the roots of our thoughts and feelings

are not here but in other worlds.... What grows lives, and is alive only through the feeling of its contact with other mysterious worlds. If that feeling grows weak or is destroyed in you, the heavenly growth will die away in you. Then you will be indifferent to life and will grow to hate it."

[Dostoevsky: *The Brothers Karamazov*]

"The Turkey Maiden" - Spanish folk tale

https://www.faae.org/assets/OnlineRes/FloridCirric/um_turkey_maiden.pdf