



VAYIGASH

THE MAN BEHIND THE CLOTHING

How to Stay Whole in a World That Won't Sit Still

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Vayigash

Judah approaches Joseph to plead for the release of Benjamin, offering himself as a slave to the Egyptian ruler in Benjamin's stead. Upon witnessing his brothers' loyalty to one another, Joseph reveals his identity to them. "I am Joseph," he declares. "Is my father still alive?"

The brothers are overcome by shame and remorse, but Joseph comforts them. "It was not you who sent me here," he says to them, "but

G-d. It has all been ordained from Above to save us, and the entire region, from famine."

The brothers rush back to Canaan with the news. Jacob comes to Egypt with his sons and their families—seventy souls in all—and is reunited with his beloved son after twenty-two years. On his way to Egypt he receives the Divine promise: "Fear not to go down to Egypt, for there I will make of you a great nation. I will

go down with you into Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again."

Joseph gathers the wealth of Egypt by selling food and seed during the famine. Pharaoh gives Jacob's family the fertile country of Goshen to settle, and the Children of Israel prosper in their Egyptian exile.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Have you ever felt like you had to act like a different person depending on where you were or who you were with? If so, did it leave you feeling empowered—or disconnected from yourself?





After revealing himself,
Joseph gives his
brothers clothing.

TEXT 1

Genesis 45:21-22

וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֵן בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּתְּנוּ לָהֶם יוֹסֵף עֲגָלוֹת עַל פִּי פַרְעֹה
וַיִּתְּנוּ לָהֶם צִדָּה לְדַרְדָּר.

לְכֻלָּם נָתַן לְאִישׁ חֲלָפוֹת שְׂמָלֹת, וּלְבִנְיָמִן נָתַן שֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת
כֶּסֶף וְחָמֵשׁ חֲלָפֹת שְׂמָלֹת.

21. And the sons of Israel did so, and Joseph gave them wagons by Pharaoh's orders, and he gave them provisions for the way.

22. He gave them all, to each one, [several] changes of clothing, and to Benjamin he gave three hundred [pieces of] silver and five changes of clothing.

TEXT 2A

*Talmud, Megilah
16a-b*

"לְכֹלֵם נָתַן לְאִישׁ חֲלִיפּוֹת שְׁמָלוֹת וּלְבִנְיָמִן נָתַן חֲמִשׁ
חֲלִיפּוֹת." אֶפְשָׁר דָּבָר שְׁנַצְטֵיעַר בּוֹ אוֹתוֹ צְדִיק, יִכָּשֶׁל
בוֹ? (רַשִׁ"י: לְעֶבֶד נִמְכָּר יוֹסֵף עַל יְדֵי קִנְיָת אָחִיו).

"He gave them all, to each one, [several] changes of clothing, and to Benjamin he gave . . . five changes of clothing." Is it possible that in the very thing from which that righteous man Joseph had suffered, he himself should stumble? (For his father's show of favoritism toward him aroused the enmity of his brothers.—Rashi)

QUESTION

Why did Joseph give five sets of clothing to Benjamin and only “several” to his other brothers—the same act that once sparked jealousy?

TEXT 2B

Talmud, ibid.

אָמַר רַבִּי בִּנְיָמִן בַּר יֶפֶת: רָמַז רָמַז לוֹ, שְׁעֵתִיד בֶּן
לְצֵאת מִמֶּנּוּ, שְׁיֵצֵא מִלְפָּנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּחַמְשָׁה לְבוּשֵׁי
מַלְכוּת, שְׁנֵאמַר: "וּמָרְדֳּכַי יֵצֵא בְּלְבוּשׁ מַלְכוּת
תְּכֵלֶת וְגו'".

Rabbi Binyamin bar Yefet said, "He intimated to Benjamin that a descendant was destined to issue from him who would go out from the presence of the king wearing five royal garments, as it is stated: 'And Mordecai went forth from the presence of the king in royal apparel of sky blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a wrap of fine linen and purple'" (Esther 8:15).

ANSWER

These five garments foreshadowed Benjamin's descendant, Mordechai, who would later wear five royal garments.

JOSEPH AND HIS CLOTHING

1. His multicolored coat
2. Gave clothing to Benjamin
3. Changed his clothes when freed from prison



TEXT 3

Genesis 41:14

וַיִּשְׁלַח פַּרְעֹה וַיִּקְרָא אֶת יוֹסֵף, וַיְרִיצֵהוּ
מִן הַבּוֹר, וַיַּגְלֵחַ וַיַּחְלֶף שְׂמֹלֹתָיו, וַיָּבֹא
אֶל פַּרְעֹה.

So Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they rushed him from the dungeon, and he shaved and changed his clothes, and he [then] came to Pharaoh.

QUESTIONS

Why is Joseph's life story so closely linked with clothing, and what is the deeper significance of it?

SHEPHERDS



represent serving G-d through separation from the world.

KINGS



represent serving G-d by engaging with and elevating the world.



The brothers were shepherds, devoted to serving G-d through a secluded, spiritual life.

TEXT 4A

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, Sefer Hamaamarim 5688, pp. 23-24

אך הענין הוא דהנה האבות והשבטים היו רועי צאן ולא התעסקו בשום ענין מעניני עולם . . . ויוסף לא היה רועה צאן, דבהיותו אצל אביו היה אצלו ולא היה במרעה הצאן עם אחיו. ואחר כך בירידתו למצרים היה עסוק בענינים רבים וגדולים . . .

והענין הוא, דהנה האבות הן הן המרכבה, דגם כמו שהיו למטה נשמות מלובשים בגופים היו מרכבה לאלקות . . . שהיו קדושים ומובדלים מעניני עולם הזה, ובכל עניניהם היו בתכלית היחוד ובתכלית הדביקות באלקות ולא הפסיקו אף רגע אחד מדביקותם באלקות. וכן השבטים היו ביחוד בתכלית . . .

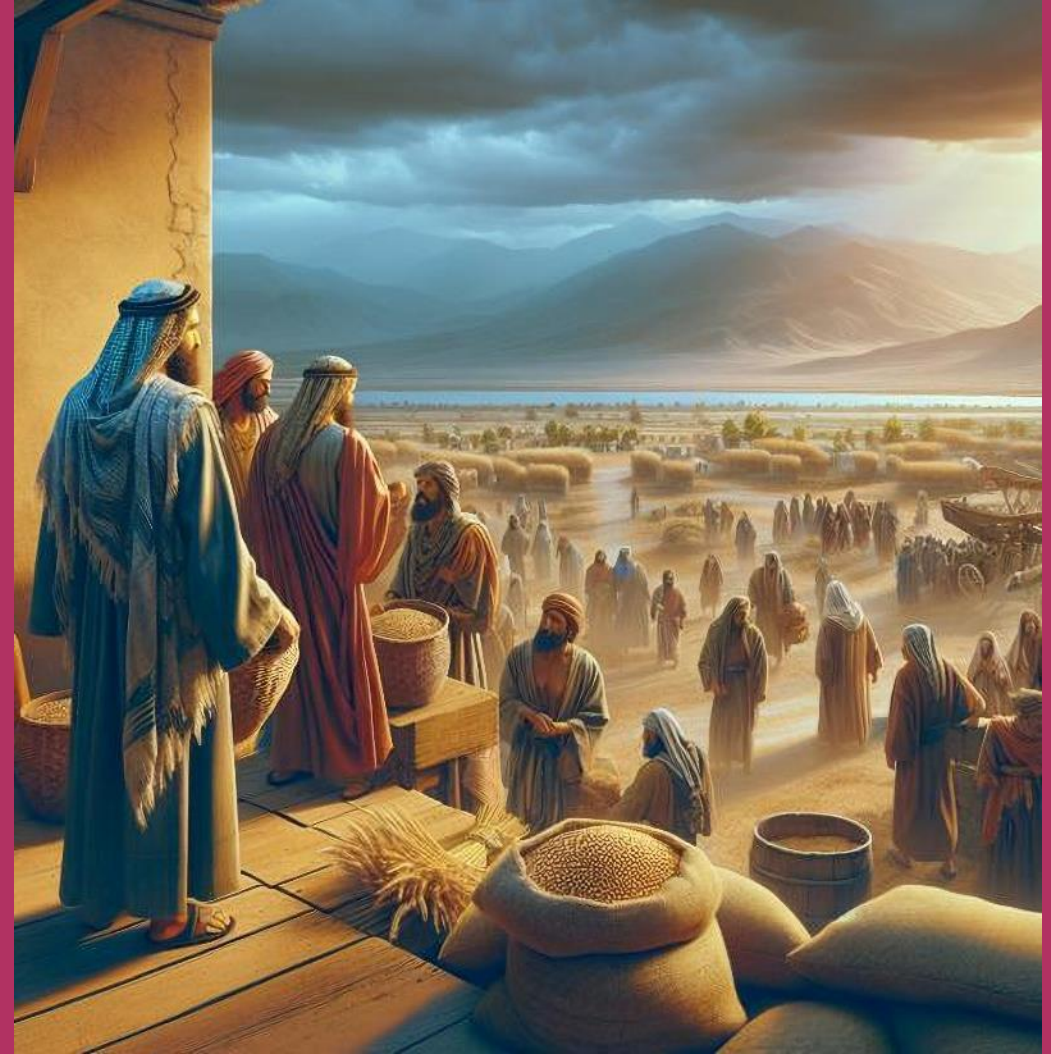
ולהיות כן, בחרו להיות רועי צאן בכדי שעניני עולם לא יבלבלם ולא יטרידם, והיו הולכים בשדות ובמדבריות שלא יטרידם מדביקותם באלקות.

Here's what's going on: Our forefathers and the tribes were shepherds and didn't involve themselves in any worldly matters. . . . Joseph, on the other hand, wasn't a shepherd. When he was living with his father, he stayed close to him and didn't go out to the pastures with his brothers. Later, when he went down to Egypt, he got involved in all sorts of major responsibilities and affairs. . . .

The point is this: Our forefathers are described as a "vehicle"—even while they were down here in physical bodies, they were totally devoted to G-d. . . . They lived lives of holiness, completely removed from the distractions of the physical world. Everything they did was done with complete oneness and attachment to G-d, without even a moment of disconnect. The tribes, too, were deeply unified with G-d. . . .

Because of that, they chose to be shepherds. They wanted to stay away from anything that might distract them or interfere with their connection to G-d. That's why they would go out to the fields and wilderness—so nothing would get in the way of their focus and attachment to holiness.

Joseph engaged deeply with the world and rose to Egypt's highest leadership while remaining fully connected to G-d.



TEXT 4B

*Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak
Schneersohn, ibid.*

והנה יוסף, הנה מלבד זה שלא היה רועה צאן, הרי עסוק בכמה ענינים רבים גם בהיותו בבית פוטיפר, דכל עניני העבודה בבית ובשדה הכל היה עליו לעשותו. ואחר כך בהיותו בבית הסוהר היה לו גם כן עבודה רבה . . . וכשנעשה מלך במצרים הרי ניתוסף לו עבודה רבה בהנהגת המדינה שהיה עסוק בענינים גדולים.

והנה באמת הרי יוסף היה מרכבה לאלקות. ואופן המרכבה דיוסף היה למעלה במעלה ומדריגה ממרכבת השבטים. ולזאת, הנה גם בעת עסקו בכל הענינים שהיה עוסק בהם, היה מרכבה לאלקות בתכלית היחוד והדביקות באור אין סוף ברוך הוא.

Yosef certainly wasn't a shepherd. He was involved in all kinds of responsibilities. Even when he was in Potiphar's house, all the work, both inside and out in the field, was on him. Later, when he was in prison, he had plenty of duties there too. . . . And when he became king over Egypt, his workload only grew as he took charge of running the entire country and dealing with major affairs.

But the truth is that Yosef was also a "vehicle" for G-dliness. And not only that—his level of vehicle was actually higher than that of the brothers. Meaning, even while he was fully involved in everything he was doing, he still remained completely united with and attached to G-d.

TEXT 5A

Genesis 42:7-8

ז. וַיֵּרָא יוֹסֵף אֶת אֶחָיו וַיִּכְרֶם, וַיִּתְנַכֵּר אֲלֵיהֶם וַיְדַבֵּר אֲתָם
קָשׁוֹת, וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם מֵאֵין בָּאתֶם, וַיֹּאמְרוּ מֵאֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן לְשָׂבֹר
אֶכֶל.

ח. וַיִּכֶר יוֹסֵף אֶת אֶחָיו וְהֵם לֹא הִכְרָהוּ.

7. And Joseph saw his brothers, and he recognized them, but he made himself a stranger to them, and he spoke to them harshly, and he said to them, "Where do you come from?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan to purchase food."

8. Now Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him.

TEXT 5B

Ramban, ad loc.

מיד שראה אותם הכירם ופחד אולי
יכירוהו, ויתנכר אליהם, ששם המצנפת על
מצחו וקצת הפנים ושנה עצמו.

As soon as Joseph saw them, he recognized them—and got scared that they might recognize him too. So he disguised himself: He put a turban on his forehead, covering part of his face, and changed his appearance.



The brothers couldn't recognize him because his spiritual path was completely different from theirs.

TEXT 6A

*Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak
Schneersohn, Sefer
Hamaamarim 5688,
p. 24*

אשר זו הטעם והסיבה מה שאחיו לא הכירוהו לפי שחשבוהו לאיש מצרי,
דהשבטים ידעו שהאבות הם מרכבה לאלקות, לזאת בחרו להיות רועי צאן
ולא הכניסו עצמן בשום התעסקות מעניני עולם, בכדי שעניני העולם לא
יטרידו אותם מיחודם ודביקותם באור אין סוף ברוך הוא, וכן התנהגו
השבטים עצמן. וכשראו אותו עסוק בעניני הנהגת המדינה ובהתלבשות כזו.
. . חשבוהו לאיש מצרי.

This is the reason his brothers didn't recognize him—they assumed he was an Egyptian. The brothers knew that the forefathers were a vehicle for G-dliness, which is why they chose to be shepherds and avoided getting involved in worldly affairs. They didn't want anything to distract them from their unity with and attachment to G-d. The brothers lived the same way themselves. So when they saw Joseph busy running the government, dressed in such a way . . . , they naturally assumed he was just an Egyptian official.

Joseph was connected to his inner self, fully bound with G-d, allowing him to remain constant despite changes in his circumstances or clothing.



TEXT 6B

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, Sefer Hamaamarim 5688, p. 24

וטעם הדבר הוא, דהנה יוסף מצד מעלות מדריגת נשמתו, הרי עניני עולם לא הטרידו אותו כלל. ולזאת הנה לבד זאת דכל הענינים שעסק בהם לא בלבלו אותו מיחודו ודביקותו באלקות, אלא דבשעה ההיא היה בבחינת מרכבה, והיה בתכלית הדביקות והביטול באור אין סוף ברוך הוא.

דזה הכלל, דכל אשר יש לו שייכות להעולם, היינו שהעולם תופס מקום אצלו, הרי גם הוא נתפס בהעולם, ואז במילא הנה עניני עולם מטרידים אותו ומבלבלים אותו. אבל מי שאין לו שייכות להעולם, היינו שהעולם אינו תופס מקום אצלו, הרי גם הוא אינו נתפס בהעולם, דעניני העולם יבלבלו לו או גם אפילו שיטרידו אותו.

ויוסף, הנה מצד מעלת מדריגת נשמתו, הרי העולם אינו תופס מקום אצלו, ובמילא אינו נתפס בעניני עולם שהם יבלבלו אותו.

Here's why that was the case: Due to his lofty soul, worldly affairs didn't distract Joseph at all. Not only did they not interfere with his connection to G-d but even while he was deeply involved in all those responsibilities, he remained a vehicle to G-d—completely devoted and united.

This is the general rule: If someone feels connected to the world—meaning, if the world matters to them—then they can get caught up in it. And once they're caught in it, the world's demands naturally start to distract and overwhelm them. But if someone has no real attachment to the world because it simply doesn't hold any weight for them, they won't get pulled in. The world doesn't have a grip on them, so it can't distract them.

Due to the lofty nature of his soul, Joseph simply didn't give the world that kind of importance. So the world never had a hold on him, and it couldn't throw him off.

TEXT 7

*Rabbi Yehudah
Aryeh Leib Alter of
Gur, Sefat Emet 5639*

והענין הוא כי הפנימיות לעולם אחד, אבל המלבוש מתחלף כפי
מדריגות האדם עולה ויורד . . .
ויוסף נתן להם זה הדרך, איך יוכלו להתלבש בכל אלה לבושים
שונים, כמו שהראה להם יוסף שלא הכירוהו אם כי היה עומד
בצדקו.

The idea is that the inner core always remains the same—but the outer garments change depending on a person’s level. They can rise or fall. . . .

Joseph showed his brothers how this works—how someone can wear all sorts of outer garments [and still remain true inside]. He demonstrated it himself: Even though they didn’t recognize him because of how he looked and acted on the outside, he was still standing strong in his righteousness.



No matter his surroundings or role, Joseph remained the same in mind, heart, and soul.

TEXT 8

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 35, p. 180*

הדרך שהגיע לזה מרומזת במה שכתוב "ויגלח ויחלף שמלותיו", שעצמותו ועיקרו של יוסף לא ירד והתלבש בדרגת מצרים, ולכן בתחילה . . . "ויחלף שמלותיו", כי כל עניני עולם הזה לא היו תופסים מקום אצלו, ולא היה שייך שהעסק בעניני העולם יטרידו ויבלבלו אותו מביטולו ודביקותו בה' . . . שעניני המלוכה היו רק בחינת לבוש, שלא פעלו שום שינוי במהותו של יוסף.

The path Joseph took to reach this level is hinted at in the verse, "He shaved and changed his clothes." This shows that Joseph's essence—who he really was—never descended or became absorbed into the mindset of Egypt. That's why, right at the beginning, . . . "he changed his clothes." It was a clear signal: The things of this world didn't hold any real place in his life. They couldn't distract or shake him from his deep humility and attachment to G-d. . . .

All the royal responsibilities—his role as viceroy, his involvement in government—were just external garments. They didn't alter his inner self in any way.

ANSWER

Joseph's life story is closely linked with clothing because he embodied the idea that life's events are like garments we put on and take off, while our inner core must remain unchanged.

TEXT 9

*Rabbi Yehudah Leib
Alter of Gur, Sefat
Emet 5639*

וזהו ענין חליפות שמלות . . . כי
כל . . . הכנת הדרך לירד למצרים
היה על פי יוסף.

This is the idea behind the changing of clothes.
. . . All of it . . . was part of preparing the way to
go down to Egypt, and it was Joseph who
paved that path.

When the Jews left Egypt,
they liberated the garments
that symbolized the power
to engage with the world
without being defined by it.



TEXT 10A

Exodus 12:35

וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עָשׂוּ כְדִבַּר מֹשֶׁה, וַיִּשְׁאַלּוּ
מִמִּצְרַיִם כֶּסֶף וְכֶלִי וְזָהָב וְשִׁמְלֹת.

And the Children of Israel did according to Moses's order, and they borrowed from the Egyptians silver objects, golden objects, and garments.

TEXT 10B

Rashi, ad loc.

"ושמלת". אף הן היו חשובות להם
מן הכסף ומן הזהב, והמאוחר בפסוק
חשוב.

"And garments." These meant more to them than the silver and the gold, and [thus] whatever is mentioned later in the verse is more esteemed.



Mordechai wore many "garments" in life, but his inner truth and devotion to G-d remained unchanged.

TEXT 11

*Rabbi Chaim Yaakov
Goldvicht,
Introduction to
Zikaron Basefer,
Zikaron LeRav Yosef
Pinsky, pp. 7-8*

חיי האדם נעים הם בתמורת הזמנים ובחלוף
העתים. אין דומה מצב האדם בזמן ובמקום אחד
למצבו וגורלו בזמן ובמקום אחרים. ברם אף
על פי כן, נתבע האדם להנהיג את עצמו
בהתחלפות המצבים על פי הנהגה פנימית
קבועה ויציבה שאינה מתחשבת במצב ובסביבה
המשתנים ללא הרף.

זהו ענין ה"חליפות שמלות". השמלה אינה עצם
מעצמיו של האדם אלא סובבת אותו מבחוץ,
כאותם תמורות ושינויים חיצוניים המקיפים את
תהלוכותיו של האדם וזו איפוא תורת האדם. הן
בהשתנות התנאים והנסיבות והן בהתחלף
העתים והתמורות, והלא המה החליפות שמלות
היינו חלוף הסביבה החיצונית, מחויב הוא
להנהיג עצמו בהנהגה תקיפה ויציבה לבצר
ולשמור את הנקודה הפנימית לבל תמוט
בהשתנות המצבים החיצוניים.

A person's life moves through shifting times and changing seasons. Who you are in one place and moment isn't the same as who you are somewhere else, in a different time or circumstance. And yet, despite all this, a person is expected to carry themselves through all these changes with a steady, inner sense of direction that doesn't bend to the constantly changing environment.

That's the deeper meaning of "changing garments." A garment isn't part of your essence; it's something external, like the outer changes and fluctuations that surround a person's life. This is the human story: No matter how much the surroundings shift—whether in time, place, or circumstance—they are just garments. What matters is that a person conducts themselves with strength and consistency, guarding their inner core so that it doesn't waver as everything around them changes.

We can stay spiritually whole even as we adapt to life's changing roles and environments—if we remain connected to our inner truth.



TEXT 12

*Rabbi Aharon
Loschak, "Why
Joseph Changed His
Clothing,"
www.chabad.org*

Life demands all types of situations, and most of us don't have the luxury of being shepherds. Our lives inevitably look much more like Joseph's than that of his eleven brothers.

Truth is, in today's day and age, there's really no such thing as "shepherd life." You can be secluded on an island, but as long as you have [Wi-Fi], you're in the world as much as anyone else. It's right there in your pocket. Even in the thickest rainforest or a remote mountaintop, with the inundation of everyday life crashing on you in the hotel at night, you may as well be sitting on the Egyptian throne, or in Times Square.

We're all Joseph today. And the only way we can be successful in holding on to our values, the morals and religious convictions we hold dear, is by mastering this ability to change clothes.

Ask yourself, who is the real you? Who am I really? What do I truly believe? Once you've identified that, make sure that wherever you go, whatever you do, whomever you associate with, if it isn't in line with your values, then "change your clothes." Remain distinct, and remind yourself [that] this isn't really you. You are something else, an internal fortress that's only wearing a costume right now.

If that device in your pocket becomes part of who you are, then the clothing has morphed into skin. If it's something you simply use at convenience, and you're easily able to put it away (think Shabbat), or remain impervious to its influence, then great. You've mastered the clothing trick.



Joseph's garments represent his secret to navigating life's changes without losing his true self—by staying deeply connected to his inner core. He gifted this lesson to his brothers and it continues to apply to us today.

KEY POINTS

1. Joseph's life story is replete with clothing references, especially to changes of clothing.
2. Joseph's life story was radically different from his brothers': The latter were ascetics who chose to live as shepherds. Joseph was thoroughly engaged in this world.
3. This divergence is reflective of different spiritual profiles: the brothers were afraid worldly affairs would challenge their attachment to G-d, whereas Joseph, who possessed a loftier soul, was confident it would not.
4. Joseph's ability to navigate through the world unfazed is represented in the phenomenon of "switching clothes": the outer appearance changes, but the inside remains unchanged.
5. We, too, ought to adopt this approach vis-à-vis the many fluctuations of life.

