

Kol Rina  
An Independent Minyan  
Parashat Vayigash  
January 4, 2025 \*\*\* 4 Tevet, 5785

### Vayigash in a Nutshell

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/3224/jewish/Vayigash-in-a-Nutshell.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3224/jewish/Vayigash-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

The name of the Parshah, "Vayigash," means "And he approached" and it is found in Genesis 44:18.

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 22 years. On his way to Egypt he receives the divine promise: "Fear not to go down to Egypt; for I will there 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 county of Goshen to settle, and the children of Israel prosper in their Egyptian exile.

### Haftarah in a Nutshell: Ezekiel 37:15-28

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/610065/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/610065/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

This week's haftarah mentions the fusion of the kingdoms of Judah and Joseph during the Messianic Era, echoing the beginning of this week's Torah reading: "And Judah approached him [Joseph]."

The prophet Ezekiel shares a prophecy he received, in which G-d instructs him to take two sticks and to write on one, "For Judah and for the children of Israel his companions" and on the other, "For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and all the house of Israel, his companions." After doing so he was told to put the two near each other, and G-d fused them into one stick.

G-d explains to Ezekiel that these sticks are symbolic of the House of Israel, that was divided into two (often warring) kingdoms: the Northern Kingdom that was established by Jeroboam, a member of the Tribe of Ephraim, and the Southern

Kingdom, that remained under the reign of the Davidic (Judean) Dynasty. The fusing of the two sticks represented the merging of the kingdoms that will transpire during the Messianic Era — with the Messiah, a descendant of David, at the helm of this unified empire.

"So says the L-rd G-d: 'Behold I will take the children of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side, and I will bring them to their land. And I will make them into one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel, and one king shall be to them all as a king...'"

The haftorah ends with G-d's assurance that "they shall dwell on the land that I have given to My servant, to Jacob, wherein your forefathers lived; and they shall dwell upon it, they and their children and their children's children, forever; and My servant David shall be their prince forever."

### [Food For Thought](#)

[Three Steps for Mankind by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l \(5769\)](#)

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vayigash/three-steps-for-mankind/>

In his introduction to the Rabbinical Council of America's version of the ArtScroll Siddur, Rabbi Saul Berman has a lovely essay on the opening word of today's Parsha, vayigash, "And he drew close." Because the work is not widely available outside America, I summarise the essay here.

It is our custom to take three steps forward before beginning the Amidah, the "standing prayer." These steps symbolise a formal approach to the Divine presence. It is as if we had been ushered into the innermost chamber of the palace, and we "draw close" to present our petition to the supreme King of kings.

R. Eleazar ben Judah (c.1165-c.1230), author of the Sefer Rokeach, made the fascinating suggestion that these three steps correspond to the three times in the Hebrew Bible where the word vayigash, "and he drew close," is used in connection with prayer.

The first is the moment when Abraham hears of God's intention to destroy Sodom and Gemorah and the cities of the plain.

**"Abraham approached [vayigash] and said: Will You sweep away the righteous with the wicked? . . . Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?" Gen. 18:23-25**

The second occurs in today's Parsha. Joseph's silver goblet has been found in Benjamin's sack, just as he intended. Joseph – whose true identity is still unknown

to the brothers – says that Benjamin will now be held as his slave. The others may go free. Judah, having given Jacob his personal guarantee of Benjamin's safe return, now pleads for his brother's release.

“Then Judah drew close [vayigash] to him and said: Please, my lord, let your servant speak a word to my lord.” Gen. 44:18

The third appears in the great confrontation at Mount Carmel between the Prophet Elijah and the 450 false prophets of Baal. Elijah proposes a test. Let each side prepare a sacrifice and call on the name of their deity. The one that sends fire is the true God. The 450 prophets do so. They prepare the sacrifice and ask Baal to send fire. Nothing happens. They cry all day, shouting, gyrating, lacerating themselves and working themselves into a frenzy but no fire comes. Then “Elijah stepped forward [vayigash] and prayed: O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known today that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant and have done all these things at Your command.” Fire descends, and the people fall to the ground, saying: “The Lord, He is God. The Lord, He is God” (I Kings 18). We recite this sentence seven times at the climax of Neilah on Yom Kippur.

Three approaches, three prayers, but very different from one another. Abraham prays for justice. Judah prays for mercy. Elijah prays for God to reveal Himself.

Abraham prays on behalf of strangers – the people of the plain. They are, we know, wicked. The Torah told us this long before, when Lot first separated from Abraham to make his home in Sodom (Gen. 13:13). Yet Abraham is concerned with their fate. He pleads in their defence. Abraham speaks out of the covenant of human solidarity.

Judah pleads with Joseph for the sake of his brother Benjamin and his father Jacob who he knows will not be able to bear the loss of yet another beloved son. He speaks on behalf of the family and its integrity, the bonds of emotion that bind those who share a common ancestry.

Elijah speaks to God, as it were, for the sake of God. He wants the people to renounce idolatry and return to their ancestral faith – to the one true God who rescued them from Egypt and took them to Himself in love. His primary concern is for God's sovereignty over the people. Later, when God reveals Himself on Mount Horeb, Elijah says, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty.” He speaks for the honour of God Himself.

Their respective stances, too, are different. Abraham, in the course of his prayer, calls himself “nothing but dust and ashes.” Judah describes himself as a “servant” in the presence of a ruler. Elijah describes himself as a prophet, “I am the only one of the Lord's prophets left.” Abraham represents our sense of awe in the presence of infinity, Judah our humility in the face of majesty, Elijah the grandeur and dignity

of those who are bearers of the Divine word.

There are echoes of these encounters in the first three paragraphs of the Amidah. The first is about the patriarchs. God “remembers the good deeds of the fathers.” This reminds us of Abraham’s prayer.

The second is about Gevurah, God’s governance of the universe, “supporting the fallen, healing the sick, setting free the bound and keeping faith with those who lie in the dust.” When we recite it, we are like Judah standing before Joseph, a servant or subject in the presence of sovereignty and power.

The third is about Kedushat Hashem, “the holiness of God’s name,” meaning the acknowledgement of God by human beings. When an act makes people conscious of God’s existence, we call it a Kiddush Hashem. That is precisely what Elijah sought to do, and succeeded in doing, on Mount Carmel.

These three prayers – each an historic moment in the unfolding of the human spirit towards God – together represent the full spectrum of emotions and concerns we bring to the act of prayer. Each is introduced by the word vayigash, “and he approached, drew close, stepped forward.” As we take three steps forward at the start of each prayer, we are thereby retracing the footsteps of three giants of the spirit, Abraham, Judah, and Elijah, re-enacting their great encounters with God.

On 21 July 1969 Neil Armstrong, the first human being to set foot on the moon, uttered the famous words: “One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.” Our three small steps towards heaven represent three no less historic leaps for mankind.

### [A Tale of Two Dreamers by Eliezer B. Diamond \(2015\)](https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/a-tale-of-two-dreamers-2/)

<https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/a-tale-of-two-dreamers-2/>

Shortly after Jacob arrives in Egypt Joseph—undoubtedly eager to introduce his father and his patron to each other—arranges an audience with Pharaoh for his father. Following the time honored traditions of polite conversation, Pharaoh asks a prosaic question: “How many are the years of your life?” (Gen. 47:8) (Perhaps we should not be surprised at this question; this pharaoh is the only biblical figure known to have celebrated his birthday.) But rather than limiting himself to answering Pharaoh’s question, Jacob adds, “Few and hard have been the years of my life, nor do they come up to the life spans of my fathers during their sojourns” (47:9). A modern analogue would be to ask a perfect stranger the innocuous question “How are you?” and have him respond with a catalogue of his trials and tribulations. No doubt Pharaoh thought to himself, as Jacob recited his woeful litany, the ancient Egyptian equivalent of, “All I said was ‘hello!’”

Yet while the incongruity of Jacob’s response to Pharaoh’s question is in some sense humorous, Jacob’s words are heart-rending. They grow out of the existential and ideological divide that separates Jacob from his son. One can speak of three

differences between their perspectives.

For Joseph, his reunion with his father is the culmination of the most joyous events of his life. He occupies a place of power, fame, and fortune. His dreams have been fulfilled and his brothers, having unwittingly played a role in their fulfillment, must now not only acknowledge their truth but also accept as their savior the brother they sought to kill. He has been reunited with his beloved brother Benjamin. And he is together once more with his father Jacob—and in Egypt, where his Jacob can see how his son, a stranger in a land not his own and a former slave, has become the second most powerful man in the land. In this Joseph is like any other son, wishing his father to admire him and bask in his accomplishments. But Joseph also wants to show Jacob that his dreams were not idle ones and that Jacob's gift to Joseph of a multicolored robe was a prefiguration of Joseph's future success: Joseph's family is now dependent upon him and he wears the robes of royalty.

Jacob, on the other hand, cares only that he will have an opportunity to see his beloved son once more before dying. Joseph insists, in his instructions to his brothers, "And you must tell my father everything about my high station in Egypt and all that you have seen" (Gen. 45:13). Yet when the brothers describe Joseph in all his glory and point out the wagons that Joseph has sent to convey Jacob and his family to Egypt, Jacob responds, "Enough! My son Joseph is still alive! I must go and see him before I die" (45:27). To Jacob, Joseph's present station in life is irrelevant. He cares not whether Joseph is a prince or a pauper; what is important is that Joseph is alive.

The perspectives of Jacob and Joseph also differ in that dwelling in the land of Egypt has very different significance for Jacob than it does for Joseph. At the moment when he reunites with his father Joseph has lived in Egypt for about 23 years, having arrived there when he was but 17. Whatever fond recollections he may have had of his life in Canaan were no doubt largely if not entirely overshadowed by the bitter memory of his brothers' betrayal. It is not for nothing that he names his firstborn Manasseh thereby declaring that "God has made me forget entirely my hardship and my parental home" (Gen. 41: 51). And the trials and tribulations that befall him in Egypt notwithstanding, it is there that he rises to the heights of power and prestige. Thus he names his second son Ephraim, signifying that "God has made me fertile in the land of my affliction" (v.52).

For Jacob the land of Egypt is yet another way station in a life of wandering and suffering. He has had to flee his father's house to avoid his brother Esau's wrath. In Aram he is under the thumb of a manipulative father-in-law whom he ultimately outwits but from whom he must flee as well. His beloved Rachel dies just as he is about to enter the land of his ancestors. This is followed by his daughter Dina's rape and the consequent mass slaughter at Shekhem, and sexual usurpation of his concubine by his eldest son Reuben. Jacob finally returns home—just in time

to bury his father Isaac. And now, in order to be reunited with the son whose disappearance has caused him years of constant grief, he must leave his birthplace once again to take up residence in a strange country. Rather than expressing this to Joseph directly he pours out his heart to Pharaoh, though presumably in Joseph's presence.

Jacob also understands something that Joseph only comes to realize on his deathbed. Joseph is short-sighted and self-centered; he is seduced by his own dreams. For him the story has reached its happy conclusion. Now that Joseph has become viceroy and his family has joined him in Egypt they and their descendants, he believes, will live in peace and security under the benevolent protection of the pharaohs. But from his sojourn in Aram Jacob knows that there is a dark side to being a guest in a foreign land, as Jacob's descendants will learn soon enough. And unlike Joseph, Jacob hears the voice of God, the God who has made a covenant with Abraham and his progeny. He therefore knows that the destiny of his clan lies not in Egypt but in Canaan. It is only after God assures him that he—and his descendants—will be brought up once again from Egypt that Jacob consents to relocate himself there. And with his last breath Jacob requires Joseph to swear that he will ensure Jacob's burial in Canaan.

And so it is for us. Our children do not necessarily share our dreams. We see them wandering toward Egypt, abandoning the land of their ancestors while believing that they have found their true home. At times we need to be with them in Egypt, hoping that by doing so we will help guide them back home. But above all we need, like Jacob, to know that it is enough that our children are alive and well—or at least we must at times accept it as being enough. And they must know that above all we love them, for with love all things are possible. (*Eliezer Diamond is the Rabbi Judah Nadich Professor of Talmud and Rabbinics at JTS*)

[Vayigash: Resisting Walls of Fear to Draw Near by Rabbi Cassi Kall \(2024\)](https://truah.org/resources/cassi-kail-vayigash-moraltorah_2024_/)  
[https://truah.org/resources/cassi-kail-vayigash-moraltorah\\_2024\\_/](https://truah.org/resources/cassi-kail-vayigash-moraltorah_2024_/)

As a campus rabbi, I have heard the fear, grief, sadness, and uncertainty that so many students have been experiencing. Even on campuses with thoughtful and responsive administrations, emotions have run high since October 7. We've seen it on social media, on flyers around campus, and in inflammatory language spoken during protests. During one protest, a group of Jewish students took me aside. "Protesters are advocating for innocent Palestinians but why don't they also care about what happened on October 7? Why aren't they condemning terrorism, and calling for the hostages to be released?"

As I spent time getting to know some of the protesters, I learned that while some were too angry and scared to recognize the pain these Jewish students expressed,

others were horrified by what happened on October 7. For fear of being misunderstood or deemed traitors, they felt uncomfortable expressing these concerns publicly.

Likewise, students who were protesting asked why the Jewish community didn't care about the innocent people in Gaza. When I told them about the scores of students who had expressed deep concern about the death toll in Gaza, they seemed unconvinced. Processing the trauma of October 7 and the growing criticism of Israel on campus, it was a difficult moment to build bridges.

Students shared many of the same concerns but felt forced into polarizing camps. It was far easier to talk at — rather than speak with — one another, to make assumptions about other perspectives rather than hear one another's stories. Feeling threatened and misunderstood, few students felt comfortable tearing down these walls of self-protection so that they could have heartfelt conversations with those who saw the situation differently. The ones who did find that they had far more in common than they realized. They had much to learn from one another. It takes courage and vulnerability to enter into conversations across lines of difference. It takes strength to approach someone and reveal ourselves.

In last week's Torah portion, Joseph's brothers showed up in Egypt in search of food. Joseph immediately knew the men were his brothers, but they never would have guessed the man standing before them was the brother they had once sold into slavery. At first, Joseph kept his identity a secret, in part for self-protection and in part to see the kind of people his brothers had turned out to be. To test this, Joseph framed Benjamin for stealing a goblet and then sentenced him to remain as a slave. This week's Torah portion begins with Judah quickly drawing near his scorned brother and protesting. (Genesis 44:18) Judah knew their father couldn't cope if they returned home without his youngest son, so Judah offered to become a slave in Benjamin's place, exchanging his freedom for Benjamin's.

This is the moment that changed everything in the family story. Joseph saw that Judah wasn't who he had imagined him to be. Judah's compassion and integrity inspired Joseph to respond to Judah's humility with his own. He excused every Egyptian from the room as he broke down in sobs. "I am Joseph!" he cried, revealing himself. The Torah doesn't tell us what was going through Joseph's mind as he then invited his brothers to approach him (Genesis 45:1-4), or what was going through the brothers' minds as they approached. But it does highlight for us the importance of the approach. The very name of this Torah portion, Vayigash, means "and he approached." This intensely vulnerable encounter has so much to teach because through it healing and connection became possible.

That is not to say that this approaching would be easy. Or HaChayim explains, "In order for the brothers to accept Joseph's claim that he was their brother, he

needed the matter of his sale to be mentioned.” (Or HaChayim commentary on Genesis 45:4) Connecting would require difficult, even painful, conversations. Once the issues were aired, the brothers kissed, wept, and embraced. They didn’t know what would happen but, despite everything, they connected with one another.

Just a few days after October 7, I was scheduled to attend an interfaith conference with imams, pastors, and fellow rabbis. Friends questioned the wisdom of my attendance. Could we create a safe interfaith environment in this excruciating moment? I responded that we needed to gather, especially now. Some clergy dropped out, but those who attended had the privilege of hearing one another and being heard. Though at times the conversations were emotional and trying, they also allowed us to sympathize and more deeply understand one another’s concerns.

As Joseph and his brothers approached each other, they too gambled that the challenging conversations would be worth the risk. They chose to build bridges rather than walls, and soon they had done the impossible. They reconnected so deeply that they couldn’t help but weep and embrace one another in gratitude. As Or HaChayim pointed out, the path forward may not have been an easy one, but it was the way forward.

The most significant moments aren’t those of harsh words, and demonstrations, but rather intimate moments of humble connection. Those are the moments that can change everything. *(Rabbi Cassi Kail is the Director of Jewish Life at Chapman University. Working in the college’s Fish Interfaith Center, she is grateful to lead a phenomenal group of Jewish students, faculty, and staff, and to gather diverse groups of students for meaningful multi-faith opportunities.)*

[Haftarat Vayigash: Joining the Branches by Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander](https://ots.org.il/https-ots-org-il-haftarat-parshat-vayigash-rabbi-brander/)  
<https://ots.org.il/https-ots-org-il-haftarat-parshat-vayigash-rabbi-brander/>

At the heart of the Haftarah this week is unity. Yechezkel, in his prophecies of consolation, is instructed by God to take two branches in his hands and hold them together, symbolizing the eventual joining together of the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judea. Central to his vision of the ultimate redemption is a reunification of the Jewish people, who had been split into the northern and southern kingdoms many years before. This ancient prophecy of reconciliation resonates with renewed urgency in our own time, as we grapple with bitter divisions today.

It would be difficult not to be moved by the poignant imagery in the haftarah, as Yechezkel dreams of the entirety of the Jewish people joining together under a single banner. What’s striking, though, is that the prophet doesn’t dwell on the differences between the two kingdoms – they are simply two halves of a whole to be put back together. In reality, though, the northern tribes and the southern tribes



diverged greatly, even regarding their faith in and worship of God. While Yechezkel envisions a national recommitment to God and the Torah in the wake of the reunification, that doesn't mean, per se, that the 'branch of Yosef and the 'branch of Yehuda' are destined to become identical.

We can think back to Yosef and Yehuda themselves, whom we encounter once again in this week's parsha. The two brothers aren't carbon copies of one another; they have entirely different personalities and complementary strengths. Yosef is perseverant in moments of trouble, strategic in his economic planning for Pharaoh in the face of impending famine, and dreamy about what the future holds. Yehuda is assertive in the face of crisis, contrite when he makes mistakes, and a spokesperson on behalf of his brothers. Despite their differences, at the climactic moment of encounter in our parsha, they are able to make amends.

This theme of distinct yet complementary roles is revisited in the rabbinic notion of the two messiahs: Mashiach ben Yosef and Mashiach ben David. Mashiach ben Yosef, introduced to us in the Talmud (Sukkah 52a), serves as a precursor to the ultimate messiah. Though traditions about this character are limited, it is said that this preliminary messianic figure from the house of Yosef will focus, like his namesake, primarily on the administrative and economic groundwork. Meanwhile, the Mashiach ben David will usher in the spiritual reawakening that will accompany the ultimate redemption. These two figures play different roles, yet both are indispensable to the Jewish people's redemption.

Rav Kook embraced this framing in his 1904 eulogy for Theodor Herzl. Secular Zionists, maintained Rav Kook, functioned in a manner akin to that of Mashiach ben Yosef, setting the stage administratively, economically and politically for the eventual redemption. Both political and spiritual tasks are required in order to bring about the redemption, and those fulfilling each of those tasks must see the other as critically important, parallel partners, rather than opponents. The joining of forces of the kingdom of Judah and the kingdom of Joseph is not about creating uniformity, but rather creating productive partnerships in pursuit of common goals.

Here lies our challenge today, as it has been continually throughout our history. How can we unite our various branches, while maintaining our distinct and complementary characteristics? What does it take to hold together differing tribes as we pursue our shared destiny? Our haftarah does not provide the blueprint, but it offers us something more valuable: the vision and mandate. Our people can and must unite in the face of difference, enabling the universal recognition of God and indeed helping to reveal God's visible presence in the world. *(Rabbi Brander is President and Rosh Hayeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone)*

## Yahrtzeits

Francine Nelson remembers her sister Sara Rapaport Amoni on Sat. Jan. 4 and her aunt Esther Miller on Sun. Jan. 5.

Craig and Anita Miller remember their daughter Audrey Miller on Wed. Jan. 8