Vayigash: Bereshit (Genesis)

What's it all about?

Judah pleads with Joseph to free Benjamin, offering himself instead as Joseph's slave. Seeing his brothers staying loyal to each other, **Joseph reveals his true identity**. The brothers feel guilty and ashamed, but Joseph soothes them, and they rush back to Canaan to tell Jacob that Joseph is still alive. **The brothers then return to Egypt with their father in tow**, and Jacob receives another divine promise on his way, with God assuring him that he'll be the father of a great nation. Joseph grows wealthy, and the Pharaoh gives his family the land of Goshen. **The Israelites grow rich and comfortable in Egypt.**



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"I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt. But now, do not be distressed or reproach yourselves for having sold me into slavery..."

Take a deeper dive

This week's parsha brings the story of Joseph and his brothers to its joyous ending. After testing them and witnessing their love and loyalty to each other, Joseph reveals his true identity and sends his brothers back home to fetch their father, Jacob. But before he lets them go, **he shares one wise piece of advice, best read in the original Hebrew: *al tirgazu ba'derech.***

What does that word, *tirgazu*, mean? It could mean "hurry," or "fight," or "get annoyed," which means that **Joseph is telling his brothers to take it easy** as they sojourn back to Canaan. A master observer of human psychology, he imagines what's likely to happen as soon as his brothers wave goodbye and head back home: they may feel guilty for having betrayed him all those years ago and sold him into slavery. They may engage in mutual recrimination, blaming each other for that ancient bad deed. They may rush home so they could return already and reunite Jacob with his beloved son, presumed dead for decades.

Joseph warns them not to do any of the above. He understands that **Jewish life is about the journey, not the destination.** It's a sentiment the book of Proverbs captured neatly when it issued the following instruction: "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your path smooth."

When we rush, when we quibble, when we focus our attention exclusively on the errors of the past or the promises of the future, we're not present in the moment.

Joseph's instruction to his brothers, then, is more than just a kind variation on "take your time." It's a master class in living Jewishly, a reminder that though they may have a long way ahead and many difficult conversations yet in store, **the path forward requires paying attention to — and being immensely grateful for — every minute of every day**. Only when we slow down and give every moment its due, only when we stop chasing some hard-to-reach goal — a lot of money, say, or a perfect figure — and stop telling ourselves we could never be happy until we reach it — only then would we have the presence of mind required for real emotional and spiritual growth.

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