

Midrash on Jewish Clothing

Names _____

Date _____

Read both sources with your chevruta partner. Both comment on Deuteronomy 26:5, which says that the Israelites went down to Egypt few in number, "and there they became a nation."

Source 1

Lekach Tov (Pesikta Zutarta) on Deuteronomy 26:5, Parashat Ki Tavo (11th century)

Another explanation: "And there they became a nation." This teaches that the Israelites were distinct there, for their clothing, their food, and their language were different from the Egyptians'. They were marked and known as a nation of their own, separate from the Egyptians.

Midrash: rabbinic interpretation of the Torah.

דבר אחר: "ויהי שם לגוי". מלמד שהיו ישראל מצוינים שם, שהיה מלבושם ומאכלם ולשונם משונים מן המצריים. מסומנים היו וידועין שהם גוי לבדם, חלוק מן המצריים.

Source 2

Leviticus Rabbah 32:5 (about 5th century)

Rav Huna said in the name of Bar Kappara: Because of four things the Israelites were redeemed from Egypt: they did not change their names, they did not change their language, they did not speak gossip, and none of them was immoral.

This is the earliest version of a famous teaching. Notice what it includes, and what it leaves out.

אמר רב הונא בשם בר קפרא: בשביל ארבעה דברים נגאלו ישראל ממצרים: שלא שינו את שמם, ולא שינו את לשונם, ולא אמרו לשון הרע, ולא נמצא בהן אחד מהן פרוץ בערוה.

Discussion Questions

1. According to Source 1, how did the people of Israel "become a nation"? What does it mean to become a nation?

2. What is the connection between clothing, food, and language? Why might they matter for keeping an identity?

3. Compare the two sources. Which one mentions clothing? Why do you think many people today remember the teaching as "names, language, and dress"?

4. What is "Jewish clothing"? Who wears it, and when? Can Jews dress like their neighbors and still keep a strong Jewish identity?
