



RABBI JUDAH

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Dedicated L'IluY Nishmas HaChaver
Shlomo Michael ben Meir z'l

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Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt'l, the Rosh Yeshiva of Kol Torah was revered for his Torah knowledge, respected as *Poseik ha-Dor*, and renowned for his greatness in *midos*, kindness and loving ways. Universally beloved and admired, Rav Shlomo Zalman was a *tzadik* whose holiness drew him close to people.

One day, as Rav Shlomo Zalman, zt'l, was walking down the street in the Shaarei Chesed neighborhood of Yerushalayim where he lived, he crossed paths with an older woman, an *almana*, widow, who was coming out of the local *makolet*. Rav Shlomo Zalman stopped to speak with the woman, and proceeded to walk her slowly to her home as they conversed.

A neighbor watched the entire exchange from an apartment window. Overcome with curiosity, the neighbor later approached the woman to ask what she had discussed with the *Poseik haDor*?

“Nothing important,” she replied. “He asked me about my health and disposition, my daily routine and chores — how I’m

handling the shopping, cooking, and laundry. He asked about my medications, where I spend Shabbos, and if my children and grandchildren come to visit.

“He showed interest in my life, in *me*. That’s all.”

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“Then Yosef said to his brothers, ‘*G’shu na eilai*, please come closer to me.’ *Vayigashu* and they drew closer. And he said, ‘I am your brother Yosef, whom you sold into Egypt.’ (Bereishis, 44:4).

Our sedra details the dramatic revelation of Yosef to his brothers and the subsequent reunion and relocating of the whole family to Egypt. In advance of moving the family, Yaakov Avinu “sent Yehuda ahead of him *l’horos l’fanav Goshna*, to direct him to Goshen, and they came to the Land of Goshen” (46:28).

According to Rashi, Yehuda’s mission in preceding the rest of the family was to establish a *beis medrash*, a house of study. Many commentaries focus on Yaakov Avinu’s effort as a step toward ensuring Jewish continuity and the family’s value system on foreign soil. Having a *beis medrash* as the cornerstone of their life in Egypt sent a powerful message to the children and grandchildren: this is our priority, this is who we are.

Beyond being a spiritual anchor and the gathering place for their communal worship and learning, the beis midrash would also be a place for them to simply *be together*, as Yosef tells them: “And you shall dwell in the land of *Goshen*, *v’hayisa karov eilai*, and you shall be near to me, you and your children and your grandchildren, and your flocks and your cattle and all that is yours” (Bereishis, 45:10).

Davening is not supposed to be primarily about wish fulfillment

It is no mistake that the word *Goshen*, where the family gathered, shares its etymological root with the name of our Parsha, *Vayigash*, “He drew close.” *Goshen* thus describes Yosef’s very goal: to bring the community close to each other.

It was the sale of Yosef which had triggered the gradual descent to exile. After decades of painful separation and alienation, the family craved *tikun*, a mending of relationships, and a cultivation of lasting closeness. This was a priority.

The *beis medrash* established in Goshen is the first ‘Jewish institution’ founded by our Avos, and the emphasis of this institution was on means, not ends: *V’hayisa karov eilai*, “And you shall be near to me.” However, we often seem to value ends, information and content over simple, human contact. So much of our communication is goal-oriented and results-driven. The bottom line, in our curricula, learning and

even Tefilah, seems to be achievement; we frequently point to the length of davening, the amount of shiurim, or the tremendous amount of knowledge of advanced students of Torah.

Yosef haTzadik’s guidance is a reminder for our shuls, schools, yeshivos and institutions of learning. It is vitally important to create an environment that enables *kesh-er*, closeness to each other and to Hashem.

This lesson is relevant to our relationships with our families and friends alike. *Kesher*, *chibur*, closeness and connection, are much greater than goal-accomplishment. Gathering Jews together is not supposed to be primarily about ‘networking’, nor even ‘outreach’ or education. Davening is not supposed to be primarily about wish fulfillment or even spiritual progress. Bonding with our Creator, and simply being together with others and asking them about their lives, are in themselves of primary value.

This *Parshas Vayigash*, may we renew our commitment to drawing closer and connect-with each other and with Hashem; to be interested in one another, “that’s all.” ■



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