



Shabbat Table Talk Page

Overview

- **Parashah Name: Vayigash (וַיִּגַּשׁ)**
- **Order in Torah (11th of 12 in Genesis)**
- **Chapters: Genesis 44:18 – 47:27**
- **Theme: The brothers “draw near” to one another**



בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְעִסּוֹק בְּדַבְרֵי תוֹרָה

– Torah Study Blessing –

Synopsis

As Benjamin stood before Joseph accused of the theft of a chalice, Judah “drew near” (vayigash) and offered himself in exchange for his brother, pleading with Joseph to spare his father the loss of yet another son. Joseph was so moved by Judah’s act of self-sacrifice that he decided the time had come for him to reveal his identity to his brothers. After clearing the room, he began speaking in Hebrew and said, “I am Joseph, is my father still alive?” When the brothers drew back in dismay, Joseph said, “Draw near to me, please” (from the same verb *nagash*) and explained how God providentially brought him to Egypt to save the family’s life. After gaining their trust, Joseph arranged for the entire family to be reunited under his protection in Egypt. The brothers were then given wagons loaded with gifts and sent back to Canaan to tell Jacob the good news about Joseph. After being reassured by God in a dream that it was safe to leave the Promised Land, Jacob took his entire family to be reunited with his lost son, whom he had not seen in 22 years. Jacob was then introduced to Pharaoh and settled his family in the land of Goshen.

Specific Questions

1. What did Judah say would happen to his father Jacob if Benjamin did not return to him? (That Jacob would die from the grief of his loss)
2. Why did Joseph send everyone else out of the room before revealing his identity to his brothers? (To avoid embarrassing the brothers. The Gemara says that one who embarrasses his friend is considered as if he has spilled his friend’s blood. This is because when you publicly shame someone, they feel as if they’d rather be dead; the blood that rushes through them is considered a form of bloodshed.)
3. How did the brothers know that it was really Joseph speaking to them? (Because he suddenly spoke to them in *lashon ha-kodesh*, i.e., Hebrew, saying, *ani Yosef; ha’od avi chai?* “I am Joseph – is my father still alive?”)



4. Why did Joseph give his brothers a new set of clothes? (Because he caused them to rend their garments when Benjamin was arrested)
5. Joseph told his brothers not to grieve or be angry with themselves for having sold him into slavery. What was his reasoning? (Hashem had a plan and had providentially sent him to Egypt to preserve life).
6. On the way down to Egypt, Jacob stopped at Beersheba and there offered sacrifices to the “God of his father Isaac.” God then spoke to Jacob in a dream. What did God say?
7. When Pharaoh asked Jacob his age, he replied: “The days of the years of my sojournings are 130 years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life.” Why did he regard the days of the years of his life as “few and evil”?

Discussion Questions

1. It was Judah’s idea to sell Joseph into slavery, but later he was willing to become a slave in exchange for Benjamin’s freedom. How did his speech to Joseph reveal that his heart had changed, especially in relation to his father’s love for Rachel and her children?
2. Joseph forgave his brothers, but not without first *testing* them. Jewish tradition states that we are under no obligation to forgive another person until the person recognizes their fault. Do you think Joseph was justified testing (i.e., deceiving) his brothers?
3. Jewish tradition says that the brothers never told Jacob that they had sold Joseph into slavery, and that Jacob simply thought Joseph had gotten lost and then captured by the Ishmaelites. Are there times when it is better to keep silent about a wrongdoing? Why didn’t the brothers confess their sin to Jacob?
4. Jewish tradition also states that Joseph never told Jacob what his brothers did to him. What is *lashon hara* and why is it considered such a terrible sin?
5. Discuss the consequences of embarrassing someone in public. Why do the sages regard this as a form of “soul murder”?
6. Since the Egyptians worshipped animals (including sheep), Joseph identified his family as shepherds and settled them in the land of Goshen (in northeast Egypt), away from Egyptian culture and its influences. How important is the idea of “separation” from worldly culture to you in your relationship with God?

For Next Week

- Read parashat Vayechi – **Genesis 47:28-50:26**
- This is the LAST portion of the Book of Genesis
- Jacob calls his sons to his deathbed and gives them final words of prophecy, warning, and blessing.