

The Path To Follow

Vayigash

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The Power of the Mezuzah

It is written, "And Judah approached him and said, 'If you please, my lord!' " (*Bereshith* 44:18). I have found in the *sefarim* that the term *vayigash* [and he approached] has the same numerical value as *VeSha-dai*. I would like to clarify the meaning of this in light of what the Sages have said, namely that the righteous Joseph fulfilled the entire Torah on his own before it was given (*Vayikra Rabba* 2:10). We must therefore say that he had *mezuzot* on his doorposts. Yet in that case, how could the tribal fathers have not seen them and immediately realized that the viceroys was Jewish?

We cannot say that Joseph removed the *mezuzot* when his brothers arrived, and put them back after his brothers left, for a *mezuzah* protects those who dwell inside the home, as Onkelos states: "According to universal custom, the mortal king dwells within while his servants keep guard outside. Yet with the Holy One, blessed be He, it is His servants who dwell within while He keeps guard outside, as it is said: 'Hashem will guard your going and your coming, from this time and forever' [*Tehillim* 121:8]" (*Avodah Zarah* 11a). Furthermore, the Sages say that the Name *Sha-dai* must be written on the outside of the *mezuzah* (*Zohar* III:266a), and the initials of this Name stand for *Shomer Daltot Israel* ("Guardian of the doors of Israel"). Besides, could we possibly say that Joseph remained in the land of Egypt without protection for even an instant?

Furthermore, just as a *mezuzah* provides Israel with material protection, it also provides spiritual protection for the soul. This is because a person is immersed in material pursuits throughout the day, and he is liable to forget Hashem. Yet when he passes his door and sees a *mezuzah*, placing his hand on it and kissing it, he recalls Hashem's *mitzvot*. Can we therefore say that Joseph removed his *mezuzot* without worrying about turning his focus away from the *mitzvot*?

We may explain this according to what our Sages say in the Gemara: "The *sukkah* must have the character of an incidental residence, and hence requires no *mezuzah*" (*Yoma* 10b). The Sages also say in the Aggadah, "Why do we make a *sukkah* after Yom Kippur? On Rosh Hashanah, the Holy One sits in judgment on every living being, and on Yom Kippur He signs the decree. Perhaps the decree signed on Yom Kippur sentences Israel to exile. In order to fulfill any such decree, Israel builds flimsy dwellings and they exile themselves from their homes to dwell in these temporary structures, and the Holy One regards it as if they have been exiled to Babylon" (*Yalkut Shimoni, Vayikra* 653).

Let us say that when a person exiles himself from his home to a *sukkah*, there is no reason to worry that he will forget the *mitzvot*, for at that point his eyes are turned to G-d for protection and to bring him back home. Along the same lines, it is written: "We do not wear *tefillin* on Shabbat, for Shabbat is called a sign and *tefillin* are called a sign, and we do not place one sign upon another" (*Mechilta, Bo*). We may therefore say that since the *sukkah* provides protection – as it is written: "There will be a *sukkah* for shade by day from the heat, and as a protection and refuge from storm and rain" (*Isaiah* 4:6) – we do not need one protection within another, meaning that the *sukkah* does not require a *mezuzah*.

He Considered Himself a Foreigner

I have seen in the Midrash that when Joseph was on the verge of leaving this world, he summoned his sons and said to them: "I am leaving this world, and I want to divide all my money among you." He then took seven *seleyim* from his pocket and gave them to his sons. Let us think about this: The Gemara states, "Joseph hid three treasures in Egypt: One was revealed to Korach, another to Antoninus the son of Severus, and the third is stored up for the *tzaddikim* in the future" (*Pesachim* 119a). In that case, why did Joseph bequeath only seven *seleyim* to his sons?

We must say that of all the wealth that Joseph amassed, he took none of it for himself. Even the palaces that Pharaoh gave him, he did not take for himself. Why did he act in this way? It is because he considered himself as a foreigner in this world, as the verse states: "For we are like foreigners before You, and like sojourners, as were all our forefathers" (*I Chronicles* 29:15). This is how the righteous act: They are the foundation of the world, and yet they consider themselves to be insignificant. Thus Abraham was the foundation of the world, and yet he considered himself to be insignificant, saying: "I am a foreigner and a sojourner among you" (*Bereshith* 23:4). Likewise Jacob said to Esav, "I have sojourned with Lavan" (*Bereshith* 32:5), and likewise it is said of Israel: "Strangers and sojourners" (*Vayikra* 25:23). Thus King David said: "Hear my prayer, Hashem, and give ear to my cry. Be not mute to my tears...." Why? "...for I am a foreigner with You, and a sojourner like all my fathers" (*Tehillim* 39:13).

Our ancestors acted in this way because they were exiled from one place to another and studied Torah, as our Sages have said: "Our ancestors were never left without a yeshiva. In Egypt they had a yeshiva.... In the wilderness they had a yeshiva.... Our father Abraham was old, but he remained in a yeshiva, as it is said: 'Abraham was old, advanced in age' [*Bereshith* 24:1]. Our father Isaac was old, but he remained in a yeshiva.... Our father Jacob was old, but he remained in a yeshiva" (*Yoma* 28b). Even the righteous Joseph, although he did not exile himself to study Torah, considered himself as a foreigner because he constantly reviewed his learning, just as a foreigner who is constantly checking his pockets, lest he lose something due to the fatigue of traveling.

How can we say that Joseph reviewed his learning? It is because on the verse, "He sent Judah before him" (*Bereshith* 46:28), the Sages taught: To establish a house of study where he could teach the tribal fathers (*Tanchuma, Vayigash* 11). Know that this is true, for when Joseph left Jacob, he remembered what passage he was learning, for he was constantly reviewing it. When the brothers came to tell Jacob that Joseph was still alive, "[Jacob's] heart grew cold, for he did not believe them" (*Bereshith* 45:26). Jacob remembered which passage he was learning when Joseph left him, and he thought: "I know that Joseph left during the study of the *egla arufa* [the heifer whose neck is broken]." He therefore told his sons, "Let him give me a sign indicating which passage he was learning when he left me, and I will believe you." Since Joseph also remembered the passage he was learning when he left, he sent *agalot* (wagons) to his father. When Jacob saw these *agalot*, "the spirit of their father Jacob revived" (*Bereshith* 45:27).

All Details – Except Sacred Ones!

It is written, “He saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to transport him, and the spirit of their father Jacob revived” (*Bereshith* 45:27).

It is said that in the time of the Vilna Gaon, the youngest daughter of one of the wealthiest men of Vilna fell in love with a Jewish student who was studying at a secondary school in Vilna. The wealthy man sent someone to look for the young man and suggested a *shidduch* with his youngest daughter. As a dowry, he offered the young man a magnificent home with beautiful furniture so he could continue to study.

Amazed at this generous offer, the young man immediately accepted and a magnificent wedding was arranged. The wealthy man kept his word, and the young couple lived together for several months.

Yet out of the blue, the young man began to make life difficult for his wife. Her parents tried to make peace between them, but they only succeeded for a short time. This occurred several times, until suddenly the young man departed from his wife, left Vilna, and was gone without a trace.

The young woman remained as an *agunah* in the home of her parents. There she drowned in tears over the husband of her youth, a man who had left her in misery, abandoned, and alone.

A few years after these events, a Jew with a long beard arrived in Vilna. He was carrying a sack upon his shoulder, and seemed to be looking for a place to sleep. He entered the Beit HaMidrash and approached the bookshelf, and then he took out a book and began to leaf through it. Some of the men who were there approached him in order to welcome him with *Shalom Aleichem*. In speaking with him, they had the distinct impression that this traveler was none other than the son-in-law of the wealthy man, the traces of whom had disappeared a few years earlier.

They immediately summoned the wealthy man to the Beit HaMidrash, who was able to identify the traveler as his son-in-law on account of certain signs and mannerisms. The son-in-law excused himself for his shameful conduct, and the wealthy man forgave him. In fact he welcomed him with open arms and invited him to come to his home. The other members of his family, including the young woman, were able to identify him, and his home was filled with joy.

Eventually, however, after the young woman exchanged a few words with him, she began to doubt whether the man standing before her was actually her husband. Still, he mentioned several private details to her, events that had occurred during their honeymoon, and other similar things.

Nevertheless, the young woman was still uncertain as to whether this man was an imposter who had heard these details from her actual husband. She did not know what to think or how to act, and so she spoke to her father and expressed her doubts to him. Her father, faced with this dilemma, went to see the Vilna Gaon to explain the problem now facing them.

The Vilna Gaon asked to see the man in question, and after examining him, he sent him away and told the father of the young woman that for now, she should not be alone with him.

Nevertheless, the family should act cordially with him and show him respect. On Shabbat, the Vilna Gaon told the father to go with the traveler to synagogue, and that before entering, he should begin speaking to the *Shamash*. Then, in the middle of their conversation, he should tell the traveler: “Don’t wait for me. Go and take a seat at my usual place, as we used to do!” They would then see what happens.

The father of the young woman followed the Vilna Gaon’s advice. He went to synagogue with the traveler, and when they arrived he told him: “Don’t wait for me. Go sit down at my usual place. I’ll be there soon.” The man hesitated for a moment, not knowing where to turn, at which point the father laughed to himself, realizing that his daughter was right.

Immediately after Shabbat, the traveler was again brought to the Vilna Gaon. After a brief conversation, he acknowledged that he lied by claiming to be the wealthy man’s son-in-law. In fact he had met the actual son-in-law in a certain town, and he heard all the details of his private life from his own mouth, including the status of his father-in-law. Since the two men were similar in appearance and height, he decided to try his luck and claim to be the son-in-law of one of Vilna’s richest men, and to live off of him.

When the disciples of the Vilna Gaon asked how he had the idea of setting a trap for him in synagogue, he replied: “When I saw this man and sensed the fear that had taken hold of him, I immediately realized that I had a great imposter before me. And when I heard from the wealthy man that his guest knew all the intimate details of his daughter’s life, I understood that he had certainly met her actual husband and was able to trick him into giving him all these details.

“However to clarify the situation, I decided to put him to the test: To see if he actually knew the location of the wealthy man’s seat in synagogue. In fact it was clear to me that the imposter never thought of informing himself about something holy. He never thought to ask about a certain place, such as a synagogue, which is how he got caught in the trap.

“I learned this from the account given in the Torah. When Jacob’s sons returned to their father, they said to him: ‘Joseph is still alive, and he is the ruler over all the land of Egypt’. The verse adds, ‘His heart grew cold, for he did not believe them.’

“Yet afterwards we read, ‘He saw the *agalot* [wagons] that Joseph had sent to transport him, and the spirit of their father Jacob revived.’ We need to understand why Jacob did not believe them at first, and why his heart only revived when he saw the *agalot*.

“The explanation is found in Rashi: Joseph gave them a sign: The subject that he was engaged in when he separated from his father was the section dealing with the *egla arufa* [beheaded heifer]. That is why Jacob was doubtful before he saw the sign. Perhaps the man had met Joseph, who had revealed some details to him. The man then become the governor of Egypt, knowing the brothers of Joseph, and lied by telling them that he was Joseph, for he physically resembled him.

“Yet when the brothers provided the sign that he studied the passage of the *egla arufa*, Jacob understood that he was no imposter. In fact an imposter pays no attention to details concerning holiness. That is why ‘the spirit of their father Jacob revived,’ for he understood with certainty that he was his son, not someone else.”

Not Enough to Forgive

It is written, "And now, it was not you who sent me here" (*Bereshith* 45:8).

Regarding Joseph's words of consolation to his brothers, the book *Ta'am VaDa'at* states: "From here we learn a great principle regarding proper conduct: It is not enough to forgive a person who has wronged us, for we must leave him with a good impression, as if he has never done the slightest thing to harm us. Likewise Joseph explained to his brothers that G-d had sent him, meaning that they had nothing to worry about."

The *gaon* Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz *Zatzal* taught that if a person has wronged us and wants to apologize, if we tell him that he does not need to, we are depriving him of the contentment that comes from seeking forgiveness. We are obligated to listen to him in order to make him feel better.

Joseph's Tears

It is written, "[Joseph] then kissed all his brothers and wept upon them" (*Bereshith* 45:15).

In his book *Oznaim LaTorah*, the *gaon* Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin *Zatzal* notes that this verse stresses Joseph's tears. In fact Joseph weeps at the slightest provocation, for in *Parsha Mikeitz* we read: "He turned away from them and wept" (*Bereshith* 42:24), and "He wanted to weep, so he went into the room and wept there" (*ibid.* 43:30). In this week's *parsha* we read: "He cried in a loud voice" (*ibid.* 45:2), "He wept on them" (*ibid.* 45:15), and "He wept on his neck a good while" (*ibid.* 46:29). Further in *Parsha Vayechi* we read: "He wept upon him" (*ibid.* 50:1), and "Joseph wept when they spoke to him" (*ibid.* 50:17), and there are other such examples.

The reason for these tears, writes Rav Zalman, lies in the fact that a person who has greatly suffered in life weeps easily, even when he is presently living in peace and prosperity. Other than the tears caused by his own suffering, Joseph was concerned about and wept over the suffering of others. On the other hand, Joseph's brothers – who had never known misery in life – were incapable of weeping even when the situation justified it.

Joseph's ability to attain honor and greatness stemmed from this as well.

Rashi's Explanation

It is written, "Joseph said to his brothers, 'Come close to me'" (*Bereshith* 45:4).

The Rav Elyahu Mizrahi *Zatzal* questions the explanation given by Rashi [that Joseph showed his brothers that he was circumcised], for the brothers should have suspected him of being a descendant of Keturah, who were obligated to be circumcised!

The book *Gan Raveh* explains that Rashi is following the teaching of the Gemara, namely that only the ten sons born to Abraham by Keturah were obligated to be circumcised; their descendants were not (*Sanhedrin* 59b). This is why Joseph's brothers did not fear that he was a descendant of Keturah.

Outward Signs

It is written, "He wept on his neck" (*Bereshith* 46:29).

Here Rashi states, "Jacob, however, neither fell on Joseph's neck nor kissed him. Our Sages say that he was reciting the *Shema*."

In his commentary on tractate *Yoma*, the Maharsha cites what our Sages have taught in this regard: "Concerning one who blinks with his eyes, gesticulates with his lips, or points with his fingers while reciting the *Shema*, Scripture says of him: 'You did not call out to Me, O Jacob' [Isaiah 43:22]" (*Yoma* 19b).

This means that one who indulges in outward signs is not doing as Jacob did, who did not stop in the middle of the *Shema* even to meet Joseph, the son of his old age, over whom he had wept for 22 years.

In the Light of the Parsha

The Sanctity of the Joseph HaTzaddik

It is written, "Judah approached him and said, *bi adoni*" (*Bereshith* 44:18). What is the meaning of *bi adoni*?

Judah said to Joseph: My name testifies that I fear no man. The letters of the Tetragrammaton are contained *bi* [in me] – in the name *Yehudah* [Judah]. That is why I am not afraid of you, for I fear only my Creator, Whose Name is found in mine, and Who stands at my right side.

How did Joseph respond? He reprimanded him by saying, "I am Joseph" (*Bereshith* 45:3). In other words: If in fact you only fear your Creator, know that I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. Did you fear your Creator when you sold me? If you had feared Him, you would have not sold me, and my father would not have suffered during all those years.

Joseph's brothers could not tolerate this reprimand, and the truth appeared on their faces, as it is written: "His brothers could not answer him, for they were terrified at his presence" (*ibid.*).

Joseph then showed them that he was circumcised (*Bereshith Rabba* 93:8), saying that the Name of the Holy One, blessed be He, was also found in his name. The numerical value of *Yosef* [Joseph] is six times greater than that of the Tetragrammaton. Thus he too could say, *bi adoni* (G-d is in me): I spent all these years in Egypt, the nakedness of the earth, and yet I kept my integrity without harming my circumcision, for I feared no one but G-d. Furthermore, I was even imprisoned for this very reason, for not having sinned with Potiphar's wife.

Guard Your Tongue!

Rectifying the Sin of Lashon Harah

If a person has transgressed by having listened to *Lashon Harah* and believed it, he must strive to remove it from his heart so as not to believe it. He must also commit himself to no longer accepting *Lashon Harah* about a Jew. He must confess his transgression, and thereby rectify the positive and negative *mitzvot* that he has transgressed by accepting *Lashon Harah*.

– Chafetz Chaim

According to the book *Orchot Tzaddikim*, zeal is the first of all attributes: "You must realize that the attribute of zeal is the foundation of all other attributes, for a man cannot always be immersed in a book. He must eat, drink, and deal with his affairs, which is why he requires zeal and prudence to return to his book and study" (*Orchot Tzaddikim, Sha'ar HaZerizut*).

The Ramchal also speaks at length about this subject. He states the following:

"A person's nature exercises a strong downward pull upon him. This is so because the grossness which characterizes the substance of earthiness keeps a man from desiring exertion and labor. One who wishes, therefore, to attain to the service of the Creator, may His Name be blessed, must strengthen himself against his nature and be zealous. If he leaves himself in the hands of his downward-pulling nature, there is no question that he will not succeed" (*Messilat Yesharim*, ch. 6).

Exactly Twenty-two Minutes

When the family of the Gerer Rebbe, Rabbi Avraham Mordechai *Zatzal* (known as the Imrei Emet), would prepare him a meal, they brought out all the various dishes at the same time (including his cup of coffee, which people usually have at the end of a meal). He would then finish the meal as quickly as possible in order to return to his studies. On weekdays, his meals would last a total of seven minutes, and on Shabbat they would last exactly twenty-two minutes. If it ever happened that all his dishes were not presented at the same time, he would not wait after finishing one dish. Instead he would recite *Birkat Hamazon* and return to his library, to his Torah, and to serving G-d.

One time the Rebbetzin apologized for a slight delay by saying, "We were late for only an instant." He responded like someone who was completely stunned: "Is an entire instant a small thing?"

It is also said that Rabbi Avraham Mordechai would usually wake up in the morning and eagerly arise. Within a few seconds, he had already gone downstairs to learn, still putting on his coat as he made his way down the stairs that led to his library, so precious was his time!

Rabbi Avraham Mordechai once attended a conference of rebbes in Lodz to discuss issues related to the community. During the break that took place between sessions, which lasted no more than two hours, he had time to have breakfast, participate in a *Sefer Torah Siyum* along with the *mitzvah* meal, give *shiurim* and discuss words of Torah, visit two Gerer chassidim who were ill, attend *Sheva Berachot*, and participate in a meeting of prominent figures on investments in Eretz Israel. He then returned to the conference two minutes before discussions reconvened...and he was the first one to arrive!

Seven Minutes

Along the same lines, the following story is told about the Sefat Emet *Zatzal*, the father of Rabbi Avraham Mordechai:

One day, the Sefat Emet was asked to attend a meeting of rebbes being hosted by Rebbe Elimelech of Grodzisk *Zatzal*. When he arrived, all the rebbes were already seating at the discussion table. The Sefat Emet entered, greeted everyone, and said: "I was invited here because I was told that 300,000 rubles were needed to annul a decree against Charedim and Torah teachers. I take

it upon myself to collect 100,000 rubles, the Rebbe of Grodzisk and Alexander will collect 50,000 rubles each, and the Rebbe of Sochatchov, Porissov, Radomsk, and Sakronavize will collect 25,000 rubles each. Does everyone agree?" The rebbes agreed, and therefore the Sefat Emet said his goodbyes.

The Rebbe of Grodzisk wanted him to stay, however, and so he said: "A meal has been prepared in honor of the guests." The Sefat Emet quickly proceeded to the room where the table had been set, and in a few seconds he washed his hands, ate something, recited *Birkat Hamazon*, said his goodbyes, and departed.

It is said that he spent exactly seven minutes with the Rebbe of Grodzisk!

Until Kiddush

Rabbi Meir Chadash *Zatzal*, the *Mashgiach* of the Hevron yeshiva, never wasted any time, for each moment was precious and holy in his eyes. Whenever he woke up during the night, he took advantage of the situation to study Torah, even in between waking up and falling back to sleep. He would arise from bed and sit down to study until he could sleep again.

He also did not lose any precious time on Friday night. In fact he would study during the few minutes in between the prayer of *Arvit* on Shabbat and the moment when his family gathered for *Kiddush*.

The Diligence of the Chafetz Chaim

The following story was told by the Chazon Ish *Zatzal*:

We know the story about the *dibuk* that the Chafetz Chaim commanded to leave the body of a certain person. He did this in the presence of his greatest disciples, among them Rabbi Eliyahu Dushnitzer, Rabbi Yosef Kahaneman, and Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman (Rabbi Wasserman would usually recount this incredible account to his students at the yeshiva on Purim).

The Chazon Ish said that these disciples asked the *dibuk*: "For what is the Chafetz Chaim admired in the World of Truth?"

The *dibuk* replied, "For his diligence in Torah study!"

This teaches us that among all the characteristics in which the Chafetz Chaim excelled, diligence was one of the greatest.

His Absolute Refusal

The *kabbalist* Rabbi Eliyahu Chacham Salman Moutsafi *Zatzal* was very careful not to be photographed. His family believed that this refusal stemmed from the fact that spirits rest upon the image of man, who was created in the image of G-d, spirits that come to disrupt a person's service of G-d.

He once explained his reasoning to his family by saying, "The main reason why I absolutely refuse to be photographed is not what you think – because of the spirits that rest upon an image. It is much more serious than that. It is because when a person allows himself to be photographed on various occasions and at family celebrations, he begins to make a collection of these pictures, which over time start to number in the dozens, or perhaps in the hundreds. One day he will sit down to look at them, losing precious time in the process. He will spend thirty minutes, or even fifteen minutes looking at picture and neglecting Torah, which is a very grave sin. Thus by allowing oneself to be photographed, a person transgresses words of Torah. He sets himself up for the sin of neglecting the study of Torah, since the goal of standing before a camera is to look at the pictures afterwards."