



Kinder Torah[©]



For parents to share with children at the Shabbos table
Parshas Vayigash

Define Yourself

“And it will be when Paroh summons you and says, ‘What is your occupation?’” (Bereshis 46:33). Rav Shimshon Refael Hirsch zt”l points out that in a country such as Mitzraim a person is defined by his work. A person is not born as a person, rather as a worker, farmer, soldier, etc. In such a place, we understand that the first question that Paroh would ask the person is about his occupation. That is the most important thing in the world about that person.

What is most important to us? “He sent Yehuda ahead to Yosef to prepare ahead in Goshen” (Bereshis 46:28). What did Yehuda prepare? Rashi explains that Yehuda went ahead to set up a Beis HaMedrash. The Shlah HaKadosh learns an important principle from this. The foremost consideration in a person’s mind must always be his spiritual needs. When he builds a new home, he should first plan to build a room where he can learn and pray. Then he can finish planning the rest of the house.

What is our attitude about a person’s work? The Chofetz Chaim zt”l relates a parable based on the verse, “Yosef sustained his father and his brothers and all of his father’s household with food . . .” (Bereshis 47:12). A king once went to visit his soldiers and appease them. He sent word ahead that anyone who had a request should come forward and ask the king. One soldier approached the king and requested with a complete heart that the king should supply him with his meals every day. The soldier’s friends laughed at him. You are asking for something that you already have. The king has already promised to feed all of the soldiers in the army. So too it is with us, continues the Chofetz Chaim zt”l. Hashem has already told us that he will feed us, as we say in the daily prayers, “He sustains the living with loving kindness,” and in the Birkas HaMazone, “for He is the merciful Hashem Who feeds and supports

everyone.”

*Kinderlach . . .
Who are we? We have many things to do in our lives. We begin as children, and students. As we become older we marry and become parents, neighbors, workers, teachers, etc. These are all roles that we fulfill. What is important to us? What is the focus of our lives? Not the occupation, as with Paroh. Rather the spiritual work, as with Yehuda. That is the most important part of our day. That is what really interests us. That is what “makes us tick”.*

It’s Embarrassing to Embarrass

“Eli how are you? It’s so good to see you. What’s the matter, you look a little upset.”

“I’ll be okay Doni. It’s really nothing, I suppose.”

“Do you want to talk about it?”

“Well, Doni, a very embarrassing thing just happened to me.”

“Oy vey.”

“Yesterday I told a personal secret to a very good friend. I told him not to tell anyone, because it was very personal. Today three or four people came to me and asked me about the secret. I was so embarrassed that they knew about it. I feel terrible.”

“Eli, now I understand what our sages wrote in the Gemora Bava Metzria, that embarrassing someone is like spilling their blood. I see how awful you feel from the embarrassment. You know, Eli, we can learn a lesson from everything that happens to us in life. I know that I have learned never to embarrass anyone.”

“Doni, do you know that Yosef HaTzaddik, put his own life in danger to avoid embarrassing his brothers?”

“Really? What happened?”

“Here is the scenario. Yosef’s brothers stood in front of the leader of Mitzraim, his servants, and guards. Little did they know that this powerful ruler was none other than

their own brother Yosef, whom they had sold as a slave to a band of travelers many years earlier. He had made his way to Mitzraim and had risen to the position of second-in-command to the king. In his capacity as ruler, he had treated them harshly, giving them good reason to resent him. Now, he realized that the time had come to reveal his identity to his brothers. What should he do? To divulge his secret in the presence of the Mitzrim would cause them great shame and embarrassment. It would become public knowledge that they once sold their own brother as a slave, a shameful act. To send all of the Mitzrim guards out of the room would be very dangerous. Yosef would be alone with the people whom he had treated so harshly. If they chose to kill him, no one could stop them.”

“Tell me Eli, how did Yosef deal with this dilemma?”

“Doni, our sages tell us in Gemora Kesuvos, ‘It is better for a person to throw himself into a fiery furnace than to shame someone in public.’ Yosef HaTzaddik risked danger to his own life rather than humiliate his brothers.”

*Kinderlach . . .
Before you say something about someone, think twice. Then think again. Could this thing be embarrassing? He got a low grade on the test. Her clothes are not so nice. He is always late. He is doing much better than last year. The teacher reprimanded her today. All of these things, besides being loshon hora, can also be embarrassing. We learn from Yosef HaTzaddik how terrible it is to embarrass someone. Don’t get caught. Stop before you say it.*

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