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MEETING POINTS

OUR LIVES AS INDIVIDUAL HUMAN BEINGS, AS MEMBERS OF FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES and as the Jewish people in relation to the world - are often filled with conflict. There are inner conflicts which, on and off, can trouble a person for years. There are sometimes unfortunately marital conflicts, divisions between parents and children, disputes in communities and, on a wider level, between nations.

The Sedra¹ is about 'meeting points', meeting between opposites, meeting between those who were opposed. The traditional name of the Sedra, the single word Vayigash, means 'meeting' or 'drawing near'. The message of the Sedra is the idea of ultimate unity as in the time of the Messiah.

Who meets in the Sedra? Firstly, Judah draws near to Joseph. This is the event with which the Sedra opens.

This is part of a dramatic story: the brothers, led by Judah, who together long ago sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt, unexpectedly meet him in the form of an Egyptian potentate. They do not recognise him, and Joseph tests their feelings towards him and his younger brother Benjamin. He tries to keep Benjamin with him, pretending he would be his slave as a punishment for stealing. Now Judah "draws near" to Joseph in order to offer himself as a slave so that Benjamin could go free.

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This is one meeting point. It has powerful human significance. Yet let us consider more carefully the identity and future descendants of the key players.

Joseph is the son of Rachel, Judah the son of Leah. These two branches of the early family of the Jewish people represent two opposing claims to leadership. Saul, the first man to be crowned King in Israel, was a descendant of Joseph's younger brother Benjamin. He was replaced by King David, a descendant of Judah.

Later the Jewish Kingdom split in two: the Northern Kingdom was ruled by a descendant of Joseph, the Southern by David's grandson, a descendant of Judah.

Hence Judah's drawing near to Joseph in our Sedra suggests striking possibilities. The Zohar² says this was a meeting "of two worlds, so that they should be unified together". It hints at the ultimate peace of the future, in the time of Moshiach.

This peace is also seen in the meeting point of the unification of all the brothers together, when Joseph revealed his identity, expressing the ultimate unity of the Jewish people. At last, after many years, despite many wounds, they were one!

Another meeting point is when Jacob himself, the great spiritual leader, together with all his family, came to Egypt, the country known then as the most immoral in the world. This hints at the way holiness will ultimately be expressed throughout the world, relating to all humanity.

The message of the Sedra is that opposites can join, and ultimately will join. It is our job to make this happen in our own individual lives: through love and concern for those around us, whether family, colleagues or associates, meeting together and, in the sacred spirit of "Love your fellow as yourself", the central theme of the Torah, becoming one³.

1. Genesis 44: 18-47:27. 2. Zohar I, 206a. See the beginning of Bereishit Rabbah on this Sedra. 3. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Sefer HaSichot 5750*, p.212 ff.

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SEDRA VAYIGASH

RESPONSIBILITY

David swept his gaze across the airport lounge. There were hundreds of people milling around, to and fro, with baggage trailing behind them. David, however, did not notice the excitement; he was looking for his little sister, Ilana.

By now David was very worried. You see, his parents had trusted him to take Ilana on a visit to the airport, to watch the planes landing and taking off from the observation roof, but they had said to him, 'David, be very careful, the airport is a big place and it is very easy to get lost - you keep your eye on Ilana'. Of course, David had thought that would be easy. Until three minutes ago. He had just bought a coke for himself and Ilana. Then he gazed out of an observation window drinking happily, when suddenly he realised that Ilana was nowhere to be seen.

'What am I going to do?' he thought to himself, dread filling the pit of his stomach. He could not bear the thought of telling his parents that he'd lost his little sister, especially after their explicit warning. He knew they would be so very upset...

David felt afraid. He began wandering through the airport, hoping he would suddenly find her, but feeling very unsure about what to do next.

Suddenly the thought of the Torah portion he'd been learning in school popped into his head. The ten sons of Jacob had gone down to Egypt to bring food back to their father and they had taken with them their youngest half brother Benjamin. Their father had warned Judah to make

sure nothing happened to Benjamin and that he was brought home safely. Judah agreed to take responsibility and they all went on their way to Egypt.

Joseph was the Viceroy of Egypt and he was in charge of giving out the food to the people. When the brothers came in front of Joseph they did not recognise him - the last they knew of him they had sold him as a slave to some slave merchants. Joseph did not reveal to them his true identity. Instead he tricked them so as to pretend to arrest Benjamin, his own full brother, and keep him together with him in Egypt.

The other brothers were very upset, especially Judah, to whom Jacob had given the responsibility of taking care of Benjamin. But Judah did not give up. He decided to deal with this himself. He stepped forward to Joseph and begged him to return Benjamin saying, 'My father has already lost one of his children, (talking about Joseph himself), he will not be able to bear losing another child. Please take me as a captive instead!'.

After hearing those words Joseph could not bear it anymore. He burst into tears and told his brothers the truth, 'I am your brother Joseph!'.

David thought about what he'd learned; Judah had been so brave to stand up to Joseph, the Viceroy. Judah had done exactly what was necessary, although it was hard.

'I must find Ilana!' David thought to himself, as he stood up resolutely, he was ready to face his challenge.

"And, thank G-d, I did find her in the end", said David to his cousins, who were listening intently to the story David was telling some time later. "I went to the airport security and got them to call out her name on the intercom system, and a description of her, and soon someone found her. But I must say that if I hadn't thought of that story from the Sedra, I probably would have been too busy worrying rather than doing anything about it... The Sedra helped me take responsibility, like Judah, and do the right thing..."

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