

Shabbat Schmooze at the Nursery School



Questions and Ideas for Parents: Torah Portion: Vayigash

1. Have you sent or received an email or other form of "written" communication that caused problems because of misinterpretation? How did you resolve that situation?
2. Are eyes really the window to the soul? How does this saying affect the interactions you have with your child?
3. Have you had any difficult interactions with family members (or non-family members) that were resolved by a face-to-face meeting?

Meeting people face-to-face, as compared to the many other contemporary ways in which we communicate with friends, family and colleagues (phone, text, email, even Skype), offers an opportunity for a close, intimate and personal connection. In this week's *parashah*, we find a number of references to face-to-face meetings.

The word "*vayigash*" means "and he approached," and in this *parashah* the term refers to Judah approaching his brother Joseph. This is one of the many very difficult and very human interactions depicted in the story of Joseph reuniting with his brothers in Egypt, many years after they had sold him into slavery. A major component in this story is the interaction of the people involved, struggling to connect and be understood; meeting face-to-face, one on one.

This reunion is a scene demanding person to person interaction. Brothers who wronged their own kin are confronted by that kin personally, face-to-face. Joseph needs to see for himself that his brothers have learned from their awful behavior; he needs to see for himself that they have changed. He needs to see not through a messenger or a middleman, but by going directly to the source, approaching the others and being in their space, their lives.

We are always "on our way" somewhere fast instead of just "being" where we are. Rather than being present and enjoying the moments as they happen, we tweet about them, taking ourselves out of the experience. We have the ability to communicate so quickly and easily that our technology is always grabbing our attention away from those who may be sitting right next to us.

When we have the chance to meet face-to-face, things can be different. There is an honesty and an intimacy to standing in front of someone and engaging in dialogue with him or her. It is the most real and most deeply connected we become in life.

What does all this have to do with parenting? Young children learn primarily through their interactions with people. Human interaction is paramount to human development. Joseph's face-to-face meetings with his brothers in this *parashah* highlight the importance of real time, up close, person to person interaction. It is a simple reminder that there never has been and (we would argue) never will be a substitute for face-to-face human interaction. As parents, we are often looking for the next technique, toy or method to support our young children's development. We can't forget that the best tool we have at our disposal is simply our "self."

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