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Vayigash – Leave it in the Car

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The pain of the past *Parshios* dissipates this week with the startling revelation that Yosef is still alive. Yaakov has been mourning his beloved son for over two decades, only to find out that Yosef is thriving and leading in the land of Egypt. Yosef, knowing that the famine will still affect the region for several years, encourages the family to relocate to Egypt and settles them in the city of Goshen.

“He sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph, to direct him to Goshen, and they came to the land of Goshen.”

(Genesis 46:28)

Yehuda was sent ahead to prepare for the arrival of the rest of the family. Rashi explains, *“...to establish for him a house of study, from which teaching would emanate.”* Yaakov sent Yehuda to establish a spiritual infrastructure which could support the needs of the family. Yaakov understood that to survive in the alien and sometimes hostile environment of Egypt there would have to be a spiritual system in place to support and facilitate the growth of the family in all times.

Jews around the world learn a page of Talmud each and every day, finishing the entire Babylonian Talmud every 7 ½ years. This past Wednesday we celebrated the Siyum HaShas. I was privileged to attend this incredible celebration at MetLife Stadium, accompanied by my children and members of our *shiur* and *kehilla*. But for us Baltimoreans there was a journey. Close to 2,000 men, women and children from across our community boarded buses to the event. We arrived at the bus station around 8:15am ready for the day ahead. Some brought their laptops to catch up on work, others brought books and reading material to make use of the hours of travel. We all brought food and, of course, our beloved *Gemaras*. Then the announcement came. The FBI had communicated that nothing could be left on the busses when arriving at the stadium. For security reasons, the busses would be swept, and we would not necessarily return on the same bus we had arrived on.

Understandably this created a challenge. Items that we had brought to accompany us on the journey could not be left on the bus, nor could they be brought into the stadium. And so, we got off the bus, returned to our cars and left behind anything which wasn't a necessity. It was in that moment that we had to decide what was truly important and necessary. We exited the bus and left our laptops and iPads and returned with our *Gemaras* and food (we are Jewish). And in this very moment, I experienced an incredible revelation. There are many things we think we need to be successful, happy, content and well-adjusted. But at the end of the day, give me my *Gemara* and I am ready to travel wherever I need to. Torah isn't simply a system of obligations and prohibitions. Torah is the beating heart of the Jew. Torah allows us to become the best version of ourselves, discovering who we are and what we are truly capable of. Torah allows us to create a beautiful and intimate relationship with God and chisels His image within each of us. Like Yehuda, who ventured into Egypt armed with his personal holiness, we boarded the buses leaving everything behind and carrying with us that which matters most, a *Gemara* in hand and an inspired soul.

To those who have finished Shas, *mazal tov* on your accomplishment. To those who will begin the next cycle with *Maseches Berachos* on Sunday morning, I know you will enjoy and feel uplifted from every *daf* and every word. May we use these inspiring times to remind us of the things that are truly important for a successful life journey and may we find the courage to leave the rest in the car.