



# GROWTH

## At The SHABBAT TABLE

### PARSHAT VAYIGASH

#### Bridging Worlds: The Neck's Vital Connection

In this week's Parsha, the Torah narrates: "And he [Yosef] fell upon the neck of Binyamin, his brother, and wept, and Binyamin wept on his [Yosef's] neck." The Talmud (Megillah 16b) derives that the weeping described here transcended personal nostalgia. Yosef, through Divine inspiration, saw into the future and cried over the two Temples that would eventually be established in Binyamin's plot of the Holy Land and then tragically destroyed, and Binyamin shed tears over the Mishkan (Tabernacle) of Shiloh that was destined to be within Yosef's portion of Israel and would also come to be demolished.

The Midrash explains that this idea is alluded to in the verse when it describes Yosef and Binyamin sobbing on one another's "neck / צוואר." On the verse (Shir HaShirim 4:4): "Your neck is like the Tower of David," the Midrash comments, "Just as the neck is situated at the height of the person, the Temple is situated at the height of the world." Although the head is situated even higher on the body, the Temple is nevertheless compared to a neck, which is slightly beneath it, since the Bet HaMikdash was 23 cubits below a place called En Etam (and wasn't literally at the total height of the world...).

This invites further elaboration. It's clear that we are considering height a significant factor, as the Midrash seems to boast of the fact that "the Temple was situated at the height of the world." Why, then, was the Bet HaMikdash not indeed built a bit higher up – upon the peak of the world – and thus be analogous to a head as opposed to a neck?

R' Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the pioneer of the Chabad movement as we know it today, offered a profound insight. Although it would appear that the head carries more importance, there is actually greater significance to the neck in a certain sense. Yes, the head has much to take credit for – the brain, which processes sensory, controls thought, memory, emotions, motor skills, and involuntary functions such as heartbeat, breathing, and digestion via the autonomic nervous system; the eyes, which provide visual information and depth perception; the ears, which detect sound waves and contain a vestibular system, which helps maintain balance and spatial orientation; the mouth, which controls speech and nutrition; the nose, which allows for the sense of smell as well as respiration by filtering, warming, and moistening air before it enters the lungs; and other things such as facial expressions and brain protection via the skull. Indeed, the head is responsible for so many vital functions. But without the neck, none of this would be possible; it is the neck – and the fact that it is indeed just below the head – that enables structural support and allows blood flow, as well as digestive, respiratory, and nerve pathways, to maintain the head's functions and purpose.

In a metaphoric sense, the Temple is no different. The very purpose of the Bet HaMikdash was to light up and influence the whole world – even the "lowly" and spiritually inferior parts of it. It wasn't meant to be at the

pinnacle of the globe, neither literally nor figuratively, as its purpose was not to be completely distinct and separated from the rest of the world, where it is too lofty for anyone to relate with or appreciate. The point of the Temple was rather to be a part of this world – our world – and illuminate it. In other words, the Bet HaMikdash was never meant to be a "head," but a "neck." It was designed as a means to an end, not the end itself.

With this, we can understand why Yosef and Binyamin cried on one another's neck. Whereas the head of a Jew represents his soul, as expounded upon in works of *chassidut*, the neck symbolizes the soul's influence on the body. Therefore, it would have been inappropriate to cry on each other's heads, since the *neshamah* itself will always remain intact in its purity and holiness. Their mourning was for the Temples, which were to be spiritual wellsprings for the physical reality, and that is why they symbolically wept on the neck, which represents just that.

One can still wonder: why was it that they each cried upon the other's neck; wouldn't it have made more sense for each of them to lament their own tragedy that would occur within their own future portions?

For this, too, the Rebbe gave a beautiful explanation. After all, why do people cry when they're in pain? It's not like weeping alleviates the situation! The answer is that it serves to help cope with the suffering and to emotionally unburden oneself. But indeed, in a tough situation where it is still possible to fix the problem, there is no place for tears; instead, action must be taken to remedy the predicament. Thus, Yosef and Binyamin did not find themselves crying over "their own" loss of the Temples within their future plots of land, since one's own destiny is always dependent on his own *avoda*. Regarding their personal future devastations, there was no room for sorrow, since, perhaps with an upgrade in their own service of Hashem, they can work to prevent catastrophe. Despite the fact that they had a glimpse into the future and saw the destruction, there was still a possibility of changing that, since, as our Sages teach, there is never reason for despair. "Even if a sharp sword is placed on a person's neck, he mustn't withhold himself from still beseeching Heavenly mercy" (Berachot 10a). However, since Yosef's future loss was out of Binyamin's jurisdiction and vice versa, there was nothing to do for one another's grievances other than share in each other's pain and cry.

On a symbolic level, there is much practicality to this. When one feels in ruins and as if he is experiencing a personal destruction of his inner "Bet HaMikdash," it is imperative to never despair; rather, strengthen yourself and your personal *avoda*. And when one's fellow is experiencing darkness in his life, the most powerful thing is not to point fingers or lecture, but to share in his pain and grieve with him, perhaps sharing encouragement that while the "neck" may be in flames, the pristine soul represented by the "head" can never be shattered...

*"Humility is not denying the fact that you have talents and abilities. Rather, humility is recognizing where those talents come from." (R' Gao Friedman)*

#### Refuah Sheleimah, b'toch she'ar cholei Yisrael:

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