



5785 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Reuven Schreier Parashat Vayigash / פְּרַשְׁת וַיִּגַּשׁ

Rejoicing in Reunion While Weeping Over Destruction

After *Yosef* reveals his identity to the brothers, the Torah describes the emotional reunion between *Yosef* and *Binyamin*. They share the same mother, *Rachel*, and *Binyamin* was very young when his older brother disappeared. One can only imagine the intensity of emotion when they embraced after 22 years of separation. “And he fell on his brother *Binyamin*’s neck and wept, and *Binyamin* wept on his neck.” (*Bereishit* 45:14)

Chazal famously comment that the verse strangely pluralizes the word “neck,” ויפול על צוארי בנימין אחיו. (See the *Gur Aryeh* and other commentaries for a more complete grammar discussion.) They explain that *Yosef* and *Binyamin* were weeping over the eventual destruction of sanctified structures that were destined to be erected in the ancestral portions of their descendants. *Yosef* cried over the “necks” of *Binyamin*, the two future temples in Jerusalem that would be destroyed. And *Binyamin* cried over the “neck” of *Yosef*, the Tabernacle in *Shilo* that the Philistines would eventually overrun.

This *midrash* is bizarre on several levels. In this joyous moment of reunion, why would the brothers cry over future destruction? Additionally, what does the word צואר, neck, have anything to do with the *Beit HaMikdash* and *Mishkan*?

To answer these questions, let us turn back to another greeting-crying episode that occurred earlier in *Bereishit*. When *Yaakov Avinu* first met *Rachel*, the future mother of *Yosef* and *Binyamin*, he joyously kissed *Rachel*. But then he raised his voice and cried, וישא קולו ויבך (*Bereishit* 29:11). As *Rashi* quotes from *Chazal*, he was weeping over the knowledge that *Rachel* would not be buried next to him in the *Maharat HaMachpeila*. This *midrash* is also strange. Are *Chazal* suggesting that *Yaakov* already prophetically understood that *Rachel* would not be his only wife, and would die earlier than him?

When *Yaakov* first met *Rachel*, he recognized her as his true spiritual mate, the ultimate complement to his religious persona. Their initial encounter brought about intense joy in *Yaakov*, as he perceived a sense of spiritual completion in *Rachel*’s presence. But there was also pain, a nagging metaphysical feeling that not everything was right. In the moment of union with his most beloved, *Yaakov* also sensed an agonizing distance that would eventually separate them. *Rachel* would not be his eternal resting mate.

A similar metaphysical phenomenon occurred as the twelve brothers reunited. In this moment of clarity and *achdut*, the joy and power of *Klal Yisrael*’s unity was palpable. *Yehudah* had drawn close to *Yosef*, ויגש אליו, יהודה, and *Yosef* beckoned his brothers to draw closer, גשו נא אלי ויגשו. As the *Haftarah* from *Yechezkel* makes clear, our *Parsha* can be viewed as a metaphor for closing the distance between the various tribes of Israel, healing the rift between the children of *Rachel* and *Leah*.

But as *Yosef* and *Binyamin* joyously embraced, they also perceived the pain of destruction and separation. *Binyamin*’s sanctified temple in Jerusalem, which was the ultimate source of unity and spiritual clarity, was



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destined to burn. The Jewish people would scatter to the four corners of the globe in a cataclysmic shattering of *Klal Yisrael*. *Yosef* could feel a looming mystical dread of Jerusalem's destruction, and he wept.

The imagery of צואר is perfect to capture the essential nature of the *Beit HaMikdash*. In *Shir HaShirim* (7:5), the *Mikdash* is referenced as the neck of *Klal Yisrael*. The *Maharal* explains (*Gur Aryeh* ibid) that the neck unites the head with the rest of the body. Much of the lower human body is physically separated into pairs of limbs: arms, legs, ribs, kidneys, lungs, etc. These pairs symmetrically mirror each other. But the head and neck are one solid piece. The neck "unites" the various pairs of limbs below it. The neck is also the conduit through which all essential nutrients and signals from the brain travel. Without the oxygen, food, and water that the neck provides, the rest of the body would have nothing.

Yerushalayim, and the *Beit HaMikdash* in particular, serve as the conduit for all spiritual "nutrients" to enter this world. It unites the disparate limbs of the Jewish people into a united whole. Without Jerusalem, our connection to the higher spiritual worlds is severed and our bond to each other disintegrates.

May *Yosef's* painful tears of separation quickly turn into joyous tears of reunion in the rebuilt Jerusalem, speedily in our days.

