

"And they shall make for Me a Sanctuary and I will dwell among them."(25:8)

The *Mishkan* serves as the place where a Jew can have the opportunity to encounter Hashem's Presence in a controlled and structured manner. The *Ramban* notes that the *parsha* concerning the building of the *Mishkan* (with its holy vessels) follows the *parshios* dealing with the giving of the *Torah* and instituting the system of laws and social justice. Only after *Am Yisrael* has established itself as a holy nation to be fulfilled through *Torah* and *mitzvos* do the Jewish people merit the *Mishkan* as a place to centralize the pre-existent holiness within the community. The *Mishkan* is not the source of the *kedusha* of *Am Yisrael*, but rather it is the reward for the study of *Torah* and performance of *mitzvos*. The relevance of the *Mishkan* and its contemporary counterpart - today's synagogues - is consistent with the *Torah* observance of the Jewish people. The synagogue serves as a vehicle through which we can reach out and communicate to Hashem in a holy atmosphere.

In its account of Yosef's revelation of his identity to his brothers, the *Torah* states that he fell, "ihnhbc hrtum kg". This is translated literally as the "necks" of Binyamin. *Rashi* explains that the plural form of the word "neck" is an allusion to the two *Batei Mikdash*, situated in Binyomin's territory which would be destroyed. Yosef was mourning this future reality. We may wonder at the *Torah's* comparison of the *Bais Hamikdash* to a neck. *Rabbi Shimon Schwab Shlita* offers an insightful explanation for this comparison. The function of the neck is to join a person's head to the rest of his body. In this way, animalistic behaviors of the body are united with the center - the brain. The brain dominates and restrains man's animalistic instincts, enabling humans to elevate themselves in order to communicate with Hashem. In a similar sense, the *Bais Hamikdash* connects the physical world with the spiritual one, the world of Hashem.

The *Bais Hamikdash* was the one forum in the world in which spirituality reigned. Man could step beyond his physical restraints, reach out and communicate directly with the *Shechinah*. Once again we may note the attitude towards the *Bais Hamikdash*, and the place of prayer, the synagogues. The Jewish people have survived because of their devotion to the *Torah*. The synagogue has served as a centralized place in which to express our devotion to Hashem. When contemporary critics of Judaism criticize the synagogue, the focal point of Jewish life, it is because they have experienced the most sterile forms of Jewish existence. Only through *Torah* study that will we merit the ultimate rebuilding of the home of spirituality, the *Bais Hamikdash*, at the time of the advent of *Moshiach*.