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## פרשת ויחי

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פרק מח פסוק לא

נִיאָמַר הַשְּׁכֵנָה לִי וַיִּשְׁבַּע לוֹ וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל־רֹאשׁ הַמִּטָּה:

רש"י

על ראש המטה. הפך עצמו לצד השכינה, מכאן אמרו שהשכינה למעלה מראשותיו של חולה

מושג

שהשכינה למעלה מראשותיו של חולה (שבת יב:)

### Translation:

The Shechinah resides above the head of an ill person<sup>1</sup>.

### Explanation:

When you visit a sick person you must sit lower than the person as Hashem's presence resides by the head of the ill person<sup>2</sup>. Hashem intensifies His presence by the sick person so that even during the most painful periods of illness he or she will still feel Hashem close by and realize that He has not abandoned them. Even at times when He may be punishing them He comes closer than ever to help them and accept their תשובה.<sup>3</sup> Yaakov feels Hashem's presence so clearly that he bows to the head of the bed as if he could see the שכינה there by his bed.

### Looking in the Pasuk:

Rashi comes to explain why Yaakov bows towards the head of his bed. His answer is that Yaakov was bowing towards the Shechinah which resides by the head of a sick person.

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<sup>1</sup> See Note 1

<sup>2</sup> See Note 2

<sup>3</sup> See Note 3

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## NOTES

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1. Rashi uses our Pasuk as the source for the concept that the שכינה is found above the head of a sick person. Rashi understands that Yaakov is bowing to the שכינה<sup>4</sup> as a way of thanking G-d for receiving this assurance from Yosef<sup>5</sup>. From the fact that Yaakov, who was ill at the time<sup>6</sup>, faced the head of the bed we learn, explains Rashi, that the שכינה is found at the head of the bed of a חולה.

There are two possible sources to Rashi's commentary. The first is a גמרא (נדריים מ.) which teaches: אמר רבין אמר רב מניין שהקב"ה זן את החולה שנאמר ה' יסעדנו על ערש דוי<sup>7</sup>. ואמר רבין אמר רב: מניין שהשכינה שרויה למעלה ממטתו של חולה? שנאמר: ה' יסעדנו על ערש דוי. תניא נמי הכי: הנכנס לבקר את החולה, לא ישב לא על גבי מטה ולא ע"ג ספסל ולא על גבי כסא, אלא מתעטף ויושב ע"ג קרקע, מפני שהשכינה שרויה למעלה ממטתו של חולה, שנאמר: ה' יסעדנו על ערש דוי.

However, while the above גמרא does mention the idea of the שכינה being above the חולה, it does not mention anything about it being above the head of the חולה, nor does it mention our Pasuk!

There is, however, another גמרא (שבת יב:) which does mention the idea of the שכינה being above the head of the חולה:

דאמר רב ענן אמר רב מנין ששכינה סועד את החולה? שנאמר ה' יסעדנו על ערש דוי תניא נמי הכי הנכנס לבקר את החולה לא ישב לא על גבי מטה ולא על גבי כסא אלא מתעטף ויושב לפניו מפני ששכינה למעלה מראשותיו של חולה שנאמר ה' יסעדנו על ערש דוי.

Here the גמרא does mention מראשותיו של חולה, however it too does not mention our Pasuk! For this reason some remove the words מכאן אמרו from Rashi as we do not find any source that uses our Pasuk to prove that the שכינה is above the head of a חולה. However, there is an obvious problem with the text of the גמרא. The גמרא mentions that the שכינה is above the head of the חולה but brings a Pasuk which does not prove that point at all. How was this point not addressed by the גמרא? To answer this issue, the ר"י quotes a different version of our text:

הנכנס לבקר את החולה לא ישב על גבי מטה ולא על גבי ספסל ולא על גבי כסא ולא על גבי שרפרף ולא על גבי מקום גבוה ולא למעלה מראשותיו של חולה אלא מתעטף ויושב לפניו מפני שהשכינה למעלה מראשותיו של חולה שנאמר וישתחו ישראל על ראש המטה וכתבי ה' יסעדנו על ערש דוי.

According to this version of the text the גמרא proves our Musag from two Pesukim. We prove that Hashem is with the חולה, providing for his or her needs, from the Pasuk in Tehillim. From our

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<sup>4</sup> See מדרש תנחומא which states: וישתחו ישראל לשכינה שעומדת עליו

<sup>5</sup> See Sforno who understands Yaakov's bowing in the same fashion:

להודות לקונו על שחננו להשיג זה מאת בנו, כענין ויהי כאשר שמע עבד אברהם את דבריהם וישתחו ארצה לה' (כד:נב)

<sup>6</sup> The commentators wonder why we would assume that Yaakov was a חולה. After all, Yosef is first told his father is ill only at the beginning of the next פרק. I would guess that from the fact that the Pasuk has told us ישראל למות and from the fact that Yaakov is in a bed we can glean that he is ill. When Yosef is told in the next Perek חולה אביך, it simply means that he was very ill about to die at any moment. A proof to this is found in the Targum of אונקלוס who translates הנה חולה אביך as הוא אבך שכיב מרע. With this we can also explain an apparent contradiction in two sections of גמרא. The גמרא (בבא מציעא פז.) tells us שנאמר ויאמר ליוסף הנה אביך עד יעקב לא הוה חולשא... שנאמר ויאמר ליוסף הנה אביך. אבן טובה היתה תלויה בצוארו של אברהם (בבא בתרא טז:) teaches that אברהם was sick, and yet another גמרא (בבא בתרא טז:) teaches that אברהם was not sick until Yaakov, who were the sick people at the time of אברהם? We can explain the contradiction by differentiating between a sick person and a deathly ill person. There were sick people all along (what the גמרא calls a חולה), however for people to be sick right before they died (what the גמרא calls חולשא) was something that did not exist until Yaakov. Yaakov asked Hashem to bring this pre-death sickness so that people might put their affairs in order before leaving this world. (I later saw that the תוספות in בבא בתרא explicitly answers as we did. ברוך שכוונתי)

<sup>7</sup> הנה יסעדנו על ערש דוי כלי-משכבו הפכת בקליו: (תהלים מא:ד) The גמרא is understanding the word יסעדנו in reference to a סעודה.

Pasuk we learn where exactly the שכינה is positioned: למעלה מראשותיו. This is most likely the version that Rashi had as well, providing him with a clear source for our Musag from our Pasuk.

2. The גמרא does not treat our Musag as being merely theoretical or metaphoric. There are two practical הלכות which the גמרא's quoted above learn from our Musag. The first concerns where one who visits a sick person may sit. Since the presence of the שכינה is taken literally the visitor must be careful to sit below the head of the חולה so as not to sit above the שכינה. This law is codified both by the רמב"ם and by the שולחן ערוך.

A second law concerns what language a חולה may daven with. Usually one who davens individually does not say Aramaic prayers. The reason for this is that all prayers davened outside of a מנין must be carried to Hashem by angels, and angels only relate to prayers said in לשון הקודש. However, the גמרא teaches that a sick person may daven in Aramaic. The logic to this allowance is that the שכינה is with the חולה and thus even as an individual his prayers reach directly to Hashem. This הלכה as well is codified in the שולחן ערוך.

3. What requires explanation is: Why is the שכינה positioned by the head of the חולה? Why is the שכינה present more by a sick person than by others?

To answer I would turn our readers' attention to what we have written by the Musag of אנכי ארד (מ:ד). The Midrash quoted there teaches explicitly that Hashem is present even when individuals suffer. The explanation of why Hashem goes down into גלות with the Jewish people applies to a sick person as well. Hashem is there with them to reassure them that He has not forsaken them. Even though He may have brought the גלות or the מחלה upon them as a punishment for their sins, He never leaves their side. He remains close to support<sup>8</sup>, protect and comfort them in their suffering and to ensure that they sense His presence so that they might seek His forgiveness and salvation. (We might even suggest that for this reason the שכינה positions Himself above the חולה's head, which is the center of a person's senses.)

The חולה thus feels Hashem's presence and realizes that not only has Hashem not abandoned him, but, quite the opposite, He has come closer to him than ever. He realizes how much Hashem loves him, and this 'punishment' turns and becomes the catalyst for his תשובה. Perhaps this is the meaning of the end of the Pasuk in תהילים which states כל משכבו הפכת בחליו much in the same way הפכת מספדי למחול לי writes דוד המלך.

### Questions for Further Thought:

- a. Does this Musag give you guidance towards understanding how you should behave when visiting a sick person?
- b. Yaakov blesses Yosef and his children on his sickbed. Does our Musag help you to understand why Yaakov would wait until now to bless them?

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<sup>8</sup> As both גמרא's quoted above taught: ה' יסעדנו על ערש דוי את החולה שנאמר (זן) את החולה שנאמר