

Neck Massage Anyone?

***Parashah Ki Tissa Message
by Kevin Phipps***

There are some words in Scripture which seem only to be found in Scripture. As we come across these words, we have a vague idea what the word means in the context, and usually gloss right over it barely even noticing it, and rarely ever actually questioning what it means. One of those words is found in this parashah.

“YHVH said to Moshe, "Tell the people of Isra'el, 'You are a stiffnecked people! If I were to go up with you for even one moment, I would exterminate you!'”

-Sh'mot/Exodus 33:5

The word "stiffnecked" is used four times in this Parashah. It is found in a handful of other places including the New Covenant. The Hebrew word is "oreph". Has to do with being obstinate and stubborn. It usually leads to apostasy and ungodliness. Stiffness in itself means that something is not easily bent or moved. Bend-ability is to cause to yield, such as yielding one's will.

"Stiffnecked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You continually oppose the Ruach HaKodesh! You do the same things your fathers did! Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who told in advance about the coming of the Tzaddik, and now you have become his betrayers and murderers! - you! - who receive the Torah as having been delivered by angels - but do not keep it!" **-Acts 7:51-53**

The neck is the connection from the head to the rest of the body. It is the connection between the brain and the body, knowing and doing. Bending implies the yielding of one's will. Stiffness implies a refusal to do so. Stiffness in the neck implies that the information necessary to perform a particular task is there in the brain, the capacity for performing the task is present in the body, but the two are not connected. It is like a well-trained pilot and a state of the art fighter plane, with no gas to enable the pilot to fly the plane. Both are useless without the gas to bring them together. The smartest head and the most athletic body are nothing without a neck to not only connect the two, but allow adequate communication, support, and movement so that the body does what the brain tells it to do.

Israel had been given the laws of God. They knew who God was and exactly what He expected of them. They had been chosen by God to be His people, a holy nation of priests, and the primary example of godliness and light in the world. They were fully capable, with God's presence and power amongst them, to fulfill all that was required of them. What they lacked was the will to connect the two.

Let's look at the golden calf incident. They had the law, which prohibited the making of graven images. They fully had the capacity to carry out this command. However, they still made the golden calf. This is like a paraplegic who knows how to walk, but is unable to make his legs do what he wants them to do to walk. The communication lines, usually in the neck, are severed or otherwise not functioning. Israel knew how to live, but did something different. They did what was right in their own eyes, not God's. They operated on their own will, not God's.

This is the essence of being “stiffnecked”. A stiffnecked people is a stubborn people. It is a people who know what is right, but insist on doing their own thing. A donkey is usually the animal we associate with stubbornness. You can tell a donkey to go right and it will go left. Sometimes a donkey will refuse to follow instruction of any kind. This kind of animal cannot be ridden or used for anything. Few people would ride a donkey over a horse. A horse can be trained. It will listen to commands. Why is this? It will allow its neck to be bent.

Israel made the golden calf because Moshe was gone for a long time on Mount Sinai. It was God who kept him there that long. The wilderness was Israel's basic training. They had lived in Egypt, a pagan nation, from their infancy. God brought them out of Egypt, and now He was trying to remove Egypt from them. He taught them a different way of living and thinking than they were used to. Living as the people of God was something they had to learn to do at all times, which would include when things were going well for them, and when things were not. It would include when living by God's ways was in their favor, or when it was not. If Moshe had come down from the mountain in a more timely manner, they would not have fallen into sin. Perhaps this is why God kept Moshe on the mountain as long as He did. They had promised to follow Him and His commands. God wanted to see what they would do when faced with temptation to go against His ways. They failed. If they could not follow God's ways in the wilderness, how would they follow Him in the midst of the paganism that dwelled in the Promised Land? Israel had to learn that following God's commands was their only option, regardless of their situation. They had to fully yield themselves to God.

“My son, don't forget my teaching, keep my commands in your heart; for they will add to you many days, years of life and peace. Do not let grace and truth leave you - bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and esteem in the sight of God and of people. Trust in ADONAI with all your heart; do not rely on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him; then he will level your paths.”

-Mishlei/Proverbs 3:1-6

Notice it says that He will make level your paths, not you. Do not forget the ways of God. Do not let grace and truth leave you. Write God's commands on the tablets of your heart. This is your part. All else is up to God. There is no part of that which tells us to worry about how long Moshe is on the mountain, or where we are going to find food and drink, or how we are going to defeat the giants of the Promised Land and build Jerusalem. There is no part of that which tells us to wonder why the pagan nations are living in wealth and goodness and the people of God are living in the wilderness with nothing but dirt under their feet and tents to live in. Those things are the details of life that are God's domain.

The natural way of the world is not the way of God. On our own, we will do what is right in our own eyes, which will not be the way God wants us to go.

“ There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.”

-Mishlei/Proverbs 14:12

Following the ways of God requires flexibility. We must be bent in order to conform to God's will rather than our own or the ways of the world. The Bible compares us to a lump of clay in the hands of the master potter. Clay which is dry and brittle cannot be formed. It just breaks apart. It is water which makes it pliable enough to be made into a useful vessel.

Yeshua answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I will give him will never be thirsty again! On the contrary, the water I give him will become a spring of water inside him, welling up into eternal life!"

-Yochanan/John 4:13-14

Yeshua is the living water which enables us to be moldable to the laws of God. Yeshua does not free us from the Law, rather He enables us to follow it in order to walk in the ways of righteousness. Only then can we be a light in the world and the vessel God intends us to be to do His will.

"Submit to God and be at peace with him; in this way prosperity will come to you."

- Job 22:21

Living life in this world, without the living water of Yeshua flowing in us leads to a life which is a pain in the neck. Such pain leads to stiffness, which does not allow us to conform to the perfect will of God. We can know what is right, but still find ourselves living in sin. Our mind can be good and our body willing to serve, but without a bendable neck to connect the two, we will continue to go the way of the world, which leads to death. God cannot live in the midst of a people who refuses to submit wholeheartedly to Him. He is our King, and with Him He will lead us to a Promised Land beyond anything we can ever imagine.

So, is your neck stiff? Take two tablets and pray to the Great Physician in the morning and evening.