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by Rabbi Yaakov Finestone

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PARSHAS NITZAVIM - VAYELECH

Rav Chaim Volozhin zt"l said a beautiful parable. A nobleman's carriage was traveling in a rainstorm. The carriage veered off the road and the wheels sank in the mud. No matter how much the nobleman lashed his four horses, the horses were unable to extract the wagon from the mud. A peasant with three small ponies passed by. He told the nobleman to unharness his four horses and attach the peasant's three ponies to the carriage. The nobleman laughed at this suggestion. How could three small ponies accomplish what his four strong horses could not? The peasant insisted and the nobleman had nothing to lose, so he agreed. When the ponies were harnessed to the wagon, the peasant lashed his whip once. As soon as he did that, the ponies struggled and pulled the nobleman's carriage out of the mud. The nobleman was shocked! Three small ponies accomplished what four strong horses could not! The peasant asked him where he got his horses. The nobleman said that he bought them from four of the world's finest stables. The peasant said that this was why the nobleman's horses failed in their task. "Your horses are rivals and feel animosity towards each other. When one is lashed, the other three are happy and do not try to help. My ponies might be small, but they are brothers. When one is lashed, the other two try to save him with all their strength. Therefore, my three ponies accomplished more than your four grown horses". (Love Your Neighbor by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin)

The **Torah** (Devarim 29:9) says, "You stand, this day all of you before Hashem your G-d; the heads of your tribes, your elders and your law officers, every man of Yisroel."

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(Devarim 29:9)*

The **Torah** (Devarim 30:4) says, "If your exiled one will be at the edge of the heavens, from there Hashem your G-d will gather you and from there He will take you."

Rashi explains that the more prominent people were mentioned first.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Dushinsky says the Torah first speaks to all Klal Yisroel and then lists a hierarchy, with the heads of the people followed by lesser officials. Then the Torah refers to every man in Israel. That suggests that no one should be considered more important than another. He explains that the Torah is teaching us that although man assigns importance to others based on their positions in life, Hashem does not differentiate. When all Klal Yisroel, all the Jewish People, are standing before Hashem, they are all equal in His eyes.

Many commentaries are bothered by the words, "from there will He take you" which seem to be extra. How is that different than "from there will Hashem your G-d, gather you"?

HaKsav VeHaKabalah explains that Hashem will gather you from your exile and will take you back as a nation, as you had been previously.

Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l, in his Zera Shimshon, (sourced in Zera Shimshon 2 by Rabbi Nachman Seltzer) says that according to the **Talmud** (Yoma 9B) the reason that Klal Yisroel went into exile was because of baseless hatred that they had for one another. Our final redemption will only come when there is peace and love between all members

of Klal Yisroel. This is the explanation of the pasuk. Hashem will “gather you”. Hashem will make peace among the Klal Yisroel, and they will be “gathered together”. Then Hashem will “take you” out of exile.

The Birchas Kohanim (Bamidbar 6:24-26), the blessings of the Kohanim are recited in the singular, not plural. **Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov** says that this teaches us that our greatest blessing is togetherness. We have many differences amongst Klal Yisroel. However, there are also many commonalities. Focusing on the similarities and the fact that we were all created in the image of Hashem will help us identify more with others and will lead to greater unity. (Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin)

Rav Yisroel Salanter says that we should focus on the good qualities of others. That will help us feel love for them even at times when they upset us.

The **Torah** says (Vayikra 25:38), “I am Hashem your G-d who brought you out from the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan, to be a G-d for you”. Why does the pasuk repeat “to be a G-d for you”?

Sforno explains that the purpose of Creation was for Klal Yisroel to interact with one another, as we are all part of one neshama, one soul. Each act of kindness that we do helps bring unity among Klal Yisroel.

There is a fable about an old man, nearing his death. He called his sons to give them some parting advice. He ordered his servants to bring in a bundle of sticks wrapped together. To his eldest son, he commanded, "Break it." The son strained and strained, but with all his efforts was unable to break the bundle. Each son in turn tried, but none of them was successful. "Untie the bundle," said the father, "and each of you take a stick." When they had done so, he called out to them: "Now, break it," and each stick was easily broken. "You see my meaning," said their father. "Individually, you can easily be conquered, but together, you are invincible. Unity gives strength.

Much of the world is united against Klal Yisroel. It is important that we push aside the differences that we have with one another. We must focus on our similarities. We need to focus on the positive traits of those who do not share all of our beliefs. We should do acts of kindness with one another, especially to those who do not share our beliefs. We should remember that we are all part of the same neshama! Our efforts can bring unity, which in turn will bring our final Redemption!

May it come speedily in our days!

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Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.

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