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by Rabbi Yaakov Finestone

I REACHED 'ROCK BOTTOM' NOW WHAT?

PARSHAS NITZAVIM-VAYELECH

Soon after conceiving the idea for Harry Potter, J.K. Rowling began writing but was pulled away from her work by the devastating death of her mother, which caused her to sink into a deep, grieving depression. Soon after, she ended up with a failed marriage and a baby daughter she now had to raise alone. She had no job, no finished product and two mouths to feed. She had hit rock bottom. As she struggled with depression, raising a child on her own and living off meager unemployment benefits, she resumed work on her book in cafes while her daughter was asleep. She finally finished her book and sent it to numerous publishers who all rejected it. Finally, one accepted it and published it. Now, J.K. Rowlings is a famous author and a billionaire! J.K. Rowlings had hit rock bottom. She persevered through a very difficult time in her life and succeeded beyond her wildest dreams. (from Failure. Rejection. Success: The J. K. Rowling Story)

Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l, in his sefer Zera Shimshon (as quoted by Rabbi Nachman Seltzer) asks an insightful question on our pasuk. It appears as if the pasuk includes unnecessary words. The Torah would have the same message had it left out the words "from there" as well as the words "and from there He will take you". The message of the pasuk would then be, "If your dispersed will be at the end of the heavens, Hashem, your G-D, will take you".

The **Talmud** (Megillah 16A) quotes Rabbi Yehuda son of Ilai who says that the Jewish People are compared to the dust on the ground and the stars in the heavens. When the Jewish People fall, they fall all the way down to the dust on the ground. In his commentary the **Maharsha, Rav Shmuel Eidels zt"l** explains that everyone steps on dust. Similarly, when the Jews fall, they may fall so low that everyone, even slaves, will have dominion over them. However, when the Jewish People rise, they rise as high as the stars.

Rabbi Isaac Alfasi zt"l, in his commentary the **Rif**, says that when the Jews fall down so low, to the dust of the ground, that is a **sign** that they will rise as high as the heavens! **Chanoch Zundel ben Yosef zt"l**, in his commentary **Eitz Yosef** (on the **Talmud** in Brachos 4B),

"If your dispersed will be at the ends of heaven, from there Hashem, your G-D, will gather you in and from there he will take you." (Devarim 30:4)

adds that if the Jewish People fall as low as the dust of the earth, Hashem will not help them to rise up. However, that is only if the Jews can raise themselves up on their own. If the Jews fall so low that they can not raise themselves up then Hashem will perform a miracle, going against nature, and raise them up.

Clearly, when the Jews sink so low, that is an indication that the ascent is about to begin. The Jewish People will once again rise to greatness, like the stars of the sky.

Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l explains that this is what the seemingly extra words of the pasuk are alluding to. If the Jews have fallen so low that it does not seem that they can fall any more, then "from there Hashem will gather you in" and turn you around. "From there Hashem will take you" and you will begin to ascend to the greatest heights.

When Hashem approached Moshe to redeem the Jewish People from Egypt, Moshe told Hashem, "Behold, they will not believe me and not listen to me" (Shmos 4:1). Moshe knew that the Jewish People had sunk so low. Moshe felt certain that they were hopelessly entrenched in the quagmire of Egypt and would ignore him. Hashem showed Moshe that he was

wrong. Yes, the Jews had fallen to the 49th level (out of 50) of impurity in Egypt. Yet they could rise, and they did rise to the highest levels when they perceived

Hashem's Presence at the splitting of the Red Sea and again when they received the Torah.

We should never give up on ourselves or on others.

No matter how difficult things are or no matter how low a Jew has sunk, things change, and people can rise to the greatest heights!

As Rosh Hashana approaches, we should realize our inherent greatness and holiness.

We can become great again!

If it is too hard for us to do so on our own, then Hashem, Himself, will help us become great again!