

Parshas Netzavim-Vayelech

This week's Parsha, Netzavim-Vayelech, is one of Moshe's final speeches to the Jews on his last day on Earth. The first pesukim express to us who was gathered. Notice that specific elite positions are not mentioned; instead, the professions of a hewer of wood and carrier of water. Alshich, quoting a story from Pesachim 50a where Rabbi Yosef, the son of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, got sick and briefly left this world. His father prayed on Rabbi Yosef's behalf, and when his soul returned, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi asked his son what he saw in the heavens. Rabbi Yosef responded that everything is the opposite of what is down here. That is, down here, the elites of society lead the hewers of wood and water carriers, but in the heavens, it is the opposite. Alshich explains that, in Hashem's eyes, all are equal.

A further explanation from the Gemara in Pesachim is that the Torah understands people. We all know that it is a human, sociological interpretation of who is elite or how a hierarchy is created. It is up to us to give everyone dignity because, in truth, we are all equal in the eyes of Hashem. The merits of any single person could be greater or less than another, and we don't know that. This is further explained by the Alter Rebbe in Tanya that just as every limb in the body is purposeful and essential and must work together, so too is a cohesive Jewish society. All parts must cooperate as a coherent group because every Jew has something to give.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains from the Gemara in Shavuos 39a that all Jews are guarantors for one another. Typically, a

guarantor must have a greater stature than who is being guaranteed. But if the Gemara says that all Jews are guarantors for one another, then it, says the Rebbe, it stands to reason that all have a superior quality. We can find that within ourselves and harness it for the greater good.

But this thematically fits in with the message of the Parsha, as the Baal Shem Tov points out that Atem Netzavim happened before Rosh Hashana when we gather before Hashem. It was also a Hakhel-like this past year for us. Aside from Moshe's message to stay on the righteous path and to "choose life," it is more than just a preparatory statement for the High Holidays; it is a message for Mashiach. Moshe references those here (now) and those who have yet to come. That is us all these years after Moshe's message; we are the people yet to come who are still steadfast in learning and keeping the Torah. Hashem and Moshe's message is an antidote for navigating life, that is, choosing it. How does one do that? By following the Torah's mandates and clinging to its words, and that learning and adhering to the Torah is not some distant, unattainable task; it is right in front of us, "Ki Karov Eilecha Hadavar Meod- Beficha Uvilvavcha Lasoso" (The words are close to you in your mouth and heart to perform it).

The blessing of choosing the right path is a choice in life. Our goal isn't to leave this world sooner by abstaining from its pleasures. Instead, the time here on earth must be purposeful, complete, and long. We are meant to be here on Earth, ebbing and flowing as humans, which waxes and wanes, but we desire to cleave to Hashem and the Torah and use the Torah as the ultimate guide through this life. And the Torah is the

testimony and has stood the test of time.
This is highly appropriate as the last
Shabbos of 5783, as we usher in a year of
renewal and revitalization to remain ever
steadfast in the ways of Hashem.

Good Shabbos and a Sweet new Year!