

Sparks of Holiness

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All that transpires is for us to learn from. When things happen in the world, or in the country, and people wonder why such occurrences are taking place and why people are behaving this way, know that the answer is that Hashem wants us to study the incidents and learn *mussar* lessons from them.

Take what occupied the news pages for the majority of last week. The Congress is led by a Speaker, who is elected by a majority of congressmen. Naturally, the party that elected the most members in the past election puts forward one of its own to lead the Congress. The vote is almost a formality.

Not so this year for the new session of Congress. The man who led the majority party through the years in which it has been the minority was widely assumed to be elected Speaker to lead the Congress and work to ensure that the party's agenda passes. As party leader, that person played a large role in helping select candidates and get them elected, traveling the country to make appearances and raise money on their behalf.

This time around, that man's name is Kevin McCarthy. He worked hard while in the opposition and was very active during the past election cycle, which generated a win for his party, albeit a close one. His party has a five-vote plurality in Congress, meaning that every vote is important, and if just a few of his party members step out of line, his party won't be able to achieve its goals.

That is what happened before the party could even get to work. Though McCarthy was supported by the vast majority of Republican members, a

stubborn few would not vote for him as Speaker, no matter what, so nothing happened the entire week besides for voting to elect a Speaker. Each time, he was missing a few votes. The majority had clearly spoken, and 90% of party members voted for him, but the holdouts would not. They would not change their votes, no matter how many times they were spoken to.

But worse than that, they had no end game. They had no candidate for the position, and certainly nobody who could win the election. They were clearly vastly outnumbered, but they didn't care. They didn't like certain things about their party's lone candidate, so they created chaos and mayhem, showing the country that the party is inept at getting things done.

Finally, deals were struck, powerful people intervened, and somehow, enough of the separatists were forced into going along. A Speaker was elected, and now the party and the Congress can get to work and do what they were elected to do...hopefully.

So, why am I writing this? What lesson is there for us here? It was a display of what happens when there is no *achdus*, when people can't get together for a common cause.

Achdus is one of our most important mandates. It is vital for us to be able to function as a group, and also the way that we need to conduct ourselves as individuals, always with concern about the common good and about caring for the individuals among us. *Achdus* is also a prerequisite for the coming of *Moshiach*, whose arrival we all desperately await.

In this week's *parsha*, we also learn about *achdus* and our mandate to care for each other.

Moshe Rabbeinu was brought up in the king's palace, leading what would be termed today a sheltered life. One day, he left the royal residence to go see for himself what was transpiring with his Jewish brethren. Growing up in the royal bubble, he had no relationship with any Jews. As he grew older, he wanted to get out and meet them and assess their situation.

Upon witnessing a Mitzri beating a Jew, he was overcome with grief. His first reaction was to kill the evil man who was hurting his brother. Until that day, he had been restricted from meeting any Jews, yet as soon as he saw their affliction, he felt the pain and sought to remedy it.

He thought that no one had seen what he did, yet two wicked Jews had watched as he committed the selfless act. They mocked him and he responded to no one in particular, "*Ochein, noda hadovor.*"

Rashi (*Shemos* 2:14) explains that Moshe was saying that he had wondered why *Klal Yisroel* was singled out from all the nations of the world for suffering, but when he heard the comments of those two men, he understood that *Am Yisroel* was deserving of the subjugation.

Hearing their negativity and apathy regarding a fellow Jew, he perceived the discord and realized why they were in servitude. When he saw the lack of *achdus*, he understood why they were stuck in a bad predicament.

For *Klal Yisroel* to be able to withstand those who set upon it to destroy it, the nation needs its people to be united and connected, feeling responsible for each other. In order to merit redemption, then and now, they needed to be united, caring for each other. The actions of Dason and Avirom showed clearly that the people were lacking in their feelings and behavior.

As we study this week's *parsha*, we learn lessons relevant to our day. We wonder why our people are still in exile. Why haven't we gained our freedom after all these years? Haven't we suffered enough? We look around and see many people in pain from economic problems. Others are experiencing problems with their children. We see families destroyed, families broke, lonely people, and people in pain experiencing different forms of hurt, grief and anguish.

We wonder why and then we hear Moshe Rabbeinu saying, "*Ochein, noda hadovor.*" The poor Jew who was beaten by the Mitzri didn't know Dason and Avirom, but when Jews act that way, everyone suffers.

It takes but a cursory view of our situation to see that we don't have complete *achdus*. There is so much *chesed* and increasing amounts of good being done in our community. There are organizations for everything, and there are generous people who support them, as well as a rapidly increasing number of *yeshivos* and schools for the growing population, *kein yirbu*.

But despite all of that, there are many who are falling between the cracks and not being reached and served. Despite increasing classroom space, there are still children who feel rejected and unwanted because they weren't accepted to

any school. Despite all the talk about *shiduchim*, there are many fine, young people who aren't *redt shiduchim*.

Feelings of *achdus*, should motivate us to care enough to do what we can to help others.

Moshe Rabbeinu was the first leader of our people. His first venture outside of the palace cocoon brought him face to face with the faults of his people. As a result, he was forced to flee to Midyan. And just like that, he went from living as a prince to becoming a shepherd.

His introduction to leadership came in a dramatic encounter. As he was leading the sheep to pasture on Har Chorev, he noticed a bush on fire. But there was something strange going on. The branches were not being consumed and the fire was not going out.

He approached the bush to get a closer look. He realized that if this happened when he was there with his sheep, there was a reason this was happening and he wanted to understand what it was. Perhaps there was a lesson for him there.

There was a relevance and power to the bush. He perceived a latent sanctity to the sparks.

Moshe saw the bush aflame and recognized holiness. Although he was in a desert, with nothing around, he was searching for *kedusha* wherever he went. When he came upon this seemingly supernatural event, he approached. Perhaps he had come across the *kedusha* he was searching for, or at least there was a lesson for him. Though he found himself in the darkness of a strange land, in

midst of the vacuity of a desert, he believed that Hashem had led him to where he was for a reason, and wherever he went, he searched for that reason.

This is what identified him as the person who can lead the children of Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov from Mitzrayim.

Hashem called out to him from the bush and told him that he was standing on holy ground. Hashem directed him to return to Mitzrayim and lead His people to freedom in The Promised Land.

In *golus*, we need to be on the lookout for *kedusha*. We need to learn from daily encounters and from what is going on in the world around us in order to place ourselves – and remain – on the path to redemption.

Throughout our history, our leaders have been able to perceive holiness where others saw emptiness. They saw holy sparks where others saw darkness, potential for dramatic growth in a desert, and they found glory in a lowly bush with little chance for life.

In *golus*, there are times when people want to give up. They think it's over. They believe that we will never be able to bounce back from the destruction. They see people who have stumbled and blundered and give up on them. Thinking that their souls have been snuffed out, they give up and assume that nothing good will ever come from them.

Yet, the good and the great among us see sparks of holiness waiting to be lit. They see a soul on fire, suppressed but looking for a way to break out.

Achdus is what keeps our people alive through the vagaries of *golus*, because it causes us to care about every person and seek to nurture and support them, no matter their situation.

Achdus doesn't just mean that we all need to get along. *Achdus* doesn't just mean not to put people down because they are different than you, because they look different, or they dress differently, or they learn differently than you do. *Achdus* means that despite all the superficial differences that exist between all the different *shevotim* and people who hail from different countries across the Diaspora, with different accents and dialects, deep down we are all the same.

Rashi, at the beginning of this week's *parsha*, writes that we are compared to the *kochavim*, the many stars in heaven. Even though each star is different and gives off but a small drop of light, each one is special and has a task that only it can perform. When you look through a telescope, you can see that the stars together form shapes, providing direction and guidance to people below looking up to the sky to figure out where they are and how to get to where they are going.

We are but a small star giving off a small amount of light, but when we are together, joined by *achdus*, we overwhelm the darkness and provide direction and support for all. It's like when you pass a construction zone on a highway, and in the darkness you see tall lights, illuminating the road as if it were the middle of the day, so that people can work and drive and function.

We are those lights. When we are together, we bring light to all. Despite how dark the *golus* may be and despite individual pain, loss and grief, everyone can bask in our glow and warmth.

May we merit to learn the lessons of the *parsha* and the day, so that we come together, each with our sparks, and help cause the great light of *Hakadosh Boruch Hu* to once again shine and envelop the world with *kedusha* and *geulah*, speedily in our day.