

Bring the Light **By Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz**

Our world, once again, is in a precarious situation. Actually, it has been this way since Covid spread throughout the world, felling many of our most cherished people. Many still have not recuperated from what it did to them physically and mentally. Yet, so much has happened since then, so you may be forgiven for forgetting the lockdowns, shutdowns, government overreach, collapsing economy and everything else the raging virus brought on.

Think about what has happened just since this past Sukkos, starting with the awful slaughter in Israel that brought on a war that has been raging ever since. So many people needlessly died that day and in the ensuing months, thousands of people's lives were changed forever, and thousands have become orphans. So many have been wounded, hurt, and traumatized, and over one hundred are still being held hostage by depraved savages.

Israel is becoming more isolated every day. Anti-Semitism has reached levels unseen since the Holocaust, and Israel's great friend is led by a president virtually nobody has any confidence in. He is increasingly pressuring and threatening Israel to end the war before achieving the goal of defeating Hamas, an enemy of Jews and the West.

Israel's economy is sputtering and many of our brethren are refugees, ripped out of their towns and cities with no homes or jobs. Yeshivos and kollelim are suffering and those who depend on them for support are facing increasing difficulty in feeding their families.

Topping it all off is the threat of a war at the country's north, with an enemy much better armed than the one Israel is battling at the country's south.

In this country, many are hurting from the fruits of a weak administration. High interest rates and high inflation are no longer theoretical fears, but facts of life that impact families on many levels. The border crisis and rising crime threaten cities throughout the country. Rising Jew-hatred is not just relegated to kids scratching swastikas into trees. It presents real danger and peril. The country is changing, and if leftist Democrats remain in power, we can expect it to get worse.

We are and remain a good and resourceful people. Dealing with adversity is built into our DNA. Coping with rough times is what we have been doing more often than not. In times of pain and suffering, we rally together and help each other get through the crisis. It is refreshing to note the many successful campaigns for good causes and for the less fortunate.

When someone's flame flickers, others come with fuel to help keep it going, providing light for him and making the world a brighter place.

The sparks of hope in the families of the two hostages miraculously rescued this week were kept alive by some religious people whose hearts pulse with compassion and love. They

became close to the worried and anxious relatives of the captives, providing them with physical and spiritual sparks of light and warmth.

This week's parsha speaks about the construction of the Mishkon, the dwelling place of the Shechinah in this world. Introducing the description of the Divine home, the posuk (Shemos 25:2) states, "Veyikchu li terumah – And they should take donations for Me" to build the Mishkon.

It was the people's donations that allowed the Mishkon to be put together. Though each person gave but a symbolic amount, it was their demonstration that they appreciated what Hashem had given them when they left Mitzrayim. This portrayed that there was holiness in their soul. Kedusha seeks to expand and strengthen.

When Jews give of themselves and their possessions, they can build a place where kedusha can reside. The more donations, the more people who are part of it, the more kedusha there is. And then the individual neshamos of those people who contributed, gather together to form a location of holiness in their world.

If one person is walking alone on a dark road and lights a match to see a sign, the match remains lit for a few seconds and then withers away. But if two people are walking together and each lights a match, the flame is brighter than when a single match is struck, though it is still quite weak and ineffective. The more people there are walking together and the more matches they strike together, the more light there is.

Every Jew has a spark of kedusha, but by itself, and when it is cold and dark, the spark can't accomplish much. When Jews join together, each with their spark, a torch of kedusha erupts and the Shechinah has a place to dwell.

This is how the Vilna Gaon (Shir Hashirim 1:17) describes the power and potency of the Mishkon. Every Jew was walking around with kedusha in his heart, but until they had a place where they could unite, a physical location where they could connect, their individual passions lay dormant. The Mishkon gave the fires a place to unite and light up the world.

The Shechinah resides inside the heart of every good Jew. The Mishkon is the place where all those Jews gather, as the Shechinah that dwells inside of them comes alive and expands, kevayachol. This is why Hashem commanded to take a "terumah" from every "ish asher yidvenu libo," allowing every person to contribute from his heart towards the construction of the Mishkon, enabling all the hearts to join together in this special place.

In the Mishkon, every feature reflected Divine mysteries and each element was filled with cosmic significance. Just as the calendar ushers in the month of Adar, we begin reading the parshiyos that detail the particulars of the construction of this special place.

The month of Adar has taught us that as a united nation, we can achieve salvation. When everyone comes together and gives of themselves, the resultant power can overcome any crisis, tragedy or enemy.

Today, in our time, it is inspiring to see how our people come together to help each other, davening for salvation and peace, visiting the sick, and helping care for the hospital-bound, boosting morale and helping yeshivos and organizations and people who do good.

With simple things, we can cheer people, lift their spirits, and inspire them.

Last week, on Rosh Chodesh Adar, I sent a clip of Benny Friedman singing the classic Mishenichnas Adar to a friend, without giving it much thought other than thinking that it was a nice thing to do. He responded with this message: "I was having a rough time because I was alone, and when you are alone, among other things, you miss out on the energy created by the people around you. Your gesture reminded me that I am never really alone. Thank you for the pick-me-up."

Letting a person know that he isn't alone with his little match, but that you are there with him, brightens his life. Try it and you will feel greatly rewarded as you light someone else's fire.

But there is more we can do.

Last week, The Jerusalem Post published a survey that it conducted to test Israeli reaction to October 7th and the war.

While we have been writing about a return to religion by many Israelis and interviewing some of those who have turned to Hashem in these trying times, the phenomenon had not yet been scientifically proven and many were choosing to ignore what was going on.

But the survey found that, in fact, the people of Israel have become closer to Hashem and to Yiddishkeit over the past four months since the attack.

The paper reports, "According to a comprehensive survey conducted by Lazar Research for The Jerusalem Post ... aimed to gauge the religious sentiments among Israelis in these turbulent times ... 33% of Israelis have reported a strengthened faith in G-d since the October 7 massacre by Hamas and the subsequent war."

Interestingly, "The younger the respondents, the more they reported an increase in faith: from 48% among those aged 18-29 to 18% among those 60+."

Israel has been through a lot politically over the past few years. Religious Jews were singled out for derision and blamed for everything that was going wrong during the leftist administrations of Lapid and Bennett. Religious funding cratered as the community's popularity sank. Thankfully,

the leftists were sent packing and Netanyahu returned to power together with the religious parties.

The left didn't let up in their bashing of the coalition, leading massive demonstrations weekly against them, giving the media, local and international, an avenue with which to bash the religious community.

But despite all the hate and invective directed at religion, the tiny embers flickering in thousands of lost souls have begun igniting small flames. It is sad that it took such an awful tragedy to trigger the sparks, and it would be a great tragedy if we allow them to flame out.

It is our responsibility at this historic juncture to provide the fuel necessary to keep those little flames flickering and turn them into larger fires. We have to introduce these people who are seeking to draw closer to Judaism and the Ribono Shel Olam to the information they need to enable them to become educated in what Torah is all about. We can't sit by and let the flames diminish in size.

There are organizations we are all familiar with, such as Lev L'Achim and Shuvu, which do their heroic work far from the limelight, bringing Torah and Yahadus to the people of Israel. They don't preach. They learn Torah with people you would never imagine would have any interest, and the Torah itself warms their hearts, lights their souls, and awakens within them the ancient yearning for the fire of Har Sinai.

If the children of those who are reaching for kedusha aren't in yeshiva, then it's doubtful that the inspiration will have a lasting effect. Shuvu is commencing a campaign to be able to accommodate many more children in their school system. Anyone who has visited their schools, seen the angelic faces of the students, and thinks about where they would be without Shuvu can be overcome.

We make that happen. It is only through our support that the young lights are lit and set on a path of Torah and mitzvos. Then they go home and light their parents' neshamos, bringing families to lives of Torah.

There is a unique opportunity now to share the gift of our way of life with so many of our brethren, who are standing alone in the dark, with a book of paper matches, trying desperately to get something going.

We have what it takes to bring the light to them and bring them to the light.

We all seek the return of the Mishkon, the place where all of us can gather and have our neshamos set on fire eternally. The more neshamos we get lit, the more Jews are on fire, the faster the Bais Hamikdosh will descend from on High to its appointed place in the center of the world, in the heart of Yerushalayim, the place to where we direct all of our prayers.

L'Yerushalayim ircha berachamim toshuv, bemeheirah beyomeinu, amein.