

D'var Torah: Parashat Shemot

by Eli Shebson - Thursday, December 27, 2018

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This week, the Chief Rabbi emphasises the need for consistent Jewish unity.

Who was Moshe most afraid of?

In Parashat Shemot we read how Moshe, having grown up in the palace of King Pharaoh of Egypt, went out to seek his brethren. Famously, he came across an Egyptian taskmaster who was just about to kill a poor Hebrew slave. Moshe came to the defence of the Hebrew, he killed the taskmaster and buried his body.

He went out on the second day and the Torah tells us, “V’Hinei Shnei Anashim Ivrim Nitzim – He saw two Hebrews who were fighting each other.” Moshe said to the protagonist, “Why are you striking your fellow?” And he answered saying, “Are you going to kill me in the way you killed the Egyptian?” “Vayira Moshe – Moshe was filled with fear.”

Now here is a situation in which the Egyptians had enslaved the Hebrews and were oppressing our nation. But who was Moshe most afraid of? A fellow Hebrew. Isn't that tragic? At the very time when the Egyptians were persecuting us, we were fighting ourselves. Moshe, was afraid of a member of his own nation, more than anyone else.

We find that the same scenario repeated in the year 70, when the Romans laid siege to Jerusalem with the intention to breach the walls. Tragically, that was followed by a civil war within those very walls. As a result, it was easy for the Romans to conquer Jerusalem, to burn our Temple and to exile our people.

Time and again throughout our history when we have faced dangers from without we have been tragically divided within. There are precious few moments when we do enjoy wonderful unity. We had one not so long ago after the Pittsburgh massacre. There was such wonderful unity throughout the Jewish world.

But why can't we bottle that? Why can't we keep it going through all times? Why must it be that, God forbid, tragedy should occur to bring our people together?

Let us live up to the aspirations of our beautiful prayer at Shabbat Mincha.

“Ata Echad V’Shimcha Echad UmiK’Amcha Yisrael Goi Echad B’Aretz” You Hashem are one and Your name is one. And who is like the people of Israel? One single, united and harmonious nation in this world.

Shabbat Shalom

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