

Weekly Teaching

September 7, 2018

According to rabbinic legend:

When the founder of Hasidic Judaism; the Ba'al Shem-Tov; saw "dark clouds" gathering and threatening his fellow Jews, he would make a point of travelling to a certain place, within a certain forest, so as to build a fire and offer a special prayer to God.

Then, a miracle would arise, and the impending threats to the Jews would miraculously dissipate.

Years later, when the Ba'al Shem Tov's disciple, the Magid of Mezritch, would perceive similar "dark clouds" he would go to the same place in the same forest, and offer the following prayer: "Holy One, Blessed be Your Name, please hear my prayer. I do not know how to light the fire that my Master was able to light, but I am able to still say the same prayer." And, then after offering the same prayer, a miracle on behalf of the Jewish People would again occur, and they would be spared.

More years passed, and then the "dark clouds" would again gather. This time Rabbi Moshe Lieb of Sasov needed to help save the Jewish People. He went to the same place in the same forest, but had to say to God: "I do not know how to light the fire and I do not know the needed prayer. However, I do know this place, and I ask you, Lord, to let it be sufficient, and please again perform a miracle."

Being in the certain place, in the certain forest, was in of itself sufficient, and God again performed a miracle on behalf of the Jewish People.

And, as more years passed, and the "dark clouds" returned, the Rabbi, Israel of Rizhyn, needed to intervene. However, he sat in his chair, holding his head in his hands, and spoke to God amidst his tears: "God, I am unable to light the fire, and I do not know the prayer. I also cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is offer my prayers to You that you should perform a miracle and once again redeem Your People. I pray this will be enough." And, it was enough, and the miracle was again granted, and Jewish People were once again spared.

Our High Holy Days have arrived. Some come to Temple regularly; some less frequently. But all arrive to the Synagogue because we do know we have a "certain place" where we can connect to our past, address our present and strengthen our Jewish future.

And we prioritize the need for our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren to also come with us; to be present and to also offer their prayers.

No matter our knowledge, or personal ritual practice, we all can be the catalyst for the miracle of God watching over our People.

We can remember our special Jewish story and feel the power of being anchored within the ebb and flow of our eternal sacred heritage.

We might not know the place in the forest, how to light the fire and even the specific prayer. But we can say to God we are here and we remember. We ask that this be sufficient and a miracle will be performed on our behalf. And it will be enough; God will answer our prayer.

The "dark clouds" always exist (in the form of anti-Semitism, assimilation, etc.). But we can gather, pray and re-light the fire of our eternal Jewish flame. I look forward to all of us gathering.

Shabbat Shalom & L'Shanah Tovah—A Happy, Healthy & Peaceful New Year!

Rabbi Mitch

rabbimitch@templesholom.com