

The 10<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Tevet is a minor fast day (observed only from dawn to nightfall) in our Jewish calendar, but one with tremendous implications that are connected to our parashah. Unlike Tisha b'Av, it may be observed on a Friday, as it does this year, which means going hungry into Shabbat, something we usually avoid. Coordinating our Jewish calendar with the civil calendar causes 10. Tevet to occur twice in some years and not at all in others. January 3, and December 22 are both 10. Tevet this year. It is a day of fasting, mourning, and repentance to mark the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem in 425 BCE. Ignoring multiple warnings from the prophets, the people persisted in their lawless behavior, and 30 months later, on 17. Tamuz the walls were breached. Then, on 9. Av the Temple was destroyed and the people were exiled. The theme of exile and redemption pervades our history, beginning with the Exodus from Egypt. Much has been written about how the groundwork was laid with Joseph, whose "descent" to Egypt was both in accordance with HaShem's plan and the vehicle through which he could help his family maintain their identity in an alien environment. Events in our parashah and their midrashic embellishments tell the story of how these plans begin to unfold. In the heated exchanges between Joseph and Judah in Midrash Tanchuma, Joseph, still in his role as viceroy, forces his brothers to confront their past. His capricious behavior toward them since they first came to Egypt provokes a dangerous, violent reaction: "Judah said to him, 'You have judged falsely.' Joseph replied, 'Did you not judge your brother falsely when you sold him?' ... 'I am consumed by anger, and no one believes me,' cried Judah. And Joseph retorted, 'I will break your anger.' Judah said, 'I shall go out and dye the marketplaces of Egypt in blood.' Joseph replied, 'All your life you have been dying things in blood, even as you and your brothers dyed your brother's coat in blood and then told your father: Joseph is undoubtedly torn to pieces.' When Joseph realized that they had agreed to destroy Egypt, he said to himself, 'It is better to make myself known to them ...' ... When at last they recognized him, they sought to kill him. An angel descended and scattered them to the four corners of the room." But upon witnessing Joseph's heartfelt emotion as he embraces his brother Benjamin, their anger dissipates and they begin to truly speak with one another. According to Midrash Tanchuma, Joseph sends everyone out of the room before revealing himself to his brothers because he did not want to shame them before the Egyptians. Realizing that their violent reactions have been driven by shame, he uses his authority to ensure privacy as they begin to reconnect and reconcile. Midrash Genesis Rabbah 93 even has him revealing his circumcision to his brothers to prove his identity. He makes it clear to them that in order to endure the remaining five years of famine, they must leave Canaan and settle in Egypt. On the way to Egypt, Jakob stops at Be'er Sheva to make offerings to HaShem in memory of his father Isaac. There, HaShem appears to him in a night vision: "I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid of going down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up, and Joseph will place his hand on your eyes." (46:1-4), reiterating the initial covenant with his grandfather before he was renamed Abraham (15:13-14). They settle in Goshen, Joseph's foresightful plan to keep them far enough from the Egyptians to prevent them from assimilating. Knowing that sheep and other livestock are sacred to them ("all shepherds are abhorrent to the Egyptians" – 46:34), Joseph instructs his brothers to tell Pharaoh that they are shepherds. "And Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen, and they acquired property in it, and they were prolific and multiplied greatly." (47:27) Indeed, they are no longer sojourners, they have become settlers, building a new life for themselves and their progeny. But as we know from our Pesach Haggadah, they were "naked and bare," i.e., they did not yet have the *mitzvot* that would define their identity and transform them from *bnei Yisrael* (children of Israel) to *am Yisrael* (the full-fledged People of Israel). Nonetheless, they manage to maintain their identity through prosperity and slavery. The Vilna Gaon viewed Egypt as the prototype for all exiles, from Babylon, Greece, and Rome to the present. We settle, we establish an infrastructure, and we try to live in the dichotomy of our Jewish culture and the culture of our home. Sometimes, either by force or by choice, we withdraw completely from prevailing society, and sometimes we lose ourselves in it. The controversy between the totally assimilated Jews versus the traditionalists of the Chanukah story, as well as the checkered story of the Maccabean-Hasmonaean family itself is a tragic case in point. In a mere 103 years, these former champions of Jewish identity became staunch supporters of Rome, establishing a ruling dynasty in defiance of Torah law, and eventually persecuting the priests from whose ranks they had come. All too often, people who completely absorb a new culture end up hating their former lives, sometimes even extending their hatred to the culture they left behind. Talmud Tractate Yoma 9b teaches that "the sin of baseless hatred [which caused the destruction of the first Temple] is equivalent to the three severe transgressions [that caused the destruction of the first Temple]: idol worship, forbidden sexual relations, and bloodshed." Indeed, Joseph's dysfunctional family was consumed by *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred, but the love that emerged from their reunion with Joseph sowed the seeds for their eventual redemption from Egypt. In our increasingly polarized world it behooves us to remember the devastating effects of internal strife. We are not required to always agree with one another, but we are called upon to resolve our differences with respect so that baseless hatred may always be overcome by baseless love.

Shabbat shalom!