

Parashah Mikeitz usually falls on the Shabbat during Chanukah, the darkest time of year here in the north. Chanukah is a celebration of many different things: The unlikely victory of a small band of guerilla warriors against the powerful Greeks, the inner-Jewish fight between assimilationists and loyal Jews, the rededication of the desecrated Temple and reinstatement of Jewish practice, and last but not least, the victory of darkness over light. Thus, it is also a winter solstice festival. Except for cultures close to the equator, solstice festivals are celebrated all over the world. Of course, they differ widely in form, but in substance they are remarkably alike. The overarching theme of Chanukah is light, both literally and figuratively. When our parashah opens, Joseph is still in the dungeon, and Pharaoh has had two very disturbing dreams which no one in Egypt is able to interpret to his satisfaction. According to Rashi, he rejected his advisors' interpretation "Seven daughters you will father and seven daughters you will bury." In other words, they are all in the dark, including Pharaoh's chief cupbearer, who has forgotten his promise back in the dungeon to mention Joseph when he was released. Suddenly he has what we colloquially call a "lightbulb moment," and recounts Joseph's successful interpretation of his own dream. But acknowledging his "transgression" while at the same time demeaning Joseph by calling him "a youth, a Hebrew, a servant of the chief butcher" (44:12), is likely an attempt to excuse his negligence by stressing Joseph's insignificance. He is obviously not fully out of the dark. It is noteworthy that the word for prison has been *sohar* (סֹהַר), but the word is now *bor* (בוֹר) – pit, as well as ignoramus/fool, and the word for the place his brothers had thrown him (37:22). This *bor* is his first encounter with the abject darkness out of which enlightenment slowly dawns for those open to receiving it. Joseph was not ready then, but after more time to reflect, he emerges into light brighter than he ever could have imagined, finally able to use his prodigious gifts wisely and with gratitude. "Pharaoh removed his signet ring from his own hand and put it on Joseph's hand. He dressed him in linen robes and placed a gold chain around his neck. He had him ride in his second royal chariot, and they proclaimed before him, 'The king's counselor! How wise for his young age! Bend the knee to him!'" (41:42-43) The entire proclamation is encapsulated in the single word אֲבִיכָהּ (*avrech*), which in Targum Jonathan 41:43 is translated as *av* (father)-*rech* (Aramaic for king). Talmud Tractate Bava Batra 4a cites II Samuel 3:39: "*reikha* denotes royalty, as is written, 'I am today a tender (*rakh*) [i.e., young] and just anointed king.'" Midrash Genesis Rabbah 90 translates it as kneel, from the root בָּרַךְ (*barach*, from which we also derive words denoting blessing). There are noteworthy echoes in Megillat Esther 6:9 and 6:11, and in Daniel. Haman, thinking he is to be honored, tells Achashverosh to have him dressed in royal robes and paraded through the streets on the king's horse, with cries of: "So shall be done to the man whom the king wishes to honor!" Ultimately, the royal signet ring is taken from evil Haman and given to good Mordechai. And for his ability to interpret dreams and decipher the words written on the wall of the king's palace, Daniel is rewarded with "robes of purple and the golden chain around his neck, ... to rule over a third of the kingdom." (Daniel 5:29). Midrash Tanchuma Mikeitz 3 teaches: "Out of adversity comes tranquility; out of darkness, light; and out of the degradation of the righteous, their exaltation. ... Daniel was hurled into the den of lions, and then was exalted. ... It is written concerning Mordecai: 'And he put on sackcloth and ashes,' but later 'Mordechai went forth from the presence of the king in royal apparel.' ... and he [Joseph] too was exalted; and Joseph became ruler over the land." The underlying message is that because Joseph, Mordechai, and Daniel recognized HaShem, they were able to survive their darkest hours and become channels through which HaShem could act. In Judaism the extremes are always symbiotic. Light and darkness merge in twilight, and like us all, Abraham and his family are capable of doing great good as well as great harm. Indeed, we all have both the good and the evil inclination. According to a midrash in Tractate Yoma 69b, when the evil inclination was captured and imprisoned for three days, the chickens stopped laying eggs because the drive to reproduce was suppressed. "If we kill it [the evil inclination], the world will be destroyed. ... So they gouged out its eyes (limiting its power) and set it free." We need both inclinations, but it is up to us to make sure that the good outweighs the evil. Erev Rosh Chodesh Tevet falls on the 5<sup>th</sup> day of Chanukah, when more candles are lit than unlit. How appropriate then, that during the month of Tevet the days are becoming noticeably longer. When we light our Chanukah candles and celebrate Rosh Chodesh Tevet, we confirm the spirit of renewal that infuses us with the will to find the strength to regroup and rebuild after each of the countless attempts to extinguish us. From generation to generation we have channeled the strength and resourcefulness of our ancestors and used our own ingenuity to adapt and thrive in new surroundings and new conditions, continually renewing ourselves as we renew the eternal covenant that sustains us. Celebrating the waxing and waning of the moon, we reaffirm that even in the darkest of times, *am Yisrael* will emerge into new light and once again grow strong. Unfortunately, fear and ignorance continue to make gullible people fall prey to outlandish conspiracy theories, leading far too often to senseless, tragic violence. We dare not stop trying to pierce the darkness of ignorance with the light of reason and hope, not only during this dark time of the year, but always.