

VAYIGASH

A Thought for the Week
By Rabbi Shlomo Truzman

The joyful celebration of Hanukkah is behind us. Together with the help of its radiant lights, world Jewry celebrated the rededication of our Jerusalem temple which lay desecrated by Antiochus and his pagan consorts. The restoration of Jerusalem to its pristine glory by our Hasmonean ancestors indeed calls for a yearly eight days of celebration notably known as Hanukkah. This being said, while the smell of the burning candles of the eight days is still present in Jewish households and our Hanukiyot may not have yet been put aside, that we are called upon to commemorate Asara Betevet, the fast of the month of Tevet today Friday December 25th. It marks the tragic beginning of the siege of Jerusalem by Nebukhadnezzar of Babylon resulting in the ultimate destruction of Jerusalem, its glorious Bet Hamikdash, and our subsequent exile from the land of Israel.

How ironic that only a few days ago we celebrated the restoration of the Temple, and now just days later we must commemorate its decreed destruction. How it contrasts with Hanukkah, when our Hasmonean ancestors armed with staunch faith in G-d brought light to a darkened Jerusalem, and no sooner than we could catch our breath, we saw ourselves bereft of that light, and by extension, the entire world.

We certainly are a proverbially daring nation, which, while on the one hand we celebrate our fortune, on the other we seemingly consolidate ourselves through our misfortunes. And as far as misfortune is concerned, a synonym for affliction given our long history of misfortunes, I see it as nothing more than fortunes missed. For when everything is said and done, only we, are responsible for our successes and failures. But even our failures have served their historical purposes in that only a nation that has suffered and endured greatly has achieved greatly.

In closing, many fortunes have befallen the Jewish people for which we mourn at their appointed times. But in our mourning, we are charged with hope and faith, and in our fasts, we are nurtured with the strength necessary to count our blessings in that even at the darkest moments of our national existence the misfortunes of our past and present are but a prelude to good things to come. Just as it is proclaimed by the Prophet Zechariah, ch.8: 18-19, "Thus says the Lord of Hosts: The fast of the fourth month (17 Tammuz), the fast of the fifth (9th of Av), and the fast of the seventh, (Fast of Gedaliah the 3rd of Tishri) and the fast of the tenth (10th of Tevet), shall (all) be to the house of Judah joy and gladness and cheerful seasons, therefore love truth and peace". In our days, Amen.

Shabbat Shalom

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