



Jewish Community Center of Paramus  
Congregation Beth Tikvah  
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## A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday December 22, 2023 ~ Parsha: Vayigash

### **The Fast of the Tenth of Tevet: A Religious Response to Crisis**

Dear JCCP/CBT Family,

Today, Friday December 22, 2023 is *Asarah B'Tevet*, the fast day of the 10th of the Hebrew month of Tevet. *Asarah B'Tevet* is one of several minor fast days associated with the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BC.

On this day in Jewish history, the Babylonians began their siege of Jerusalem. This event marked the beginning of the battle that ultimately led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the First Temple. It also sent the Jews into the 70-year Babylonian Exile.

The event is chronicled in the Bible. An identical description of the tragic event is found in both the Book of Jeremiah and II Kings:

*And it came to pass in the ninth year of his (King Zedekiah's) reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and encamped against it; and they built forts against it round about.*

*(Jeremiah 52:4, II Kings 25:1)*

Two weeks ago, I wrote to the congregation about the [celebration](#) of Chanukah in a time of war. The next day, while offering my introduction to the Torah reading on Shabbat morning (December 10th), it occurred to me that the first several observances of Chanukah in antiquity also took place during war. The Maccabees achieved a great

victory when they, too, liberated the Temple (that was destroyed by the Babylonians 400 years earlier) and rededicated it for Jewish sacred worship. That's what Chanukah celebrates. But the war against the Syrian Greeks continued on for at least three more years after the first Chanukah until they were able to re-establish Jewish sovereignty and independence in the land of Israel which had been interrupted by the Babylonian assault on Israel which is ritually commemorated on this fast day today.

As we observe the fast today, I remember a lesson of the late Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, one of the great Jewish thinkers of our time. He taught that the 10<sup>th</sup> of Tevet represents the Jewish people under siege facing two ways to respond to the crisis and danger around them. One is to assimilate and acculturate to the threatening world around you. The other is to strengthen ourselves internally by turning towards our unique way of life. Rabbi Sacks taught that in the face of the unprecedented tragedy of the destruction of the First Temple, great Jewish leaders laid the foundation for Judaism as a living civilization that could survive defeat, exile, and every imaginable external threat. Their vision helped to sustain, even in the most difficult of times, a Judaism that lasts until this day.

Rabbi Sacks taught this lesson exactly four years ago, at a time when rising anti-Semitism had become a chief concern of world Jewry. But what he said about that growing threat is even more significant during this time of war in Israel, and of heightened danger for world Jewry. Despite all its amazing achievements and powerful army, Israel was dealt a severe blow that in many ways is even more threatening to its citizens than the attack that began the Yom Kippur War 50 years ago. So how do we react to this tragedy? Rabbi Sacks explained that the proper way to respond is to turn toward Israel, and towards our Judaism now. Because ultimately, as the prophet Zachariah taught

*Lo b'chayil v'lo bakoach, ki im b'ruchi.*

*The Jewish people survives not by strength or by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord. (Zechariah 4:6)*

Though not a particularly well known or well observed observance, this fast day is an opportunity to offer a religious response to danger and loss. Today we are strengthening our connection to our Judaism and its own unique understanding of how we should respond to crisis. By doing so, we play our part in rebuilding Jerusalem and strengthening the Jewish people.

The fast begins at 6:06 AM and ends at 5:02 PM

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Arthur D. Weiner