

Shabbat Shalom
from Rabbi Michael Gold

Candle Lighting Time
Friday Erev Shabbat 5:45 pm

Services

Thursday Jan. 30 8:30 am Rosh Hodesh Minyan and Bagels & Bible
Saturday Feb. 1 9:30 am Shabbat Services

SUNDAY MORNING LECTURES

10 am Meeting followed by Lecture

Feb. 16 Where were you when the universe was created?

Mar. 9 Why is there evil in the world?

We pray that the peace holds, and the rest of the hostages are quickly released.

**PARSHAT BO
ROSENZWEIG ON REDEMPTION**

“That very day the Lord freed the Israelites from the land of Egypt, troop by troop.” (Exodus 12:51)

As we read about God redeeming the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, I want to consider the work of one of the most influential Jewish thinkers of the twentieth century, the existential philosopher Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929). In 1966 *Commentary Magazine* did a survey on the beliefs of the most prominent rabbis in America, published under the title *The Condition of Jewish Belief*. Regarding the beliefs of the non-Orthodox rabbis in the series, the editors wrote, “The single greatest influence on the religious thought of North American Jewry, therefore, is a German Jew – a layman, not a rabbi – who died before Hitler came into power and who came to Judaism from the very portals of the Church.”

Rosenzweig lived an amazing life. He almost converted to Christianity before having a religious experience attending a small Orthodox synagogue in Berlin on Yom Kippur. That brought him back to his Jewish roots. He wrote his great book of Jewish philosophy, *The Star of Redemption*, on postcards from the front in World War I. He founded a center of adult Jewish learning in Berlin, and together with Martin Buber, translated the Bible into German. But he disagreed with Buber in a fundamental way. Buber had little use for Jewish observance. Rosenzweig on the other hand believed that the goal is to turn a law, something written in a book, into a commandment, something that speaks to the heart. When asked if he put

on *tefillin* (phylacteries) each morning, he famously answered “not yet.” In the end, paralyzed by A.L.S. (Lou Gehrig’s disease), he continued writing until the end of his life.

But for our purpose, it is fascinating to describe Rosenzweig’s famous Star of Redemption. He placed two triangles on top of each other, building a Jewish star. At the points of one triangle were the words – “God”, “nature”, “humanity”. At the points of the second triangle were the words – “creation”, “revelation”, “redemption”. Then the triangles were brought together. The word “creation” was placed between “God” and “nature”. The word “revelation” was placed between “God” and “humanity” And finally, the word “redemption” was placed between “humanity” and “nature”.

The message is clear. Creation is the way God relates to nature. God is the Creator of the universe. Revelation is how God relates to humanity. God revealed God’s will, not only to Israel but to all humanity, at Mt. Sinai. And finally, redemption is how humanity relates to the world. Humanity has been given a job to do. The world remains unredeemed, incomplete. Our job as human beings is to complete the world, or to use a term borrowed from Kabbalah, to perfect the world (*tikkun olam*). God’s world may be very good, but it is far from perfect. Humanity has been given the job of perfecting the world. Redemption is in our hands.

In this week’s portion we read about redemption, how God redeems the Israelites from Egypt. But it only occurs when the Israelites take action. Moses and Aaron confront Pharaoh and lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Next week we will read about the redemption at the Sea (traditionally translated the Red Sea but more accurately, the Sea of Reeds.) The parting of the sea only takes place when Nachshon ben Aminadav, the leader of the tribe of Judah, leaps into the water up to his neck. Redemption demands action.

Rosenzweig was not the first to develop the idea of the human role in redemption. But his influential Star of David powerfully visualizes it. God acts by creating the world. God also acts by revealing God’s will. But then God waits for humanity to act to bring about redemption. It is our job to complete God’s work, to make the world a better place. Passivity has never been a Jewish virtue. Action is demanded. And through our action, step by step, we can be God’s partners in perfecting the world.