

**Shabbat Shalom and Happy Passover
from Rabbi Michael Gold**

Candle Lighting Time

Friday Erev Shabbat and Seventh Day Pesach 7:28 pm

Saturday Erev Eighth Day Pesach 8:22 pm (from pre-existing flame)

Services

Sat. April 19 9:30 am Seventh Day Passover, read Song of Songs

Sun. April 20 9:30 am Eighth Day Passover, Yizkor

Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Memorial Day) Service at Torah Ohr Thursday April 24 2 pm.

We continue to pray for the release of the hostages and peace to come to Israel.

**PESACH
A RELIGION OF LOVE**

“Oh, give me of the kisses of your mouth, For your love is more delightful than
wine.” (Song of Songs 1:2)

It is a commonly accepted shibboleth that Judaism is a religion of law while Christianity is a religion of love. (The term shibboleth, a word that comes from the Bible, means a common belief which is not necessarily true.) People frequently accuse the God of the Hebrew Scripture, what Christians call the Old Testament, as concerned only with laws. The God of what Christians call the New Testament is a God of love.

I respectfully disagree. The God of the Hebrew Bible is a God of love. Nothing proves that more clearly than the Biblical book Song of Songs, which Jews throughout the world read in synagogue on Passover. We will read part of it Saturday morning, the Seventh day of Pesach. The book is a highly erotic series of love poems between a young woman and her shepherd lover. In fact, the book was considered so sexually suggestive that the Rabbis debated whether it should enter the Canon. But Rabbi Akiba taught that the book symbolized the love between God and the people Israel and was therefore the holy of holies. (*Mishnah Yadayim* 3:5)

Just to give a taste of the book, here are some verses that the artist put on our *ketubah* (marriage document.) “Like a lily among thorns, So is my darling among the maidens. Like an apple tree among trees of the forest, So is my beloved among the youths.” (Song of Songs 2:2,3). The book is filled with words of love, often quite explicit and erotic. But it symbolizes the love between God and God’s people.

These words of love are essential to Jewish liturgy. Every morning Jews pray the words *Ahava Raba* “Great love,” God’s love for us. Every evening Jews pray the

words *Ahavat Olam* "Eternal love," God's embrace of us. And of course, we are commanded "to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our might." We are also commanded to "love our neighbor as ourselves" and "love the stranger." Judaism is a religion of love.

If that is true, why is there such a strong belief that we are a religion of law. I believe the answer is simple. To love someone requires action. Love is tied with laws because love is more than a mere feeling. It means that certain behaviors are mandated. If we must love God, love our neighbor, and love the stranger, then we must behave in a certain way towards God, our neighbor, and the stranger. True love must manifest itself through behavior. And that makes our scripture a religion of law.

Whenever we speak of love, we must also speak of law. Spouses who love each other must behave in a certain way towards one another. Parents and children show their love by certain behaviors. Parents teach their children and children honor their parents. Siblings show their love by caring for one another. To answer Cain's famous question, we must be our brother's keeper. And of course, we show our love for God through our commitment to Godly living. Love is about action.

Regarding the Christian view of love, I sometimes think my Christian neighbors are more concerned with feelings than actions. Love is in your heart, not in what you do. In the musical *Les Miserables*, Marius may have sung about "A heart filled with love." But such a heart is not enough. It must demonstrate itself in action. Love is not only about what we feel but what we do.

Yes, Judaism is a religion of law. But it is also a religion of love. It is through the law that we demonstrate our love. So let us celebrate love as we read the erotic poetry of Song of Songs this Shabbat.