

**Shabbat Shalom and Shana Tova
from Rabbi Michael Gold**

Candle Lighting Time

Friday Erev Shabbat 7:02 pm

Monday Erev Rosh Hashana 6:59 pm

Tuesday Erev 2nd Day 7:50 pm from pre-existing flame

Services

Shabbat Morning September 20 9:30 am

High Holiday Schedule

Mon. Sept. 22 6:30 pm Erev Rosh Hashana, followed by dinner for those
with reservations

Tues. Sept. 23 9 am 1st Day Rosh Hashana
6 pm Tashlich, Mincha

Wed. Sept. 24 9 am 2nd Day Rosh Hashana

Wed. Oct. 1 6:30 pm Kol Nidre

Thurs. Oct. 2 9 am Yom Kippur Day

4 pm Community Yizkor Service

5:30 pm Mincha, Neilah

7:30 pm Shofar, break fast for those with reservations

With a new Jewish year, we continue to pray for the release of the hostages
and peace to come to Israel.

**PARSHAT NITZAVIM
THE TORAH IS NOT IN HEAVEN**

“It is not in the heavens, that you should say, Who among us can go up to the
heavens and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe
it?” (Deuteronomy 30:12)

Sometimes people ask me how I understand Judaism. I often reply with
a simple, tongue-in-cheek answer – “The Chutzpah of the Rabbis.” Chutzpah
is a good Yiddish word meaning “brazenness.” It refers to the willingness of the
Rabbis of the Talmudic period, and even today, to look at the Torah text and
interpret it, often far from the literal meaning. The great Rabbi Abraham Joshua
Heschel wrote that “The Torah is a minimum of revelation and a maximum on
interpretation.”

There is a story in the Talmud, based on a verse in this week's portion, that explains this Rabbinic approach clearly (see *Baba Metzia* 59b). On a regular basis it is worth retelling that story. It is often called "The Oven of Achnai" and whether this kind of oven could become ritually impure. But the details are unimportant. What is important is the opinions of the Rabbis. Rabbi Eliezer had one opinion while Rabbi Joshua and all his other colleagues disagreed.

Rabbi Eliezer cried out, let the carob tree prove I am right. The carob tree jumped 100 cubits – some say 400 cubits. Rabbi Joshua said that we do not learn Jewish law from carob trees. Rabbi Eliezer responded, let the stream prove it. The stream started to flow backwards. Rabbi Joshua said that we do not learn Jewish law from streams.

Rabbi Eliezer then said, let the walls of the house of the study prove it. The walls started to lean in. Rabbi Joshua scolded the walls. "Why are you getting involved in an argument between the rabbis?" At that point the walls did not fall in out of respect for Rabbi Joshua but remained leaning out of respect for Rabbi Eliezer.

Frustrated, Rabbi Eliezer finally cried out, if I am correct, let the heavens prove it. A voice cried out from heaven saying, "Why do you argue with Rabbi Eliezer knowing that the law is according to his opinion." Rabbi Joshua called back, quoting a verse from this week's Torah reading. "The Torah is not in heaven. Since we received the Torah at Mt. Sinai, we no longer listen to a Divine Voice." The law was decided according to the majority, following Rabbi Joshua and rejecting Rabbi Eliezer.

The follow up of the story is perhaps the most fascinating. Rabbi Natan encountered the prophet Elijah who often wanders freely between heaven and earth. He asked Elijah how God responded to this argument. Elijah replied, "God smiled and said, my children have defeated me, my children have defeated me." The Rabbis were doing precisely what God wanted them to do. God gave them the Torah and they were interpreting it according to their understanding. What God intended when God originally wrote the Torah was irrelevant. The Torah was given to humans to interpret. And in each generation, scholars of the law must study the Torah and interpret it according to the needs of their generation.

The Rabbis often fought bitterly over the meaning of the Torah. This is precisely what God wanted when God gave us the Torah. In the Talmud and other classic Jewish writings, the disagreements were recorded and the arguments on both sides were presented. This was done deliberately to prove that there are multiple faces and multiple understandings of the Torah. In fact,

according to the Rabbis, each verse of the Torah has 70 different understandings.

Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year begins this week. We will hear the shofar which is a wake-up call. We will dip apples in honey and wish each other a sweet year. Shortly after Rosh Hashana, on Simchat Torah, we will begin reading the Torah once again. May we always see new insights and interpretations of our holy text.