

Shabbat Shalom
from Rabbi Michael Gold

Candle Lighting Time
Friday Erev Shabbat 5:28 pm

Services

Thursday Morning Jan. 8 8:30 am Minyan followed by Bagels and
Bible

Saturday Jan. 10 9:30 am Shabbat morning service.

PARSHAT SHMOT
THE BASKET AND THE ARK

“When she could hide him no longer, she got a wicker basket for him and caulked it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child into it and placed it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile.” (Exodus 2:3)

Reading the Torah in English translation often loses subtleties available in the original Hebrew. In this week’s portion Moses’ mother has a baby boy, when all baby boys were to be drowned in the river. His mother rescues him by placing him in a basket (*tevah*) and letting him float down the Nile. Moses’ sister Miriam follows to see what happens. You know the story. Pharaoh’s daughter sees the baby floating in the basket, rescues him, and raises him as her own. Miriam even brings Moses’ mother to be a wet nurse for the baby.

The word for basket, *tevah*, is used in another place in the Torah. God plans to destroy almost all life on earth. He tells Noah to build an ark (*tevah*) for himself and his wife, his three sons and their wives, and the animals two-by-two. (Later God will say seven pairs of the clean animals.) It is the same Hebrew word for the ark and the basket. But what could a tiny basket for a baby and a huge ark filled with animals have in common? The Torah must be teaching us something.

The basket and the ark do have something in common. Neither has a rudder or any other way to steer it as it floats in the water. In both cases, the basket and the ark, the fate is in God’s hands. Nobody is in control. It is in the hands of mere fortune where each will land in the end. The word “fortune” in classical literature means fate or destiny, events beyond human control. Perhaps the best example is Boethius’s (480-524 C.E.) classic work, *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Boethius, condemned to death, has a

long conversation with Lady Philosophy who has come to comfort him. She convinces him that our lives are determined by fortune over which we have little control. "Ill fortune is better for men than good. When fortune smiles, she is always false. But when she is inconstant and whimsical, she shows her true self." All we can do is stoically accept our fortune with the right attitude.

A more modern version of the same idea is the serenity prayer, attributed to Christian theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971). "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." This prayer is a vital part of the recovery movement. In our lives, there is much we cannot control. We must place our fate in God's hands and accept our fortune with serenity. This is the lesson of both the ark and the basket. The fate of both Noah and Moses was in God's hands.

The ark rested on Mt. Ararat and both humanity and the animals flourished on the earth. The basket was pulled from the river by Pharaoh's daughter and Moses grew up to rescue the people Israel. Both stories had happy endings. Unfortunately for Boethius, his story did not have a happy ending. He was executed. But even he found serenity and peace in his long discussion with Lady Philosophy. All these stories give the same message. We often do not have control over what happens in our lives. We need to let go and leave it in God's hands. This is the meaning of fortune.

Teva is Hebrew for something that floats on water with no way to control it. The word reflects an important insight into our lives. Sometimes we need to let go and allow life to float wherever it will take us.