

Shabbat Shalom
from Rabbi Michael Gold

Candle Lighting Time
Friday Erev Shabbat 5:54 pm
Services

Thursday Morning Feb 12 8:30 am Minyan followed by Bagels and Bible
Sisterhood Shabbat
Friday Feb. 13 5:45 pm Kabbalat Shabbat followed by oneg
Saturday Feb.14 9:30 am Shabbat morning service followed by kiddush hosted
by Sisterhood

We continue to pray for the safe release of Nancy Guthrie, kidnapped from her home in Tucson, AZ. Nancy is the mother of the Today Show anchor Savannah Guthrie.

Here is my weekly message.

PARSHAT MISHPATIM
ARE SPORTS TOO DANGEROUS?

“If, however, that ox has been in the habit of goring, and its owner, though warned, has failed to guard it, and it kills a man or a woman—the ox shall be stoned and its owner, too, shall be put to death.” (Exodus 21:29)

I love the Olympics, both winter and summer. Yesterday I watched the United States win silver in a Curling match. I am not Canadian and do not totally understand Curling. It involves pushing a heavy granite stone down a sheet of ice, sweeping the ice with a broom to influence its direction, and hoping your stone lands in the middle of a target called the home. Meanwhile, ideally you also push the other team’s stones away from the home.

The game is strangely calm and involves a lot of strategy. It is sometimes called “chess on ice.” As a chess player, I appreciate that. It seems less dangerous than the other winter sports, skating full speed down a sheet of ice, jumping and spinning four times in the air on ice skates, racing on skis down the snow at speeds that would lead to a speeding ticket on any American highway, or flying high above the snow on skis or a snowboard while doing multiple flips in the air. There is danger in Olympic sports. We pray for a full recovery of the great American skier Lindsey Vonn who broke her leg trying to make her Olympic comeback.

One hopes that the Olympics is beyond politics. Sadly, in Milan the

Israeli team was booed as they entered the arena. Still, they held the Israeli flag high. One can root for the Israeli bobsled team competing in Italy. It brings back memories of the Jamaican bobsled team in the 1988 Winter Olympics, and the 1993 Disney movie based on their story, *Cool Runnings*. The Israeli team has labeled themselves *Shul Runnings*.

Of course, there are more dangerous sports than the Winter Olympics. Sunday was a quasi-American holiday called Superbowl Sunday. The world comes to a halt to watch the big event. Years ago, my daughter worked in a restaurant that closed twice a year, Christmas Eve and Superbowl Sunday. Some people watch the football game, some watch the halftime show, and some watch the extremely expensive commercials. We need to thank Patriots owner Robert Kraft for his Superbowl ad on fighting antisemitism. If you have not seen it, watch it on YouTube.

People are injured playing sports. How does Jewish tradition react to the possibility of such injuries? There is a passage on this issue based on this week's Torah reading. The Torah speaks of an ox who injures someone. It differentiates between a *shor tam* "innocent ox" with no history of dangerous behavior and a *shor muad* "warned ox" with a history of dangerous behavior. The liability of the owner is much greater for a *shor muad* "warned ox." The Talmud goes on to speak of other animals, and whether they are innocent or warned as dangerous. Finally, the Talmud says *adam muad l'olam* "humans are always considered warned and dangerous" (*Sukkah* 45a). Humans are deemed dangerous from the outset. They cannot claim innocence if their activities cause injuries.

What about humans who participate in sports? Are sports too dangerous? The commentary *Tosafot* on *Sukkah* 45a mentions young people who perform a form of jousting (knocking one's opponent off a horse using a stick. The Talmud speaks of using the *lulav*, the palm branches from *Sukkot*.) Is this permissible? The commentary admits that this sport can be dangerous. But it was done to entertain a bride and groom and people participated voluntarily. Therefore, if someone is injured, there is no liability. Jewish law permits jousting. Various Jewish religious authorities have used this ruling to teach that if someone participates in sports voluntarily, aware of the dangers of injury, then there is no liability. Athletes are permitted by Jewish tradition to participate in sports, even dangerous sports.

I was never athletic enough to participate in any sports that might be deemed dangerous. My parents, like many Jewish parents of that era, taught that is better to own the football team than to play on the football team. Still sports, whether the Olympics or the National Football League, add a dimension

of joy to our lives. Regarding the Superbowl, my only regret is that my wife's family, living in Boston, were disappointed that the New England Patriots lost. But I congratulate my online chess opponent, who lives outside Seattle and is a huge Seahawks fan.