

Shabbat Shalom
from Rabbi Michael Gold

Candle Lighting Time

Fri. 7:28 pm

Services

Thurs. April 16 8:30 am Minyan followed by Bagels and Bible
The Thursday Morning minyan followed by Bagels and Bible will continue until the
end of April.

Sat. April 18 9:30 am Shabbat Morning Service
Israel Independence Day (Yom Atzmaut) begins Tuesday night April 21 and
continues through Wednesday night April 22.

As war continues with Iran and Hezbollah, we pray for peace for the United States,
Israel, and innocent people everywhere.

PARSHAT TAZRIA-METZORA
WORDS HAVE CONSEQUENCES

“It is the plague of leprosy, he shall pronounce the person (ritually)
impure.” (Leviticus 13:3)

I was looking at Facebook and something strange and upsetting popped up. It was a discussion page run by the Quakers. (I am not a Quaker and have never been to a Friends meeting, so I do not know why it appeared in my account.) Someone wrote, why are we allowing Zionists on this page?

I had to respond. I threw out a question – “why does the belief that the Jewish people have the right to a Jewish state go against Quaker beliefs?” My simple comment unleashed a slew of hateful comments, although some people defended me. People wrote that Quakerism is a religion of peace, while Israel is a nation of war. Quakers are pacifists while Israel is militaristic. Zionism is a white supremacist movement. It is a racist movement. It is a colonial movement. And the one that irks me most - it is a genocidal movement. Using the term “genocide” cheapens its meaning. Jews were the victim of genocide. If Israel were committing genocide against the Palestinians, why does Israel have Palestinian Supreme Court Justices, members of the Knesset (the Israel parliament), professors, doctors, lawyers, and even Palestinian soldiers in the Israel Defense Force (I.D.F.)?

I made a few more comments defending Zionism. I mentioned that I do not necessarily support every action of the current Israeli government. But I do support

the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state. A few people agreed with me; I guess there are some pro-Zionist Quakers. But the majority kept up its barrage against Zionism, Israel, and in my mind, Jews. I finally left the Facebook feed with the realization, as a non-Quaker I do not belong there.

I realized that the argument lacked any kind of nuance about the complexities of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The world was seen as black and white, good and bad. Palestinians were good and Israel was bad. And so, they threw out words like racist, colonialist, and genocidal.

Words have meaning and misusing words can cause pain. I am aware of the scene in *Through the Looking Glass* where Humpty Dumpty says to Alice, "When I use a word... it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less." But the misuse of words can hurt. And people are using hurtful words to describe Israel, words that are often inaccurate. Because of these words, Quakers and many others can say, Zionists not welcome here.

In this week's portion we have the strange laws of an ancient skin disease, often mistranslated "leprosy." The Hebrew for this disease is *metzora*, which the Rabbis identified with *motzi shem ra*, "spreading an evil report." They give the example of Miriam, sister of Moses, who spread an evil report about Moses' wife. She broke out with this skin disease. The Israelites had to send her out of the camp and Moses said one of the shortest prayers in history, *el na refa na la*, "God please heal her."

Words can hurt. And the misuse of words can hurt most seriously. Reasonable people can discuss Israel and the Palestinians, Israeli policies, or even Zionism. But it must be done respectfully, without using words laden with negative connotations. Long ago the Rabbis warned of the danger of misusing words. They tied it to this skin disease. These ancient Rabbinic thoughts are as relevant today.