

**Shabbat Shalom
from Rabbi Michael Gold**

Candle Lighting Time

Fri. Evening 7:50 pm

Services Sat. May 30 9:30 AM

**PARSHAT NASO
TO LIFT UP OR TO PULL DOWN**

“God spoke to Moses, Take a census (*Naso*) of the Gershonites also, by their ancestral house and by their clans.” (Numbers 4:21-22)

The Hebrew word *naso*, the name of this portion, is translated “take a census.” But technically, the word means “to lift up.” By taking a census of the tribe of Levi, Moses is lifting them up and noting their importance. Each clan has a role in carrying the tabernacle through the wilderness. Each individual counts as someone important.

The idea of humans lifting up other humans is vital to the Biblical understanding of humanity. That is the importance of the term *naso*. In fact, the Hebrew word for a wedding is *nisuin*, a plural form of “lifting up.” The act of marriage is when two people lift each other up, each seeing the importance of the other in his or her life. At one point the bride was literally carried into the room. Perhaps that is the reason why it is customary at a Jewish wedding to lift the couple up on chairs and dance with them. We lift them up, reflecting the fact that they are lifting up one another.

The importance of lifting one another up goes beyond the wedding hall. That is the power behind Josh Groban’s most famous song *You Raise Me Up*. “You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains. You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas. I am strong, when I am on your shoulders. You raise me up to more than I can be.” He sang this at Superbowl 38 in tribute to the Space Shuttle Columbia crew who had lost their lives in a tragic accident.

Sadly, we live in an era where it is far more popular to pull people down than to raise them up. We demonize people, particularly those with whom we disagree politically or religiously. Regarding politics, conservatives put down progressives and progressives put down conservatives, and everyone puts down moderates. We live in an age where one can boycott family members over their vote at the last election. Yale University psychiatrist Dr. Amanda Calhoun advised people to cut ties with their family over Christmas if they voted for President

Trump. People whose politics differ from our own are seen not simply as political rivals but inherently evil.

Similarly, religion can make us more intolerant of others. The late Tom Lehrer could humorously sing in the late 60's his song National Brotherhood Week. "Oh the Protestants hate the Catholics and the Catholics hate the Protestants, and the Hindus hate the Muslims, and everybody hates the Jews." Today the lyrics are no longer humorous. Not in a world where two teenagers could enter a mosque in San Diego and kill three men including a security guard. Not in a world where someone near Detroit could drive a truck filled with guns and explosives into a synagogue filled with children. Thank God a security guard stopped him. But in a world filled with hate, every religious institution including my own synagogue needs an armed security guard.

Those with whom we disagree, whether on politics, religion, or any other subject, are not the enemies. They are human beings created in the image of God. We can argue. We can disagree without demonizing the other. We have two choices in life. We can either lift one another up, as is the title of this week's Torah portion. Or we can pull one another down, which is happening more and more frequently. The question is, how will we choose to live our lives.