

**Shabbat Shalom
from Rabbi Michael Gold**

Candle Lighting Time
Fri. Evening 7:54 pm

Services Sat. June 6 9:30 AM

I read that there is a new national organization of anti-Zionist synagogues, Jewish organizations, and rabbis. If Zionism means the belief in a Jewish state in the traditional Jewish homeland, then anti-Zionist is the belief that such a Jewish state should not exist. I suppose these groups believe that Israel ought to disappear and the 7 million Jews who live there should go elsewhere. (Arafat wanted to push them into the sea.)

I understand the presence of antisemites on the progressive left (Zohran Mamdani) and reactionary right (Tucker Carlson). But it is deeply disturbing when Jews proclaim the same ideas. May Israel find peace and flourish.

Here is my message for this week.

PARSHAT BEHAALOTECHA

WHAT IS LIGHT?

“The Lord spoke to Moses saying, Speak to Aaron and say to him, when you mount the lamps, let the seven lamps give light at the front of the lampstand.”
(Numbers 8:1-2)

The beginning of this portion is read twice a year, this week and on the last day of Hanukkah. The haftarah is also done twice a year, this week and on the Shabbat of Hanukkah. Both speak of the lighting of a seven branched lampstand or menorah. (This is different from the lampstand we use on Hanukkah which has nine branches.) It was the responsibility of the priests to keep the lamps always lit.

Light is a powerful metaphor used not only in Judaism but in many other spiritual traditions. Plato in his famous allegory of the cave spoke about the light that shines creating the reflection on the wall, light as the ultimate reality. Even in our modern language when we speak of some kind of human understanding, we say that someone “saw the light.” Cartoonists use a light bulb going on to symbolize an idea. Light is a metaphor for God, spirit, the soul, or as I use it in my own writing, the mind or consciousness. The book of Proverbs teaches that “the

soul of man is the light of God.” (Proverbs 20:27)

If light is such a powerful metaphor for God or the soul, it is worthy to ask the question what exactly is light. On the most basic level, light is an electro-magnetic wave. Visible light is a tiny part of the electro-magnetic spectrum. There are waves with much lower energy and longer wave lengths such as radio waves and microwaves. There are waves with much higher energy and shorter wave lengths such as x-rays and gamma rays. Our eyes evolved to perceive a tiny part of this spectrum of waves which constantly surround us.

Calling light a wave already creates mysteries. First, light can also be a particle. Einstein discovered particles of light called photons. But can something be both a particle and a wave? The answer is yes, but it depends on what we are looking for. The act of observation decides whether light will behave like a particle or a wave. This is one of the great mysteries of quantum mechanics. And this is one reason the famous physicist Richard Feynman said, “Those who are not shocked when they come across quantum theory cannot possibly have understood it.” Light is a mystery, but the mysteries are only beginning.

If light is a wave, what is waving? In the ocean the waters are waving; with sound air molecules are waving. But light travels through a vacuum at a constant rate of speed. What is waving? Einstein sat in the patent office in Bern Switzerland thinking about light. What if he went faster and faster, trying to catch up and ride beside a ray of light. The speed of light would remain constant. So, Einstein theorized that time would slow down and space would become narrower. Space and time are not absolutes but vary with the speed of travel. Out of this Einstein came up with his theory of special relativity.

It would be impossible to catch up to the light. As he went faster his mass would increase and if he caught up to the light, he would have infinite mass. But what if he could catch up with the light? Riding beside a wave of light, time and space would disappear altogether. Light is something that exists beyond time and space, in some spiritual dimension that we cannot even imagine. We may look at light in this world. But there is something other-worldly, non-spatial and non-temporal, almost spiritual about light. No wonder that light is probably the best metaphor for the spiritual dimension of life.

It is popular today to teach that we live in a physical world of matter in motion in time and in space. The universe is this and nothing more. Light seems to point to some other dimension of reality. Call it God or mind or consciousness or the soul. There is something beyond this world. It was the responsibility of the priests to keep the lights lit, to make sure that the world would never forget this spiritual dimension. These ideas are as important today as they were in the ancient Temple. As Peter, Paul, and Mary famously sang, “Don’t let the lights go

out.”