

Shabbat Shalom
from Rabbi Michael Gold

Candle Lighting Time
Fri. Evening 7:59 pm

Services Sat. June 27 9:30 AM Shabbat Morning

Tisha B'Av – Evening services for Tisha B'Av will take place Wed. July 22 at 7:30 pm. This is the saddest day of the Jewish year, where we commemorate the destruction of both Temples in Jerusalem and the other tragedies that have occurred throughout history. It is a full fast day (some Conservative Jews fast only through the early afternoon, recognizing that the tragedies have been mitigated by the founding of Israel.) In the evening we pray in a somber tone, read the book of Lamentations, and chant sad poems known as *kinot*. In terms of its mood and melodies, I find the evening of Tisha B'Av to be one of the most beautiful services of the year.

PARSHAT HUKKAT – BALAK
'TIS A PUZZLEMENT

“The priest shall wash his garments and bathe in water; after that the priest may reenter the camp, but he shall be impure till evening.” (Numbers 19:7)

Most of you know that I love classic Broadway musicals. One of the great musicals is Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The King and I*, based on the book *Anna and the King of Siam*. In the musical, the king, famously portrayed by the late Yul Brynner, sings regarding the difficulties of his role, “'Tis a Puzzlement.” Life is often not clear and logical, but rather a great puzzlement.

The Rabbi's recognized this at the beginning of this portion. It contains the very strange law of the *para aduma* or red heifer. A person who becomes impure by contact with a dead body must be purified in order to reenter the Temple area. The ashes of a red heifer were used, mixed with water and various plants. A priest would pour the mixture on a person who was impure, making them pure again. But the very act of pouring the ashes would make the priest himself impure. That which purifies the impure also makes the pure impure. Even the great King Solomon, traditionally the wisest man who ever lived, admitted that he was puzzled by this strange law. The Rabbis said that it was put in the Torah as a *chok*, a law beyond

any human understanding. It is meant to teach us that not everything in life is logical. Perhaps we humans are not meant to understand everything.

I love logic. It reminds me of mathematics which was my major when I was in college, long ago. For several years I taught "Introduction to Logic" at Miami Dade College. But the college eventually discontinued the class; too many students found it too difficult. I even found it difficult, and I was the professor. But perhaps more important, life is not always logical. To quote the King of Siam, "'tis a puzzlement."

We can see this lack of logic in the most fundamental laws of the universe, quantum mechanics. Einstein discovered that light is made up of little particles called photons. Send a single photon through two slits close together, logically it should go through one slit or the other. But it does not. The particle of light goes through both slits. This was one of the many factors that deeply bothered Einstein about quantum mechanics. It is not logical. Einstein said regarding this new theory, "God does not play dice with the universe." Another great physicist Niels Bohr responded, "Einstein, stop telling God what to do." On the most fundamental level, the universe is not logical.

We human beings expect other human beings to be logical. But we quickly realize that logic eludes us. Let me give one example from the current world of political discourse. Genocide is the attempt to kill off an entire people. On October 7, 2023, when Hamas attacked innocent Israelis including hundreds of young people at a music festival, it was clear from their writing. Their goal was genocide, to kill every Israeli and if possible, every Jew. They killed 1200 people that day, and those who were not killed were taken hostage. Women were raped and sexually abused. Israel reacted to these events as any other country would have reacted.

So, who is being accused of genocide? Not the original perpetrators from Hamas. Instead, Israel is accused of genocide, most recently by the mayor of New York City, the city with the largest Jewish population in the world. Mayor Mamdani publicly accused Israel of genocide and called the pro-Israel lobby AIPAC "dark money monsters." Following his words, every candidate who he supported won in the Democratic primary yesterday. There is no logic. Hamas commits genocide, Israel is accused of genocide, and those who accuse Israel win the election. 'Tis a puzzlement.

I like to believe the world makes sense and that logic still runs supreme. But perhaps this strange law of the red cow comes to teach us, do not expect logic to reign. Today many mathematicians speak of "fuzzy logic," logic that is not quite logical. Today we live in a world of fuzzy logic.