

**Shabbat Shalom
from Rabbi Michael Gold**

Candle Lighting Time
Fri. Evening 7:50 pm
Services Saturday August 1 9:30 am

Here is my message for this week.

**PARSHAT EKEV
MY BAR MITZVAH**

“And if you do obey these rules and observe them carefully, the Lord your God will maintain faithfully for you the covenant that He made an oath with your fathers.”

(Deuteronomy 7:12)

Most years I chant the haftarah for this week’s portion, whether I am at home or traveling. First, my mother’s yahrzeit falls on or around this portion (this year it actually falls on Shabbat. She has been gone over thirty years.) The other reason I chant this haftarah is that it was my bar mitzvah portion – too many years ago.

I became a bar mitzvah at a very small Conservative synagogue in West Los Angeles. I doubt that it still exists. At the time I was told that I did a good job chanting my portion. A few people even said, “You are going to grow up to be a rabbi.” I had no interest in being a rabbi and dismissed their words. Who knows where life will take us?

During the next several years I was far from the ideal candidate for any kind of Jewish leadership. I dropped out of Confirmation class and only went to United Synagogue Youth (USY) if there was a dance. I was active in a teenage folk-dance group, an activity that brought me to Yugoslavia for a folk-dance festival when I was nineteen. My involvement with ethnic dances also taught me to love Israeli dancing, leading to a visit to Israel, a year study in Israel, and eventually after much soul-searching, rabbinical school. But during my bar mitzvah year being a rabbi was far from my thoughts.

Looking back, I wonder whether there was anything during that year that may have pointed me towards the rabbinate. I remember one thing. During much of the following year, my tiny Conservative synagogue struggled to keep a minyan going Saturday mornings. Often, they would call my dad and me to come down and help make a minyan (at that time, ten Jewish men necessary for prayer). We would go together or, if my dad was working, I rode my bike

over. We went when they needed us, until at the age of fourteen our family moved out of the neighborhood.

Looking back, I realized that I became interested in Judaism because I was needed. They needed a body in synagogue to help make ten. No one asked whether I enjoyed the prayers, followed the prayers, or could learn to lead the prayers. Going on Saturday was not about me and my needs. Rather it was about what the synagogue needed. When someone feels needed, they begin to see that something is important.

I think about these memories as I serve as a rabbi of my own synagogue. We often try to sell people on the synagogue by how it will meet their needs. It is a place to connect spiritually. It is a place to educate your children, and yourself. It is a place of comfort during difficult times and a place to share your joy during happy times. It is important for socializing with other Jews. All of these are true. But perhaps the most important point we ought to make in selling the synagogue is a simple one – we need you.

Jews need other Jews to be Jewish. When people feel needed, they can start to connect. When people feel needed, they become important. One of the great pieces of wisdom of Jewish tradition is that you need ten Jews to properly conduct worship services. Our tradition forces Jews, who otherwise might not be there, to make a commitment and come join in. It makes people feel needed.

This week's portion is called *ekev*, which literally means "heel." Things follow on the heel of other things. Actions have consequences. Perhaps the best translation of this portion is that there are consequences to actions. Sometimes we do not know the consequences of our actions until years later.

Over sixty years ago, a struggling synagogue called a thirteen-year-old boy to come down on Saturday morning and help make a minyan. That boy grew up to be a rabbi. Perhaps the beginning of being drawn towards this career was that sense of being needed.