

**Shabbat Shalom and Happy Fourth of July  
from Rabbi Michael Gold**

Candle Lighting Time  
Fri. Evening 8:00 pm

Services Sat. July 4 9:30 AM

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.

Happy Fourth of July as we celebrate the 250<sup>th</sup> birthday of the United States of America.

**PARSHAT PINCHAS  
PICKING A LEADER**

“God answered Moses, “Single out Joshua son of Nun, an inspired man, and lay your hand upon him.” (Numbers 27:18)

How do you pick a political leader? In this week's Torah portion, it is time for Moses to pass the leadership to someone new. The obvious choice would be Pinchas, the grandson of Aaron, for whom this portion is named. But Pinchas is a man of passion and violence, putting the ringleaders to death of the Midianite-led orgy. Someone more stable and rational was required. God chose Joshua the son of Nun, who would lead the conquest of the land.

How do we choose leaders? In ancient Greece, Plato called for a Republic led by philosopher kings (and queens), people who dedicated their lives to learning. Plato did not believe in democracy, considering it mob rule. It was the mob who had put Socrates to death. Plato was an elitest, believing that an aristocracy of learned people should rule the nation. Aristotle also rejected democracy, advocating an aristocracy of virtuous political leaders. Historically, it is

doubtful that any nation adopted the political ideas of Plato or Aristotle.

Through most of history, political leadership was believed to be the divine right of kings. Kings, and sometimes queens, were chosen by God and ruled with absolute power. In Renaissance Italy, Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* regarding political leadership, teaching that it is better to be feared than loved. A political leader must do what is necessary to hold on to power. Only with the Enlightenment were these ideas of political leadership challenged.

Thomas Hobbes believed in a social contract, that without very strong political leaders, life would be a war of everyone against everyone. For Hobbes, people are basically evil, and life in nature is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” In his *Leviathan*, he called for a very strong government built to keep the peace. It is only another Enlightenment thinker, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who taught that people are basically good, and they ought to pick a leader by the “general will” of the people. With Rousseau, we have the beginning of modern democracy.

That brings me to the United States. This Shabbat we celebrate 250 years, a quarter of a millennium of America’s independence from the brutality of King George III. In America, we pick political leaders including the president by democracy. 45 different men have served as president of the United States since George Washington. (We are still waiting for a woman). Washington made it very clear that he did not want to be a king. And somehow, decade by decade, we have held free elections. Many of us may not like the results of these elections. But four years later, we can always elect someone new. That is the greatness of America. A woman once asked Benjamin Franklin, is this new nation a monarchy or a republic? He famously answered, “A republic, if you can keep it.”

As we celebrate the birthday of the United States this Shabbat, perhaps we should take a moment to appreciate the greatness of our nation. Is it perfect? Of course not. To quote the wonderful comedian Bill Maher, “That is why it is called America, not utopia.” But we have free elections and the right to choose our political leaders. Most countries of the world do not have such elections.

I am not a soccer fan, so I am watching the FIFA World Cup from a distance. I am watching how fans come to America from around the world and are celebrating our nation. They walk through Costco in amazement and send cases of ranch salad dressing back to their home countries. (I never realized ranch was such a treat. I like thousand island.) These fans seem to appreciate America in a way that too many of us take for granted.

This is a weekend to celebrate the freedom, democracy, and economic opportunities of America. This is a country that allowed my grandparents to come as immigrants from Eastern Europe and allowed me to be raised in freedom. I

treasure the fact that I have the freedom to vote for my political leader in the next election. On this Fourth of July, may God bless the United States of America.