

Shabbat Shalom
from Rabbi Michael Gold

Candle Lighting Time
Fri. Evening 7:27 pm

Services

Saturday August 29 9:30 am

On Thursday morning Sept. 3 at 8:30 am we will have a minyan. (Mark Kotok's father's yahrzeit). Let us know if you can come.

PARSHAT KEE TAVO
ALWAYS LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

"These are the words of the covenant, which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the people of Israel in the land of Moab, beside the covenant which he made with them in Horeb." (Deuteronomy 28:69)

Monty Python used to sing, "Always look on the bright side of life." The song is deeply humorous, but it reflects an ancient Jewish idea. One must always see the cup as half full. One must always follow the mitzvah of *hakarat tov* "searching for the good." For a people who have suffered so much in history, Judaism remains strangely upbeat and optimistic. That is why the national anthem of the State of Israel is *Hatikva*, a song that means "the hope."

A few years ago, I read Rabbi Joseph Telushkin's wonderful book *Rebbe*, the story of the late Lubavitcher Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson. I often disagree with Chabad's approach to Judaism, but I admire the man. Telushkin shared one fascinating insight. The Rebbe would never speak words that have any negative connotation. He brings the example of the Hebrew word for hospital, *Beit Holim*, literally "House of the Sick." He would not use that term. Instead, he called it *Beit Refuah*, "House of Healing." The former name has negative connotations, the latter positive.

This optimistic attitude is reflected in Jewish law. For example, if a funeral procession and a wedding procession meet at a crossroads, the wedding always takes precedent. Later the Rabbis would teach that we do not cancel a wedding for a funeral. This hit home in my own family. My wife's grandmother died a week before our wedding. My wife's mother got up from *shiva* to celebrate our special day. We would not postpone our celebration. In a similar way, the joyous festivals of the Jewish year cut off *shiva*, the traditional week of mourning. The cup is always half-full, not half-empty.

There is a powerful hint of this idea in the portion we read this week. The portion contains a long list of horrible curses that will befall the people Israel if they do not obey God's covenant. The list contains every tragic event that could occur in the ancient days

when the Torah was written. Traditionally, when this part of the Torah is read in the synagogue, it is read in a subdued voice very quickly. But the fascinating law is that one is not permitted to end this reading in the middle. One is not allowed to end a Torah reading on a negative note. One finishes the entire section (54 verses) then ends with an upbeat verse about God's covenant.

By Jewish law, it is never permitted to end a reading on a negative note. Often at the end of a reading, we will go backwards and end with the last upbeat, positive verse. One must always walk away looking at the bright side of life, even after reading the long list of curses this week. That is why I have never been a rabbi who dwells on Jewish suffering. We need to observe the sadness of Holocaust Memorial Day and Tisha B'Av. But even more important, we need to celebrate the happiness of Purim and Simchat Torah.

I have often met two kinds of people as I go through life. Some see the negative in everything. If something can go wrong, it will go wrong. Such people remind me of Eeyore the donkey in the Winnie the Pooh books. He always looks gloomy and depressed. On the other hand, I meet people who are upbeat and positive. The Rabbis of the Talmud tell stories about Nachum Gam Zu. He was called that name because whatever happens, he would respond, *gam zu l'tova* "this too is for the good." I love Eeyore, but it is much more pleasant to hang out with Nachum Gam Zu. It is important to be around positive, upbeat people.

This week we read multiple curses. And yet, we do not become bogged down in those curses. We get through them and end in an upbeat note, that this is for the good. As Monty Python teaches, "Always look on the bright side of life."