

**Shabbat Shalom
from Rabbi Michael Gold**

Candle Lighting Time
Fri. Evening 7:19 pm

Services

On Thursday morning Sept. 3 at 8:30 am we will have a minyan. (Mark Kotok's father's yahrzeit).

Saturday Sept. 5 9:30 am Shabbat Services
8 pm Selichot, dessert reception featuring our choir

High Holiday Schedule

Rosh Hashana

Fri. Sept. 11 6 pm Erev Rosh Hashana, followed by dinner for those with reservations

Sat. Sept. 12 9 am 1st Day Rosh Hashana, 6 pm Mincha

Sun. Sept. 13 9 am 2nd Day Rosh Hashana, followed by Tashlich (bring bread crumbs)

Yom Kippur

Sun. Sept. 20 6:45 pm Kol Nidre

Mon. Sept 21 9 am Yom Kippur Morning, Yizkor approx. 10:30 am

4 pm Community Yizkor Service

5:45 Mincha, Neilah, shofar blowing and break fast approximately 8 pm.

For the next four Tuesday afternoons at 3 pm, I will be teaching a class at FAU OLLI program in ethics. We will explore the ethics of business, war and peace, immigration, and the environment. Here is the sign up form <https://olli.fau.edu/ollifau/Course/Course.aspx?c=983> . I hope some of you can participate.

Here is my message for this week.

**PARSHAT NITZAVIM – VAYELECH
THEREFORE, CHOOSE LIFE**

“I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore, choose life—if you and your offspring would live.” (Deuteronomy 30:19)

Suppose you see a bumper sticker on a car that says, “Therefore, Choose Life.” You would assume that the car belongs to a passionate believer in the pro-life,

anti-abortion rights movement. But in truth, the verse is simply a quote from this week's portion.

The Jewish view of abortion is more nuanced and complex. To fully analyze the Jewish position would go beyond this brief essay. In a nutshell, Judaism would disagree with the pure pro-life position which would claim that abortion is murder. It would also disagree with the pure pro-choice position that a woman can do whatever she wishes with her own body. The Rabbis have developed a careful middle ground that permits abortion in some cases but discourages it for casual reasons. But the words from this week, "therefore, choose life," go far beyond the abortion issue.

As the High Holidays approach, there is an overwhelming emphasis on how Judaism chooses life. In every service throughout the holiday period, we add the words "Remember us for *life*, King Who loves *life*, and write us in the book of *life*, for your sake, God of *life*." This one short passage from our liturgy mentions life four times. And of course, on the holidays we pray that we should be written in the Book of Life. God is a God of life. But what does that mean?

To understand, we need to acknowledge that there are two forces at work in the universe. The first is the force of death, entropy, the second law of thermodynamics, the tendency of randomness to increase and things to fall apart. As the poet William Butler Yeats put it in his poem "The Second Coming" – "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold." Every physical thing - our bodies, the earth, the sun, even the universe itself, must eventually fall apart. Scientists teach that in any closed system, entropy or randomness must increase. Death is built into the universe.

But our religious tradition teaches that there is another force at work in the universe, the force of life. Ultimately it is the force that overcomes entropy. It is the force that goes from randomness to organization. It is the force that made random carbon atoms become organic chemicals, then become one-celled animals, then become tissues of multi-celled animals, then become higher mammals, and finally human beings. We are here because there is a force of life at work in the universe. Entropy teaches that the universe goes from order to chaos. The force of life teaches that the universe can go from chaos to order. That is the meaning of the creation story in Genesis, moving from chaos to order. The French philosopher Henri Bergson gave that force of life a name, *élan vital*.

The words "therefore, choose life" mean that in a world where too many people choose the force of death, we should choose the force of life. Where many choose hate, we should choose love. Where many choose violence, we should choose compassion. Where many choose war, we should choose peace. Where many choose to injure, we should choose to heal. If God is the source of that force of life, we should also become part of the force of life.

The Torah teaches that God sets before us a blessing and a curse. We are commanded to choose the blessing. If the High Holidays teaches that God is a God of

life, we should be God's partners in choosing life. There is a High Holiday story of the man who approaches God, claiming that the world is full of pain and suffering. "God, why do you not do something about it?!" God answers, "I did do something about it. I sent you." God sent us to be a force of life.