

Shabbat Shalom
from Rabbi Michael Gold

Candle Lighting Time
Fri. Evening 6:27 pm

Services
Saturday Oct. 24 9:30 am

PARSHAT LECH LECHA
PARIS IS BURNING

“Now the inhabitants of Sodom were very wicked sinners against God.” (Genesis 13:13)

Several years ago, my flight home from Israel was cancelled. I was given an alternative flight, but only if I was willing to spend the night in Paris at my own expense. I said that I can live with that. Paris is a magnificent city.

The local Conservative rabbi in Paris met me and gave me a walking tour of Jewish Paris. But first he warned me, “Do not wear a yarmulke here. It is too dangerous.” I wore a hat. Since then, Paris has only become more dangerous. Today there are riots not simply in Paris but throughout France. Often Jewish businesses are targeted. The rioters wave their Palestinian flags as they create havoc and burn cars and buildings. In Limoges they burnt down the 143-year-old beautiful town hall that had survived World Wars I and II. Anarchy is reigning on the streets of France and is spreading to other countries such as Italy.

Who are these rioters? According to news reports, it began with students protesting inadequate government funding of public schools. But the rioters multiplied. First, there were immigrants and children of immigrants, mostly Muslim, expressing their dream of overturning the values of the West and establishing a Caliphate. Then there were leftists seeking to overthrow classical liberal values with a socialist vision of the future of France. These two groups, Islamists and leftists, make strange bedfellows, but they are joining forces in much of the Western world including the United States. Look at who participated in the George Floyd riots in the United States or all the pro-Palestine “from the river to the sea” demonstrations.

Sadly, these rioters want to overturn the entire liberal tradition of the West. They reject ideas with roots in Greek philosophy and Biblical values, further developed by the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. The West certainly has not been perfect. One can accuse Western values of permitting slavery and colonization. But those same Western values have helped overturn slavery and challenge colonialization. But today, one does not

need to travel to Paris to see how the values of the West are being challenged. Simply visit any Ivy League University.

In this week's portion we see what happens in a place where evil reigns. Abraham is involved in a conflict with his nephew Lot, so Lot separates from his uncle and moves to Sodom. Sodom is a city of great evil. In this week's portion a civil war breaks out and Lot is taken captive. Abraham must go to war to rescue his nephew. Then in next week's portion, we read of the total destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot and his two daughters barely escape, while Lot's wife turns into a pillar of salt. This is what happens in a place of evil.

Paris is not yet a place of evil and I pray that it will not suffer the fate of Sodom. But there is the potential for great evil there. One simply needs to recall the 2015 murder of 12 people by Muslim extremists at the Paris satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* to show what can happen in this beautiful city. Paris is beautiful. I have wonderful memories of visiting when I was in college, walking along the Champs-Élysée carrying a long French bread. But today Paris is burning.

The West is not perfect. But the West gave the world a beautiful liberal view of society that is under attack today. We must defend it and be proud of it. Or what is happening in Paris today may soon happen in New York and Los Angeles.