

RABBI'S MESSAGE

A Time for Dedication

A well-respected author and scholar, Ellen Frankel, calls Shavuot the “neglected stepchild of Jewish holidays.” It doesn’t have the notoriety or pizzazz of Rosh Hashana, Hanukkah, Passover or even Purim. College students don’t “come home for Shavuot.” Many modern Jews don’t know when it occurs or what it celebrates. And yet, it is a very important holiday. It is one of the *Shalosh Regalim* – the three holidays in which ancient Jews made pilgrimages to Jerusalem – and commemorates the receiving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai seven weeks after Passover. In a sense, Shavuot is the holiday that defines us as a people, connecting to the First Commandment, “I am the LORD, your GD, who led you out of Egypt, the house of bondage.” (Exodus, 20:2) Our relationship with GD is directly tied to being redeemed from slavery and partnering with the Divine Presence on our journey through life.

Shavuot traditions are not as well-known as those for other holidays, but equally significant. One is to read the Book of Ruth. Ruth is one of my favorite stories in the Bible, which includes the famous promise from Ruth to her mother-in-law, Naomi, “Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live; your people will be my people, your GD will be my GD.” (Ruth, 1:16) Both women experienced the tragic loss of their husbands, and pledged to stay together to provide mutual support. Ruth and Naomi’s dedication to each other is like the relationship that GD and the Jewish people share with each other. Despite periodic hardships and tragedy, we pledge to remain devoted.

It’s not always easy. There are times when confusion and doubts may gnaw at us. There are times when GD’s plans seem mysterious to us. We may even feel anger. Remembering how Ruth and Naomi supported each other is a good reminder that the best way to face adversity is together.

This leads to one of the other traditions of Shavuot: learning. Since Torah is about learning, it has become traditional to attend special late night study sessions. Legends teach that the Israelites received the Torah at 4.00 a.m.; so many dedicated Jews stay up in study groups until that time. The Ten Commandments are simple statements that have complicated explanations. In order to fully understand GD’s full intentions for us, we must dedicate ourselves to study.

The actual holiday of Shavuot is Sivan 6-7 on the Hebrew calendar, which means that this year it begins Tuesday night, May 14 and lasts through sundown May 16. Temple Beth Torah will showcase our commitment to learning at a special Shabbat service Friday night, May 17. All of our Religious School students will participate in the service, which will be led by the Dalet class, taught by George Owens. The younger classes will lead some of

the songs and prayers with leadership from the Dalet students. The highlight of the evening will include Dalet students reading the Ten Commandments in Hebrew and giving their own explanations. As we learn from our young people, we will also be demonstrating our commitment to the future of Judaism.

I hope everyone can attend this special Shabbat evening (which will include an unbelievable oneg!), as we can each renew our dedication to Torah, to learning and to encouraging our youth.

L'shalom,

Dan Gordon