

## RABBI'S MESSAGE

### TEN COMMANDMENTS AND SIX QUESTIONS

Many think of Passover, the Exodus from Egypt, as the defining moment in Jewish history. Seven weeks later, we observe another important holiday, *Shavuot*, which literally means “weeks.” *Shavuot* commemorates receiving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. Tradition teaches that all of us were there together to witness it; our collective acceptance brought us together as a people. I am personally looking forward to *Shavuot* a little differently this year, as I will be spending it in Israel. This is the first time I have ever been able to be in the Holy Land during a major Jewish holiday. Loren and I will be able to visit the Western Wall, remembering that collective bond of commitment. Connecting the past to the future, we will then have lunch with a “young man” from my past, Rabbi Leon Morris and his family. When Leon was 12 years old and I was 20, he attended the summer camp where I was drama director, and he performed in the plays I directed. Now, **Rabbi** Morris directs one of the most respected institutes of non-denominational Jewish learning in the world, as president of PARDES Institute. I couldn't be more proud!

*Shavuot* is a time to renew commitment. Appropriate for today, it comes at the end of our modern “school year.” This is a time when, three quarters of the way through the Jewish calendar, we can begin to think about rededicating ourselves for the upcoming High Holidays. It's a great time to look back and to look forward.

The Talmud teaches us that at the end of our lives, we will be asked six questions to demonstrate our accomplishments in this world.

- 1) Were you honest in business?
- 2) Did you make time for learning?
- 3) Did you engage in procreation?
- 4) Did you hope for salvation?
- 5) Did you add to the wisdom of the world?
- 6) Did you have a mystical relationship with G-d?

While each of these questions may seem simple at first glance, they are questions we can all look at and commit ourselves to strive for positive answers.

***Were you honest in business?*** All of us have business relationships, whether as consumers or proprietors. When we represent ourselves honestly, we are true to who we are. Our identity is sacred, and we must always be careful to represent ourselves that way.

***Did you make time for learning?*** *Pirke Avot* (Ethics of our Ancestors) says, “Do not say, ‘When I have time, I will study,’ because you will never have time.” There are many avenues available to all of us for learning. Whether we learn from the Torah during Shabbat services, take a class, or merely engage others in conversations that involve thinking, listening and respecting the opinions of others. Between the two Sunday morning classes, TORCH and “Spiritual Travelers,” we have more adults learning together than ever before. It's a great way to satisfy another saying from *Pirke Avot* (the book TORCH is studying): “Don't separate yourself from community.”

***Did you engage in procreation?*** This is not only about having children. Procreation, in this respect, means promoting positive influence on others. Anyone who we encounter is someone who can learn from us. We have engaged in procreation each time something we do or say has an influence on others. Therefore, we must be careful about our words, for people are learning from us all the time.

***Did you hope for salvation?*** The 10 Commandments has one commandment that is not about action, but about emotion (Thou shalt not covet). Likewise, this list has one that is about emotion. Hope is something all of us can do. Last month, we commemorated the Holocaust, remembering a time when there was little hope, but people managed to survive and keep their faith. Hope not only keeps us alive but helps us to *really* live.

***Did you add wisdom to the world?*** Again, from *Pirke Avot*: “Who is wise? Those who can learn from everyone.” Each of us has something special to share. We never know when the things we take for granted may be just the wisdom that someone else is looking for.

***Did you have a mystical relationship with G-d?*** This may be the hardest one to measure, and clearly a life-long pursuit. Our relationships with G-d are very much like our relationships with people: intangible connections that include intense love and difficult challenges. When we remember that each human being is created in the image of God, all our human relationships become sacred.

As the school year is ending and we look at the Hebrew year 5778, we know that there are still four months before we evaluate ourselves on Rosh HaShanah. Perhaps these four months can be used to plan that in 5779, we'll take time to address each of these questions.

L'shalom,  
*Rabbi Dan Gordon*

SEE INFORMATION ON PAGE 1 ABOUT SPECIAL SHAVUOT SHABBAT MAY  
18 AND SHAVUOT CONCERT WITH CANTOR TUNITSKY ON MAY 20