

SHAVUOT

The celebration of *Shavuot* begins on Thursday evening. The Hebrew word *Shavuot* means weeks. Seven weeks after the ancient Israelites departed Egypt (marked by the celebration of *Passover*), they arrived at Mt. Sinai where Moses received the Torah (marked by the celebration of *Shavuot*).

We live in existential times. In our day, *Shavuot* has become an annual opportunity for each Jew to experience their personal Sinai moment. On a spiritual/historical level, God's revelation on Mt. Sinai was THE transforming moment for the ancient Israelite. By accepting Torah, the Israelites transitioned from slaves to free people. Jewish peoplehood was born at Sinai. To maintain a loyalty and commitment to this ancient code of ethics in our time requires a message that speaks to "me" (not "we") in "my" (not "our") day as well as to generations past.

Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg in his book **The Eternal Journey** writes, "For lovers the question is almost never, "*Did you love me then?*" It is, "*Do you love me now?*" The same is true of our relationship with God; the crucial question is not about the past, but about the present. The issue is not whether we once heard the voice of God in the Torah, but whether we hear it, heed it, and feel the love of God today."

Each of us can probably lay claim to a "Sinai moment"; a transformative experience that changed our lives forever. Maybe our *Walden Pond* occurred at a summer camp, or in the arms of a loved one. Maybe it was an inspiring teacher or special moment of prayer. Whatever, and whenever, we are different because of it. Or, are we still wandering in the desert in search of Sinai?

Shavuot is the annual opportunity for the Jew to stand at Sinai; again, experience the thunder and lightning of God's revelation, and again discover-in our day, and on our terms, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah, Moses, and the Jewish people.

- Rabbi Howard Siegel