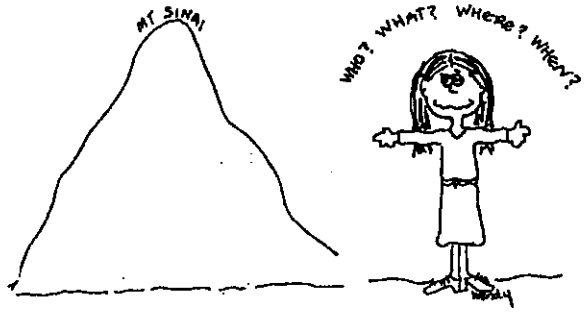
A BEGINNER CONSIDERS SHAVUOT

by Natalie Lardner

Let's refill our glasses, our eyeglasses, with scholarship and "Chag sameach!" Shavuot is a great holiday for beginners. Here we are receiving the Torah for the first time, many of us courtesy of Rabbi Buchwald. For us it's the first fruit of our beginning studies.

As a beginner of three or four years' standing and ripe for graduation (some would say overripe), I remember with pleasure the first rush of religious feeling, questions and answers and faith, that came to me through my attendance at the Beginners Service at Lincoln Square. Indeed, I still feel that pleasure as I discover more and more about Judaism and the possibility, through life-long study leading to action, of a vigorous old age–a kind of perpetual spring.

Why, then, do I still have trouble with Shavout? Many secular Jews can't tell you what Shavuot is. Until recently I had no idea. If holidays were members of a family, Shavuot would be the middle child, with a murky identity, easily lost from view. Does it commemorate the first fruits of a spring harvest when in ancient times the first wheat of the year was brought to the Holy Temple as an offering to God? Or does it commemorate the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people at Sinai?



Still a beginner, I turn to my borrowed copy of Understanding Judaism, the Basics of Deed and Creed, by Benjamin Blech. Thank you, n, this wonderful book, clear and concise, explains it all for now.

In ancient times there were three festivals that required the Jewish people to drop everything at home and head to Jerusalem *en masse*, to make an offering in the Holy Temple. The thrice-yearly pilgrimage took place on Pesach, Shavuot, and Succot. Each of these holidays commemorate a specific event in Jewish history, but each is also associated with a specific season. The Jewish calendar being a lunar calendar, these holidays would have drifted over time to different seasons if it were not for the addition of a leap month. Every few years, the month of Adar is repeated, making the holidays seasonally consistent.

So! Passover always comes in the beginning of spring. It is the holiday of liberation from slavery, from a winter of darkness, deprivation, and constraint. Ice cracks, snow melts. We eat fresh greens and hard-boiled eggs which remind us of beginnings, fertility, promise, but as yet no fruit.

Succot on the other hand comes in autumn. Observant Jews eat in booths, exposed to the elements of wind and rain. We remember our difficulties as a people, living in tents in the desert, learning to meet God's demands and accept God's help, slowly maturing as a nation until the children and grandchildren slaves could enter the promised land and reap the harvest of a long communal effort.

Shavuot comes in the middle, as spring turns into summer, when crops planted in winter bear their first fruit. In a way, the revelation at Sinai was a harvest for the Jewish people. When we first received the Torah, it was the fruit of our experience as free people moving toward a holy way of life. How could anyone forget such a momentous event and the festival that commemorates it? Well, many Jews do.

According to one version, on that fateful occasion when the Torah was given to us in the desert, we fell asleep. I'm reminded of a dear friend who starts yawning the minute our conversation shifts to something of vital importance. He suddenly remembers how tired he really is. Vital importance certainly can be overwhelming. Observant Jews today mark Shavuot by staying up all night studying Torah. Perhaps this shows that as a people we have moved forward in 3300 years, that our appreciation and understanding are greater than our predecessors'...if we stay awake.

Still, for many, revelation and the holiday that celebrates it suffer from a lack of clarity. While Pesach and Succot refer to historical events accepted as fact by Jews of every stripe and by secular historians as well, it isn't so with Shavuot. There was an Exodus of Jews from Egypt. They did wander in the desert for many years until they settled in Canaan. Knowledgeable people can provide dates. But what happened at Sinai? How was the Torah given? To whom? When? All at once or in bits? (To this last question, Rabbi Buchwald answers "Both," which, to my surprise, I understand.) How and when could Moses do all that writing on top of all his other duties? I've pictured him in a sweaty shirt, exhausted at the end of a long day, sitting down to write. Night after night. What a lot of words... even if it was a kind of automatic writing or just taking dictation. And I've wondered how did he get scrolls and ink in the middle of the desert? A miracle. As miracles go, hardly worth questioning. The big question for beginners is: was the Torah God's word or was it the work of men? Here we come to a great divide between Orthodox Jews and others.

I straddle the divide with questions. What's inspiration? Where does it come from? How is it given? What is the breath of life? Where does it come from? Where does it go? Animate and inanimate, rock, wood, plants, people, angels, God-- what are the differences? How does wood grow? How does it become a shepherd's pipe, a ship, a Stradivarius? Why?

Orthodox Jews believe that the Torah was given by God to the Jews in the desert at Sinai, on the way to the promised land. And not just to ragtag bunch of wanderers alone in the desert. No. The Torah was given in the presence of all Jewish souls that ever had been and ever would be, including future converts. Some ideas boggle the mind, but if they bypass the mind, they can take root and bear amazing fruit in our amorphous hearts.

Natalie Lardner raises people

CONGRATULATIONS AND MAZAL TOV

ENGAGEMENTS

Carol Markovici and Alex Kotlyar
Lisa Solomon and Gabriel Pivawer
Mazal Tov to parents Beverly and Gerald Pivawer

MARRIAGES

Karina Sala and Michael Bloch
Stefanie (Shira) Chait and Dr. Harry Feld

BIRTHS

Nava and Daniel Bettinger, on the birth of a boy, Jonathan
Rivkah and Shia Cohen, on the birth of a boy, Nachshon Yitzchak
Mazal Tov to grandfather, Dr. Stuart Blaustein
Andrea Spungen and Sam Laniado, on the birth of a boy, Matan Spungen
Maura and Adam Ruskin, on the birth of a girl, (correction) Aiden Shani
Debbie and Mark Rosalimsky, on the birth of a boy, Shai Binyamin
Sheindel and Yaakov Steinberg, on the birth of a girl, Yehudis

BAR/BAT MITZVAH

Emily Belfer
Mazal Tov to parents Dr. Michelle Friedman Belfer and Benjamin Belfer
Eric Joel Brief
Mazal Tov to parents Caryl Alterbaum Brief and Benjamin Brief
Mark Mayer Gottlieb
Mazal Tov to parents Wendy and Seymour Gottlieb
Joella Roland
Mazal Tov to parents Shelly Winston and Neil Roland
Aryeh Shapiro
Mazal Tov to parents Fay and Neal Shapiro
Yosef Dov Steinberg
Mazal Tov to parents Sheindel and Yaakov Steinberg

CONDOLENCES

Gerald August, on the loss of his mother, Anita August
Helen Gurvich, on the loss of her husband, Vladimir Gurvich
Sandy Lechner, on the loss of her mother, Janet Lechner
Ann-Rose Lieberman-Alfasi Lehner, on the loss of her mother, Chia Lieberman
Paula (Gelbaum) Weinberg, on the loss of her father, William Warmbrand

REFUAH SH'LEIMAH (SPEEDY RECOVERY)

Rabbi Herschel Cohen
Mrs. Martha Cohn

Diana Halprin Goodman
Salomon Helfgot
Les Nelkin
Warren Rich

CONGRATULATIONS

Sander and Tracy Gerber for being honored at the annual dinner of Chabad of the Upper West Side

SAVE THE DATES

All Night Shavuot Learn-in
Thurs. May 20, 11:30-p.m. - 6:45 a.m.

Last and First Beginners Shabbat Luncheons of the seasons -- $15
June 5, Sept. 4

Rosh Hashana
Fri-Sun Sept. 10-12

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Friday May 28, 1999 - 13th of Sivan
Services ... 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Earliest Candle Lighting ... 6:43 PM
Candle Lighting ... 8:00 PM
Mincha ... 6:45 & 8:05 PM

Shabbat May 29, 1999 - 14th of Sivan (Nasso)
Daf Yomi ... 8:00 AM
Morning services ... 7:45, 8:45 & 9:45 AM
Talmud & Bible class ... 6:55 PM
Mincha ... 7:55 PM
Shabbat Ends ... 9:00 PM
Daily Mincha & Maariv ... 8:05 PM

Monday May 31, 1999 - 16th of Sivan MEMORIAL DAY
Morning Services ... 7:05 & 8:30 AM

Friday June 4, 1999 - 20th of Sivan
Services ... 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Earliest Candle Lighting ... 6:48 PM
Candle Lighting ... 8:05 PM
Mincha ... 6:45 & 8:10 PM

Shabbat June 5, 1999 - 21st of Sivan (Beha'alotcha)
Daf Yomi ... 8:00 AM
Morning services ... 7:45, 8:45 & 9:45 AM
Talmud & Bible class ... 7:00 PM
Mincha ... 8:00 PM
Shabbat Ends ... 9:05 PM
Daily Mincha & Maariv ... 8:10 PM

Friday June 11, 1999 - 27th of Sivan
Services ... 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Earliest Candle Lighting ... 6:52 PM
Candle Lighting ... 8:09 PM
Mincha ... 6:45 & 8:15 PM

Shabbat June 12, 1999 - 28th of Sivan (Sh'lach)
Daf Yomi ... 8:00 AM
Morning services ... 7:45, 8:45 & 9:45 AM
Talmud & Bible class ... 7:05 PM
Mincha ... 8:05 PM
Shabbat Ends ... 9:09 PM
Daily Mincha & Maariv ... 8:15 PM

Monday June 14, 1999 - 30th of Sivan ROSH CHODESH
Morning Services ... 7:00 & 7:40 AM

Tuesday June 15, 1999 - 1st of Tamuz ROSH CHODESH
Morning Services ... 7:00 & 7:40 AM

Friday June 18, 1999 - 4th of Tamuz
Services ... 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Earliest Candle Lighting ... 6:55 PM
Candle Lighting ... 8:12 PM
Mincha ... 6:45 & 8:15 PM

Shabbat June 19, 1999 - 5th of Tamuz (Korach)
Daf Yomi ... 8:00 AM
Morning services ... 7:45, 8:45 & 9:45 AM
Talmud & Bible class ... 7:05 PM
Mincha ... 8:05 PM
Shabbat Ends ... 9:12 PM
Daily Mincha & Maariv ... 8:20 PM

Friday June 25, 1999 - 11th of Tamuz
Services ... 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Earliest Candle Lighting ... 6:56 PM
Candle Lighting ... 8:13 PM
Mincha ... 6:45 & 8:20 PM

Shabbat June 26, 1999 - 12th of Tamuz (Chukat-Balak)
Daf Yomi ... 8:00 AM
Morning services ... 7:45, 8:45 & 9:45 AM
Talmud & Bible class ... 7:10 PM
Mincha ... 8:10 PM
Shabbat Ends ... 9:13 PM
Daily Mincha & Maariv ... 8:20 PM

Thursday July 1, 1999 - 17th of Tamuz SHIV'A ASSAR B'TAMMUZ
Fast Begins ... 4:16 AM
Morning Services ... 7:00 & 7:30 AM
Mincha ... 8:05 PM
Fast Ends ... 9:02 PM

Friday July 2, 1999 - 18th of Tamuz
Services ... 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Earliest Candle Lighting ... 6:56 PM
Candle Lighting ... 8:13 PM
Mincha ... 6:45 & 8:20 PM

Shabbat July 3, 1999 - 19th of Tamuz (Pinchas)
Morning services ... 7:45, 8:45 & 9:45 AM
Bible class ... 7:10 PM
Daf Yomi ... 7:25 PM
Mincha ... 8:10 PM
Shabbat Ends ... 9:13 PM
Daily Mincha & Maariv ... 8:20 PM

Sun July 4, 1999 - 20th of Tamuz INDEPENDENCE DAY
Morning Services ... 7:10 & 8:30 AM

Monday July 5, 1999 - 21st of Tamuz INDEPENDENCE DAY OBSERVED
Morning Services ... 7:05 & 8:30 AM

Friday July 9, 1999 - 25th of Tamuz
Services ... 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Earliest Candle Lighting ... 6:54 PM
Candle Lighting ... 8:11 PM
Mincha ... 6:45 & 8:15 PM

Shabbat July 10, 1999 - 26th of Tamuz (Matot-Masei)
Morning services ... 7:45, 8:45 & 9:45 AM
Bible class ... 7:05 PM
Daf Yomi ... 7:20 PM
Mincha ... 8:05 PM
Shabbat Ends ... 9:11 PM
Daily Mincha & Maariv ... 8:15 PM

Wednesday July 14, 1999 - 1st of Av ROSH CHODESH
Morning Services ... 7:00 & 7:40 AM

Friday July 16, 1999 - 3rd of Av
Services ... 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Earliest Candle Lighting ... 6:51 PM
Candle Lighting ... 8:08 PM
Mincha ... 6:45 & 8:15 PM

Shabbat July 17, 1999 - 4th of Av (Devarim) CHAZON
Morning services ... 7:45, 8:45 & 9:45 AM
Bible class ... 7:05 PM
Daf Yomi ... 7:20 PM
Mincha ... 8:05 PM
Shabbat Ends ... 9:08 PM
Daily Mincha & Maariv ... 8:10 PM

Wednesday July 21, 1999 - 8th of Av EREV TISH'A B'AV
Mincha ... 8:10 PM
Fast Begins ... 8:22 PM
Maariv & Kinnot ... 8:53 PM

Thursday July 22, 1999 - 9th of Av TISH'A B'AV
Morning Services ... 6:30 & 8:30 AM
Early Mincha ... 1:53 PM
Mincha ... 7:50 PM
Fast Ends ... 8:52 PM

Friday July 23, 1999 - 10th of Av
Services ... 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Earliest Candle Lighting ... 6:51 PM
Candle Lighting ... 8:03 PM
Mincha ... 6:45 & 8:10 PM

Shabbat July 24, 1999 - 11th of Av (Va'etchanan) NACHAMU
Morning services ... 7:45, 8:45 & 9:45 AM
Bible class ... 7:00 PM
Daf Yomi ... 7:15 PM
Mincha ... 8:00 PM
Shabbat Ends ... 9:03 PM
Daily Mincha & Maariv ... 8:05 PM

Friday July 30, 1999 - 17th of Av
Services ... 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Earliest Candle Lighting ... 6:44 PM
Candle Lighting ... 7:56 PM
Mincha ... 6:45 & 8:00 PM

Shabbat July 31, 1999 - 18th of Av (Eikev)
Morning services ... 7:45, 8:45 & 9:45 AM
Bible class ... 6:50 PM
Daf Yomi ... 7:05 PM
Mincha ... 7:50 PM
Shabbat Ends ... 8:56 PM
Daily Mincha & Maariv ... 7:55 PM

Friday August 6, 1999 - 24th of Av
Services ... 7:10 & 7:50 A
Earliest Candle Lighting ... 6:36 P
Candle Lighting ... 7:48 P
Mincha ... 6:45 & 7:55 P

Shabbat August 7, 1999 - 25th of Av (Re'eh)
Morning services ... 7:45, 8:45 & 9:45 A
Bible class ... 6:45 P
Daf Yomi ... 7:00 P
Mincha ... 7:45 P
Shabbat Ends ... 8:48 P
Daily Mincha & Maariv ... 7:45 P

Thursday August 12, 1999 - 30th of Av ROSH CHODESH
Morning Services ... 7:00 & 7:40 A

Friday August 13, 1999 - 1st of Elul ROSH CHODESH
Morning Services ... 7:00 & 7:40 A
Earliest Candle Lighting ... 6:32 P
Candle Lighting ... 7:39 P
Mincha ... 6:45 & 7:45 P

Shabbat August 14, 1999 - 2nd of Elul (Shoftim)
Morning services ... 7:45, 8:4 A
Bible class ... :45 P
Daf Yomi ... 6:50 P
Mincha ... 7:35 P
Shabbat Ends ... 8:39 P
Daily Mincha & Maariv ... 7:35 P

Friday August 20, 1999 - 8th of Elul
Services ... 7:10 & 7:50 A
Candle Lighting ... 7:28 P
Mincha ... 7:35 P

Shabbat August 21, 1999 - 9th of Elul (Ki Teitzei)
Morning services ... 7:45, 8:45 & 9:45 A
Bible class ... 6:25 P
Daf Yomi ... 6:40 P
Mincha ... 7:25 P
Shabbat Ends ... 8:29 P
Daily Mincha & Maariv ... 7:25 P

Friday August 27, 1999 - 15th of Elul
Services ... 7:10 & 7:50 A
Candle Lighting ... 7:19 P
Mincha ... 7:25 P

Shabbat August 28, 1999 - 16th of Elul (Ki Tavo)
Morning services ... 7:45, 8:45 & 9:45 A
Bible class ... 6:15 P
Daf Yomi ... 6:30 P
Mincha ... 7:15 P
Shabbat Ends ... 8:19 P
Daily Mincha & Maariv ... 7:15 P

Friday September 3, 1999 - 22nd of Elul
Services ... 7:10 & 7:50 A
Candle Lighting ... 7:07 P
Mincha ... 7:10 P

Shabbat September 4, 1999 - 23rd of Elul (Nitzavim-Vayeilech)
Daf Yomi ... 8:00 A
Morning services ... 7:45, 8:45 & 9:45 A
Talmud & Bible class ... 6:00 P
Mincha ... 7:00 P
Shabbat Ends ... 8:07 P
Daily Mincha & Maariv ... 7:05 P
Early Selichot ... 10:00 P
Selichot Lecture ... 11:30 P
Late Selichot ... 12:54 A

Sunday September 5, 1999 - 24th of Elul
Morning Services ... 7:10 & 8:30 A

Monday September 6, 1999 - 25th of Elul LABOR DAY
Selichot & Services ... 6:40 & 7:30 A

Tuesday September 7, 1999 - 26th of Elul
Selichot & Services ... 6:40 & 7:30 A

Wednesday September 8, 1999 - 27th of Elul
Selichot & Services ... 6:4 A

Thursday September 9, 1999 - 28th of Elul
Selichot & Services ... 6:40 & 7:30 A