

JOURNEY TO SHAVUOT AND JEWISH LEARNING

David Glassberg

Every spring, we count the *Omer* on each of the forty-nine days between Pesach and Shavuot. This special period affords us the opportunity to reflect on what it means to be Jewish – to feel how we connect to our religion, our people, our history and our laws.

Learning Torah and Talmud is one of the most meaningful personal ways that I connect.

I grew up in the 1950s in a small town in northern New York State. We had a tiny, but cohesive, Jewish community. Except when there was a Bar Mitzvah (at most five times a year), our temple was closed on Saturdays. Most of the retail businesses on Main Street were owned by Jewish shopkeepers, and Saturdays were the big shopping days. On Friday nights though, my family usually went to shul.

Services always started at 8:00 pm, after the stores closed, of course.

Jewish learning in our town was hard to find. Sunday school was mandatory for me and my younger brother. The big draw, however, was the candy store across the street from our temple. Learning came second.

The situation was much the same at my college in Upstate New York. There was a very small Jewish population on campus, and no Hillel or rabbi. My only connection to Judaism then was again culinary—trips to the Jewish-owned New York Bakery in nearby Utica.

All that changed after my move to the Upper West Side in 1978. Jewish people and Jewish culture, and synagogues of all denominations, were everywhere. All this was literally at my doorstep, as I lived at the time across the street from The Jewish Center on West 86th Street.

My younger brother, who had become observant, introduced me to Lincoln Square Synagogue (LSS) in the early 1980s, where I met Rabbi Buchwald at my first LSS Friday night service. Soon thereafter, I enrolled in the LSS Beginners Service, where I learned to daven and was blessed to make many good friends. I was particularly drawn to learning, which I did with gusto, spending many hours every week attending lectures and study groups on Jewish history, Israel, Torah and Talmud. I dreamed of learning one-on-one with someone (like they do in yeshivas), but that never

happened.

Then, with a job change, I moved from New York City to a small town in Massachusetts and, once again, I found myself in a place devoid of Jewish culture and learning opportunities.

Then, one day I read about the appointment of a young rabbi to a conservative synagogue, a short drive from my home. We met for coffee. We were simpatico. We decided to learn together.

Our learning was a bit unorthodox (despite the rabbi being a former yeshiva *bocher* and an ordained Orthodox rabbi). Instead of going straight through volumes of the Talmud one at a time, we would spend several weeks or months on one subject, usually focusing on an ethical question: What does it mean to be a good father, husband, brother, friend and neighbor? What does it mean to honor one's parents? How should we treat strangers? Is it ever okay to tell a lie (for *shalom bayit*, for example)?

Thus began many rewarding years of learning together until my "Wednesdays with Avi" ended when he and his family made aliyah.

The days of counting the *Omer* are a special time - a time of spiritual preparation for the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. For me, it is also a time of reflection, much like the month of *Elul*, just before Rosh Hashana.

According to tradition, *Elul* is the month that Moses spent on Mount Sinai waiting for the second set of Ten Commandments after the sin of the Golden Calf. I often wonder how Moses spent his time up there. I like to think he learned--that he studied Torah with G-d.

There are many rewarding ways to connect to our religion and our people. Learning Torah and Talmud is one of them. Shavuot is a good time to start. You can spend the entire first night of *Shavuot* learning Torah at LSS or at your local synagogue. Go for it!

David Glassberg is a graduate of the LSS Beginners Service and a mostly retired lawyer. He lives, once again, in Manhattan.



CONGRATULATIONS AND MAZAL TOV



ENGAGEMENTS

Miriam Adler and Shimon Golish
Mazal Tov to parents, Loren and Reuven Adler
Mazal Tov to grandparents,
Sarah Leah and Lou Vyrerib
Estee Gerber and Ezra Husney
Mazal Tov to parents, Tracy and Sander Gerber
Tamara Reich and Dvir Weil
Mazal Tov to parents,
Sema and Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Reich

MARRIAGES

Gaviella Milder and Shmuel Yedidya Schwartz
Mazal Tov to parents, Elisheva and John Milder

BIRTHS

Tammy and Tzuriel Biale on the birth of a son,
Yonaton Harel
Mazal Tov to grandparents, Anne Bossewitch and
Golda and Kenneth Bossewitch
Rachel and Coby Zekry on the birth of a daughter,
Naya Ellie

BAR/BAT MITZVAH

Yuval Yair Biale
Mazal Tov to parents, Tammy and Tzuriel Biale
Mazal Tov to grandparents, Anne Bossewitch and
Golda and Kenneth Bossewitch
Hadassa
Mazal Tov to mother, Suzann Goldberg

CONDOLENCES

Family of Irving Centor [see box on other side]
Andy Dimond, on the loss of his mother, Marianne Davis
Family of Evalyn Steinbock

SPEEDY RECOVERY/REFUAH SH'LAIMA

Geraldine Katz, *Gershona Yehudit bat Rochel*
Ruth Nelkin, *Rochel bat Sarah*
Barbara Reader, *Baila bat Clarissa*
Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Reich, *Mordechai Menashe ben Henya Ruchama*
Louis Vyrerib, *Elazar HaCohen ben Malka*

CONGRATULATIONS

Rabbi Avraham Yitzchok (Tod) Jacobs
on the publication of his new book, *Not a Partnership*

