



From The Rabbi



Today's Jeopardy Question
Chag HaBikurim. Z'man Matan
Torateinu, Atzeret, Megilat Ruth,
Weeks, Cheesecake, Yizkor
June 11-13, 2016

Answer: What is Shavuot?

According to Jewish tradition, Shavuot is one of the three major festivals of the year. In degree of holiness, Shavuot is identical to Passover and Sukkot. However, Shavuot has become the forgotten holiday. The reason for this is probably the same reason why a piece of real estate is either valuable or insignificant; which is: LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION. A holiday that is often celebrated after the conclusion of the Hebrew School year and during a season of good weather and heightened activity in many aspects of life, is doomed to failure! This year, because Shavuot begins on a Saturday night and the first day is on Sunday, one might think that observance of Shavuot would increase, but somehow that really doesn't seem to matter based on our experience last year when Shavuot also began on Saturday night.

In Rabbinic tradition, Shavuot is called ATZERET that is based on the Hebrew word Atzor which means STOP. The word Atzeret can be translated to be a gathering. This is because Shavuot marks the end of a seven week period that begins with Passover. Therefore Shavuot is, in its essence, the conclusion to Passover. On Passover, we celebrate our freedom from slavery in Egypt. However, our freedom is not complete until we establish our covenantal relationship with God that is defined by the Torah that was revealed at Mount Sinai. A significant part of the observance of Shavuot is to reenact the experience at Mount Sinai. On the first day of Shavuot, we stand as the Biblical account of God's revelation at Mt. Sinai is chanted and imagine what it would have been like to have stood at Mt. Sinai as our ancestors did so long ago.

As the festival of Shavuot begins, we take some time to study words of Torah in which we can hear the voice of God. In our community it has become our tradition to study until midnight. There are those who stay up all night studying until the sun rises and it is time for the morning prayers. One of the Hebrew names for Shavuot is Zman Matan Torateinu, the time of the giving of the Torah. Purposefully, we do not refer to Shavuot as the time of the receiving of the Torah because we receive Torah anew each time we approach its words.

Over the years it has become clear to me that many of us when asked the question, "What is the Torah?" are challenged to offer a clear definition. As we approach the holiday on which we celebrate the special gift of the Torah that God has given us, I would like to share with you this definition.

The Torah is a collection of books in which we learn of the relationship between God and Humanity.

It contains stories and laws.

The stories teach us who we are and the laws teach us what we should do.

The Torah teaches us what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong.

The full schedule of this year's Shavuot observances is on the front cover of this issue of Temple Talk. Please take a look and make your plans to conclude your celebration of Passover and rejoice in our covenantal relationship with God as molded by our understanding of Torah. Join us for study, prayer and the joyous celebration of the last of the major festivals of 5776.