



Flushing-Fresh Meadows Jewish Center
 193-10 Peck Avenue ✧ Flushing, New York 11365 (718) 357-5100

THE BULLETIN

May-June 2018
 Vol.16, No.7

Iyar/Sivan 5778
 Rabbi Gerald M. Solomon



Coming Events

Thursday, May 17, 2018

Sisterhood Lunch and Program
 featuring Dr. Jennifer Lee,
 Northwell Health.

Topic: Stress Management.
 Cost: \$10.00 at the door.



Sunday, May 20, 2018

Prayer* Lunch* Study

Services will begin at 9:00am.
 After services, a Dairy Lunch
 will be served followed by
 Shavuot Torah Study.

Conducted by Rabbi Gerald Solomon
 Cost for the Luncheon: \$30.00 per person.



Thursday, May 24, 2018

Thursday, June 14, 2018

Sisterhood Lunch and Program.
 Documentary film- Theodore Bikel
 "In the Shoes of Sholom Aleichem"
 Narrated by Alan Alda.
 Cost: \$10.00 at the door.

Thursday, June 21, 2018

Book Club- "Manhattan Beach" by
 Jennifer Egan at 10:30am.

Sunday, June 24, 2018

We are pleased to announce that Albert
 Mulad will be appearing again at our syna-
 gogue. He performed here last August to
 huge acclaim. The concert will begin at
 2:00pm. After the concert, coffee, cake

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES FOR MAY AND JUNE 2018

Friday, May 4

Mincha/Maariv.....7:00PM
Candle Lighting Time.....7:36PM

Saturday, May 5

Parashat Emor
Shabbat Services.....9:00AM
Shabbat Ends.....8:46PM

Friday, May 11

Mincha/Maariv.....7:00PM
Candle Lighting Time.....7:43PM

Saturday, May 12

Parashiot Behar/Bechukotai
Shabbat Mevarchim Services.....9:00AM
Shabbat Ends.....8:53PM

Friday, May 18

Mincha/Maariv.....7:00PM
Candle Lighting Time.....7:50PM

Saturday, May 19

Parashat Bamidbar
Shabbat Services.....9:00AM
Saturday, Erev Shavuot.....T.B.A.
Erev Shavuot Candle Lighting Time.....8:59PM

SHAVUOT

Sunday, May 20

First Day Shavuot-Holiday Services.....9:00AM
Candle Lighting Time-
Second Evening of Shavuot.....9:00PM

Monday, May 21

Second Day of Shavuot-Holiday Services...9:00AM
Yizkor.....10:45AM
Festival Ends.....9:01PM

Friday, May 25

Mincha/Maariv.....7:00PM
Candle Lighting Time.....7:56PM

Saturday, May 26

Friday, June 1

Mincha/Maariv.....7:00PM
Candle Lighting Time.....8:02PM

Saturday, June 2

Parashat B'haalotecha
Shabbat Services.....9:00AM
Shabbat Ends.....9:11PM

Friday, June 8

Mincha/Maariv.....7:00PM
Candle Lighting Time.....8:06PM

Saturday, June 9

Parashat Sh'lach
Shabbat Mevarchim Services.....9:00AM
Shabbat Ends.....9:15PM

Friday, June 15

Mincha/Maariv.....7:00PM
Candle Lighting Time.....8:10PM

Saturday, June 16

Parashat Korach
Shabbat Services.....9:00AM
Shabbat Ends.....9:19PM

Friday, June 22

Mincha/Maariv.....7:00PM
Candle Lighting Time.....8:12PM

Saturday, June 23

Parashat Chukat
Shabbat Services.....9:00AM
Shabbat Ends.....9:20PM

Friday, June 29

Mincha/Maariv.....7:00PM
Candle Lighting Time.....8:12PM

Saturday, June 30

Let's Celebrate Shavuot

Prayer Lunch* Study*

Join us on Sunday, May 20, 2018.
Services begin at 9:00am followed by a
complete dairy lunch and Shavuot Torah
Study conducted by Rabbi Solomon.
Cost for Luncheon: \$30.00 per person.

***Please RSVP no later than
THURSDAY, MAY 10, 2018***

Shavuot





Mazel Tov

To: Inge on the birth of her two great grandsons Asher, son of David and Dorel Pollack and Joshua son of Michael and Hannah Bahar.

Condolences

To: The family of Dr. David Coppel who was a member of Flushing-Fresh Meadows Jewish Center

To: Alice Wetchler whose husband Herb Wetchler passed away.

To: Robin Korn and her family on the passing of her beloved father Calvin Rosen.

To: The family of Shirley Klein, long time secretary and member of Queensboro Hill Jewish Center. Although she moved upstate, our members from Queensboro will agree she epitomized the true

Thank You

To: The Cohen Family for sponsoring a Kiddush in memory of their mothers: Ramah Cohen, mother of Ezra and Mordecai Cohen. Hilda Moses mother of Matilda Cohen

A Special Thank You

Without the following three special people the lovely Israeli Independence Luncheon you enjoyed on April 19, would not have been possible and so I want to publicly thank Shari Zuber and her brother Paul for taking care of all the shopping from tablecloths to the delicious Israeli appetizers. In addition, I want to thank Lynne Kirby for coming in early that morning and helping to set up all the foods you found on your tables when you sat down. Again, thank you for all you did to ensure that our luncheon was a success.



Sisterhood News

SISTERHOOD

Welcome to the start of the new season of events for our Sisterhood.

We celebrated Israel Independence Day with a lunch including Israeli and Italian food. It was wonderful to see fifty of our members and friends. After lunch, we enjoyed entertainment by Naomi Zeitlin. Thank you to Bette Glasser for coordinating this event and to Shari and Paul Zuber for making the whole thing happen. Thank you to Lynne Kirby for coming early to assist in setting up and doing whatever was needed and to all those who helped to serve the meal.

On May 17 we are presenting a luncheon and program. The speaker will be an MD from Northwell Health on the topic of "Stress Management".

The monthly book club is scheduled for May 24th with a discussion of "The Bridal Chair" by Gloria Goldreich. On June 14th after lunch, we will be showing a wonderful film "Theodore Bikel: In the Shoes of Shalom Aleichem". The June 21st book to be reviewed is "Manhattan Beach" by Jennifer Egan.

The 10:30 AM Tuesday morning chair exercise class continues.

Cards for all occasions are available to be sent from the Center office. Proceeds benefit The Jewish Theological Seminary.



ISRAEL INDEPENDENCE DAY

May 14, 2018 is also the secular date of the 70th anniversary of Israel's statehood. It behooves us at this time to offer our continued love and support to both Israel and the United States as well as our talents to encourage our families and friends, our neighbors, and our leaders to do their share in seeing to it that the relationship between Israel and the United States remains strong.

For American Jews, celebrating Yom Ha'atzmaut has been a way to express solidarity with the state of Israel and to strengthen their alliance with it. In many communities, it is one of few occasions in which Jewish organizations and synagogues of different ideologies and denominations cooperate in forming a common celebration. Let us show our love and support for Israel at this time by celebrating its 70th anniversary even as we affirm our devotion to our beloved America .

A PRAYER FOR ISRAEL



Our Father in Heaven, Protector and Redeemer of Israel, as we observe the 70th anniversary of the State of Israel's independence, we ask that you bless the State of Israel which marks the dawn of our deliverance. Shield it beneath the wings of Your love. Spread over it Your canopy of peace; send Your light and Your truth to its leaders, officers, and counselors, and direct them with Your good counsel

O G-d, strengthen the defenders of our HOLY LAND. Grant them salvation and crown them with victory. Establish peace in the land, and everlasting joy for its inhabitants.

Remember our brothers and sisters, the whole house of Israel, in all the lands of their dispersion. Speedily let them walk upright to Zion, Your city, to Jerusalem Your dwelling-place, as it is written in the Torah of Your servant Moses: 'Even if you are dispersed in the uttermost parts of the world, from there the Lord your G-d will gather and fetch you. The L-rd your G-d will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it.'

Unite our hearts to love and revere Your Name, and to observe all the precepts of Your Torah. Shine forth in Your glorious majesty over all the inhabitants of Your world. Let everything that breathes proclaim: The Lo-d G-d is King; His majesty rules over all.

Purple Ink-by Lois Greene Stone

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How can inked paper delivered weekly constantly evoke feelings and memories?
The Jewish Press sits open on my kitchen table. From 400 miles away from the home of my childhood, I search the Queens Section for just one name Flushing Jewish Center; it is never there, although my ritual is the same with each edition. Yes, I know that the congregation got old and few replaced members whose names are spelled on copper rectangles ready to be lit for yahrzeit. Yes, I know there was a fire that burned almost all of the building, but it was constructed again I thought.

Thought. Above a shoe store half a block from the Long Island Railroad's Broadway Station stop, on the Port Washington line, a tiny group of people wanted to keep orthodox laws where possible but be able to sit with family. The Free Synagogue near Flushing Main Street was not an option as the Reform

And so I marched carrying my flag during Simchas Torah. My patent leather dress shoes made drum-like sounds on the wooden floor. Perhaps no one in the shoe store below minded as the sound of nails being driven into leather soles or pounded into rubber heels muffled any noise from above. Did customers however, hear my grogger sounding when Hamen's name was mentioned during Purim?

Gradually, the one room congregation got larger, and my father, one of the founders, searched for larger quarters or land. Oh how lovely was the drawing of what these men dreamed the building would look like. That rendering was on my older sister's girls' confirmation program. Since there was no place yet to hold that ceremony, Temple Gates of Prayer in Flushing allowed its basement to be used. World War II had just ended.

Was the house bought on Northern Blvd. and 171st Street to be temporary? The parcel of land was quite beautiful. But the house was a house no matter that upstairs bedrooms were classrooms, and one that had a staircase leading from ground level became the chapel. For my girls' confirmation in June 1948, I climbed those stairs in my long white graduation-type robe with long-stemmed flowers in my arms. Since guests were seated already, it was decided we girls would enter from a direction where we could immediately be seen. My father, then head of the education committee, made a speech.

So with popular songs of the day such as "Nature Boy", "Dickey Bird Song", "Love Somebody", "Little White Lies", and "Four Leaf Clover", I became girl/woman and was to assume some adult female responsibilities. That entire congregation was invited to my parents' house on 165th Street and 33rd Avenue didn't get my attention as much as my seven friends who were allowed to come; they belonged to Bayside Jewish Center where most of my girls' club meetings were held.

When Israel was formed, special prayers were printed on the mimeograph; the purple ink stained my fingers. Some congregants were tearful, some jubilant; I really didn't understand much of the world and its politics. Ration were tangible; Israel was a far away dot on a penciled-in map.

It was nothing special to me when my father became president of the congregation the same time my mother became president of the Ladies' Guild; much of their life revolved around the Center. It seemed important enough for the Long Island Star Journal, but I was involved with growing up pleasantries. And my bicycle gave me independence in a way that the railroad never could. It seemed very strange to me when my younger sister, four years my junior, was the first group of girls to be able to learn Hebrew. Inside, I felt a man's language was being violated, but I didn't express this.

So, each week, The Jewish Press is removed from my rural mailbox at the end of my long driveway in a suburb of Rochester. I clip the education coupon to mail to my daughter-in-law in Crown Heights and then search in the Queens Section for a name I pretend might appear. After all, no yahrzeit card sent since 1954 has ever-ever missed reaching

I read the Time Capsule. Dates such as 1939 don't seem so old. My brain doesn't process time the way a calendar does. But Time Capsule jolts my thoughts since Jews in Poland were putting on armbands and I was going to the World's Fair in Flushing Meadow Park. December 4, 1941 while the Nazis murdered Jew of Horodenka, Ukraine, I was probably building a snow-igloo to climb in and out of, or sledding down a steep hill, or ice skating in Bowne Park; the United States hadn't even had Pearl Harbor yet!

The children's page with "what did the *blank* say to" fills me with the nonsensical sayings I once used. Why do all seem to continue to make me smile, no how simple?

And with quiet amazement, I tear out the weekly Jewish "great person", and add it to my collection almost as if those pages might leap out and make the rest of the world notice and stop hating us because we're 'different', according to them. Why isn't our difference 'good', I wonder as I read about pioneers who have made the world safer, healthier and so forth?

Fingers inked with black print are not like the purple of old-fashioned mimeographed, but even with those stains on each tip, I smile and remember, and look forward to the next week's issue.

Lois Greene Stone

MAY 2018

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	<div>On-Going Low-Impact Chair Exercise Class Tuesdays</div>	1 16 Iyar	2 17 Rabbi's Classes <i>Life Cycle of the Jew-Part 3</i>	3 18	4 19 	5 20 Parashat Emor <i>Ends: 8:46pm</i>
6 21	7 22 Rabbi's Classes <i>Basic Judaism</i>	8 23	9 24 Rabbi's Classes <i>Life Cycle of the Jew-Part 3</i>	10 25	11 26  7:43pm	12 27 Parashiot Behar/ Bechukotai <i>Ends: 8:53pm</i>
13 28	14 29 Rabbi's Classes <i>Basic Judaism</i>	15 1 Sivan	16 2 Rabbi's Classes <i>Life Cycle of the Jew-Part 3</i>	17 3 <i>Sisterhood Meeting Lunch and Program Dr. Jennifer Lee</i>	18 4  7:50pm	19 5 Parashat Bamidbar <i>Erev Shavuot</i>  8:59pm
20 6 <i>First day of Shavuot</i>  9:00pm	21 7 <i>Second day of Shavuot</i> <i>Yizkor Festival</i> <i>Ends: 9:01pm</i>	22 8	23 9 Rabbi's Classes <i>Life Cycle of the Jew-Part 3</i>	24 10 <i>Book Club "The Bridal Chair" by Gloria Goldreich</i>	25 11  7:56pm	26 12 Parashat Naso <i>Ends: 9:06pm</i>
27 13	28 14 Rabbi's Classes <i>Basic Judaism</i>	29 15	30 16 Rabbi's Classes <i>Life Cycle of the Jew-Part 3</i>	31 17		

JUNE 2018

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		<div> On-Going Low-Impact Chair Exercise Class Tuesdays </div>			1 18 Sivan	2 19 Parashat B'haajotecha
3 20	4 21 Rabbi's Classes Basic Judaism	5 22	6 23	7 24	8 25 8:06pm	9 26 Parashat Sh'lach Ends: 9:15pm
10 27	11 28	12 29	13 30	14 1 Tamuz Documentary Film: "In the Shoes of Sholom Aleichem"	15 2 8:10pm	16 3 Parashat Korach Ends: 9:19pm
17 4	18 5	19 6	20 7	21 8 Book Club "Manhattan Beach" by Jennifer Egan	22 9 8:12pm	23 10 Parashat Chukat Ends: 9:20pm
24 11	25 12	26 13	27 14	28 15	29 16 8:12pm	30 17 Parashat Balak Ends: 9:20pm



Rabbi's Message

KASHRUT, SHABBAT, PRAYER AND THE SANCTUARY

It has been pointed out in the Torah portion Shemini read recently at services on April 14th that the purpose of the dietary laws was and continues to be the holiness of the Jewish people. Eating the wrong foods will detract from the retention of the status of holiness which the Jewish people were mandated to maintain.

Some critics of the dietary laws of the Jews have protested: What difference could it possibly make what foods one eats, as long as those foods are not contaminated in any way? They then usually point to those very healthy non observers of the dietary laws as proof that the laws are of no real benefit and that unkosher food is therefore fine.

But truth be told, unkosher food is anathema to the Jewish soul. While that statement cannot be proven 100% of the time in the physical world, people of faith who observe the dietary laws maintain that it can be proven 100% of the time in the spiritual worlds. The observant are content with the view that one is to observe the dietary laws because G-d says so. No other proof is required, they say.

It is interesting to note that the dietary laws are not included in the category of "Hareg V'lo Ya-avor," where one is required to go so far as to martyr oneself rather than to violate - such as would be the case in the three cardinal sins of Judaism: Wrongful sexual relations, murder and idolatry. While the eating of unkosher food does not fall within this category, it should be duly noted that our history has recorded that there have been many of our people who did in fact choose death over violation of the sacred dietary laws. This was particularly true during the Crusades as well as during the years of the Holocaust.

What happened in the Parasha of Shemini? Two of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Avihu bring a fire to the sanctuary and are consumed themselves by a fire which comes from G-d. What exactly was the sin involved here which resulted in their instantaneous demise?

Midrashic theories abound as to the nature of the sin of Nadav and Avihu. They had too much to drink, they wanted Moses and Aaron out of the way so they could take over, even that they were overly diligent in their attempts at piety wanting to be closer to G-d. Some hypothesize, they came too close.

In the Sons of Aaron story, we are reminded that the Sanctuary was a sacred place. G-d commanded in Parashat Terumah "And let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them." The Sanctuary is where G-d's presence dwells. It is where G-d reveals Himself to the extent that we are capable of receiving Him. One needs to be well versed in what to do and how to serve in the Sanctuary for in the Sanctuary where G-d dwells, the officiant or officiants need to know very well what to do to please G-d - to interact harmoniously with G-d. Functioning in the Sanctuary we learn from this episode, should not be attempted by the uninitiated or the inexperienced. It is not a job for a newcomer or one who is not sufficiently conversant with the laws. Additionally we learn from what happened to Nadav and Avihu, if one isn't exactly sure of what one is doing in the Sanctuary of G-d, one could get burned and make a terrible mess of things and G-d forbid bring calamity on the Jewish people.

We should be mindful of the fact that in the synagogue, for those who attend religious services they are there to *participate* in congregational worship of God through the meaningful recitation and chanting (davening) of various types of prayers including praise of God, petitioning God and thanking God and learning about the will of God through the reading of the Torah portion. If the sanctuary represents G-d's presence on earth, its sanctity has

Another example, G-d instructed : “One may not come to the Sanctuary at all times.” There were times designated for entering the Sanctuary. One needed to know how and when to approach the Ruler of the Universe. Even today we acknowledge that there is an *Et Ratzon*, a desirable time for prayer, a specified time for the prayer services in the Sanctuary. Therein lie the sins of both Nadav and Avihu. They failed to grant proper respect to the sacred. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, they trivialized it, proving that in matters of holiness there is precious little, if any, room for error.

Abraham Joshua Heschel referred to the Sabbath as a “palace in time.” He taught that on the day which G-d made holy, we feel and conduct ourselves differently than we do during the week of non sacred time. The Sabbath is sacred time, even as the Sanctuary is sacred space calling upon us as well to conduct ourselves when in it, differently than when in non sacred places.

The synagogue cries out against being taken as commonplace. It is a Mikdash Me’at, a miniature Holy Temple, unlike any other institution in society. It protests being trivialized as just another organization in our society of which we are members.

The synagogue, it should be remembered, is, in our day, largely what those who function in it make of it. Those who function within its precincts, both religious functionaries and lay leadership must assume the sacred calling of *Guardian of the House of G-d*, no small or trivial undertaking. Those who enter its portals need remember that they are entering no ordinary institution. They are entering a sacred institution. Defining that term is what we come here for. We come to learn what is holy and what is not and we come to learn how to know the difference between that which is holy and that which is not. May we grow in our knowledge and ability to distinguish between the sacred and the commonplace that we may learn to serve G-d **correctly**, that we find favor in His eyes and thus merit his blessings. AMEN

With all good wishes,

Rabbi Gerald M. Solomon

FOR YOUR INFORMATION - FROM THE RABBI

“The first thing that is happening here may be summarized in one word – security, security for Israel, security in the future. We have one clear and simple rule and we seek to express it constantly: if someone tries to attack you – rise up and attack him. We will not allow, here on the Gaza border, them to hurt us. We will hurt them. Security in the present is a necessary condition for security in the future and what we have here today is a powerful expression for our future security.” — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. (Times of Israel, Apr. 9, 2018)

“You have to understand, there are no innocent people in the Gaza Strip. Everyone has a connection to Hamas. Everyone receives a salary from Hamas. Those who are trying to challenge us at the border and breach it belong to Hamas’s military wing.” — Defense Minister Liberman. “Dozens of times in the past Hamas has used journalists, the media, the Red Crescent and ambulances to carry out terror attacks,” said Liberman. “We sent warnings in Arabic, Hebrew and English. Everyone knew that we were determined to defend Israeli citizens and our sovereignty. Those who take risks and endanger their lives do so knowingly.” To date, the IDF has killed 31 Palestinians on the Gaza border in this set of protests. (Jerusalem Post, Apr. 8, 2018)

“Israel is losing the public relations war. The media around the world today are against Israel, Europe and the UN are enemy entities when it comes to talking about the real reasons for this conflict, America is distracted and even the pro-Israel forces that could speak are silent. Hamas managed to turn the terrorist assault on a neighbor in its sovereign borders recognized by the international community, the only democratic and civilized country in the Middle East, into the story of some clowns, some children and 50,000 'defenseless' demonstrators. . .” — Giulio Meotti. (Arutz Sheva, Apr. 11, 2018)

“Having the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad preside over global chemical and nuclear weapons disarmament will be like putting a serial rapist in charge of a women’s shelter. The Assad regime’s documented use of chemical weapons remains the most serious violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention in the treaty’s twenty-year history. We

SEASONAL OBSERVANCES - LAG B'OMER- MAY 3, 2018

Lag B'omer means "the 33rd day of the (counting of the) Omer. This day is observed as a day of rejoicing because on this day, the students of Rabbi Akiva did not die. We therefore are permitted on that day to take haircuts, listen to music, hold weddings, etc., because the signs of mourning which we have been observing are not necessary on this day of great happiness.

Lag B'omer, the 18th day of Iyar, also corresponds to the date of the death of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, one of the great sages from the era of the Mishna. Although the death of a great sage is usually not marked with rejoicing, but rather with sadness, we treat Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai differently. The Zohar in Parshas Ha'azinu tells us that on the day Rabbi Shimon passed away, a great light of endless joy filled the day because of the secret wisdom he revealed to his students. That secret wisdom was written down and recorded in the holy Zohar. The happiness on that day was to him and his students like that of a groom while standing under the canopy at his wedding.

On that day, the sun did not set until Rabbi Shimon had revealed all that he was permitted to. As soon as he was done, the sun set, and his soul returned to its Maker. Because of the happiness back then, we celebrate with happiness now, as well.

In Israel, people flock to the grave of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai in the city of Meron. There is dancing, singing, and bonfires are lit. Many people wait until their son is three before cutting his hair, and on the Lag B'Omer of his third year, they cut the boy's hair. There is also a custom that children play with bows ("keshet" in Hebrew) on Lag B'Omer. A reason given for this is that in all the days of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's life, a rainbow was never seen. A rainbow is a sign that the world was due for a flood of the proportion of that in Noach's time. In the merit of Rabbi Shimon, the world was never deserving of such punishment in his generation, and the appearance of a rainbow was never necessary. Therefore, children play with bows, which in Hebrew share the same word as rainbow.

SHAVUOT-MAY20-21

The Festival of Shavuot or "Weeks," is one of the Shalosh Regalim (Exodus 23:14); one of the three main pilgrimage festivals. It comes at the end of the seven-times-seven (a "week of weeks") cycle of the Omer, which begins on the second day of Pesach. This year Shavuot begins on Saturday evening, May 19th. Candle lighting is 8:59P.M.

The Festival of Shavuot is somewhat unusual. Not only is it not assigned to a specific date, but there is no real explanation given in Torah as to the meaning of the day, nor how it is to be observed ritually. In Biblical times, the period of counting seven weeks marked the transition from the very first grain crop (barley) of early spring (at Pesach) to the beginning of the summer grain (wheat) harvest (at Shavuot). Thus names for Shavuot given in the Torah are Chag Ha-Katzir - the Festival of the Harvest - and Chag Ha-Bikkurim - the Festival of the First Fruits (Cf. Exodus 23:14-19;

Leviticus 23:9-22). The day is identified as a holy occasion to be observed as a Sabbath, and specific sacrificial offerings are to be brought to the Temple. But beyond that, there is no special ritual prescribed.

These agricultural origins of Shavuot probably sufficed for the agrarian society of ancient Israel while they lived in the promised land. But they didn't really allow for a meaningful holiday for Jews once they were outside the Land of Israel, where farming was on a different cycle and there was no Temple to which one could bring the seasonal offerings. In exile, Jews were left with a commanded festival with no apparent meaning. But tradition abhors a vacuum. So what inherent meaning could be found for Shavuot?

The meaning of Shavuot became apparent after considering the relationship of Shavuot with Pesach and Sukkot. All are Biblically ordained festivals. All have an agricultural connection, assigned to a specific harvest season. But Pesach and Sukkot both have historical associations as well. Pesach commemorates the Exodus and the liberation from Egyptian bondage. Sukkot, and the dwelling in the Sukkah, recall the Israelite's experience while wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. So, our sages opined that Shavuot must fit into this para-

with it in the Torah, and the event of Revelation had no holiday to mark it, it was a perfect match. Conveniently, since Revelation and Shavuot both do not have an actual date in the Torah, the Rabbis were able to determine that Revelation coincides with Shavuot. The Rabbis had a vested interest in this transformation as well. They saw themselves as the legitimate heirs to the Temple and priestly leadership. Instead of sacrifices, Torah learning must be at the center. How could there not be a holiday to acknowledge the giving of the Torah?

The sages came to refer to Shavuot as **“Z'man Matan Toratenu”- “The Time of the Giving of our Torah.”** As the anniversary of revelation, Shavuot evolved into a celebration of Torah. In the synagogue, the account of the revelation at Sinai and the Ten Commandments are read as part of the service. Among Ashkenazic Jews, a custom also developed associating the Megilat Ruth- the Book of Ruth with Shavuot. There are a number of links that make this an appropriate text. Particularly, the setting of the story is at the harvest time, and Ruth's conversion to Judaism is seen as analogous to the Israelite's acceptance of the covenant at Sinai. In addition, King David, who tradition teaches was born and died on Shavuot, is identified in the book as being descended from Ruth.

Another popular custom, which originated with the Jewish mystics in Safed in the sixteenth century, is the practise of staying up all through the night of Shavuot studying Torah. This practice, called Tikkun Leil Shavuot is based on a Midrash that explains that the Israelites slept late on the morning of the revelation at Sinai, and thus almost missed the giving of Torah. By staying up all night, we atone for this lapse of our ancestors, and demonstrate our appreciation of revelation and our eagerness to recommit ourselves again and again to Torah .

Rituals and Customs

There is a custom on Shavuot to eat dairy foods, such as cheese blintzes. This custom is of uncertain origin; perhaps it is an ancient echo of the agricultural seasons when in the early summer the calves and kids would be old enough to wean, so there would be plenty of milk for the farmers. Another explanation suggests that Torah is like milk and honey (see Song of Songs 4:11). Another theory suggests that prior to the Revelation on Shavuot, the consumption of meat would have been inappropriate because of the laws of kashrut which were to be given in the Shavuot Revelation of the Torah.

There is a beautiful Sephardic custom of erecting a Chuppa (bridal canopy) over the lectern on which Torah is read on Shavuot and honoring recently married couples. The custom extends from the notion that Shavuot is like a wedding between God (the groom) and Israel (the bride), with Torah serving as the Ketubah- (marriage contract). Special Shavuot ketubot are also written and read.

Other customs include decorating the synagogue for Shavuot with flowers and green plants, again echoing the ancient holiday of the “first fruits,” and “Confirmation,” a relatively new ritual (only a hundred years or so) through which teenagers are given the opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to Jewish life and living.

It has often been asked why Shavuot is known as “The Season of the **Giving** of Our Torah,” when perhaps it's more important for us as Jews to recall that not only did G-d give Torah to Israel, but that we freely accepted and committed ourselves to it. Shavuot, then, becomes not only Z'man Matan. Other customs include decorating the synagogue for Shavuot with flowers and green plants, again echoing the ancient holiday of the “first fruits,” and “Confirmation,” a relatively new ritual (only a hundred years or so) through which teenagers are given the opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to Jewish life and living.

Toratenu - the time of the giving of our Torah, but also Z'man Kabbalat Toratenu - the time of the **accepting** of our Torah. The giving of Torah is an historical event, that happened just once. But the acceptance of Torah by individual Jews is a continual process that happens every day, anytime a Jew makes a decision based on Jewish values, wholeheartedly recites a Jewish prayer, or makes a conscious effort to better the world. Each and every experience of our lives provides us with a new context to learn and understand Torah and put it into action in our lives. This is referred to as progressive revelation. We were given Torah just once, thus allowing for this yearly anniversary of Shavuot. But we “accept” Torah continually, allowing us to live a renewed Jewish life every day.

