

A Jew Always Stands at Sinai

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Sinai is not just an event of the ancient past. The blessings before and after the reading of the Torah are in the present tense Barukh Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh haOlam notein et ha Torah. "Praised are You, Adonai, Sovereign of the universe, who gives the Torah." God offers us, gives us the Torah every day. The question is: Will I accept it? Will I be loyal to it and live up to it?

On Sunday night, we shall begin our celebration of Shavuot, the festival that celebrates the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

It is not Passover that makes us Jews.

It is not Chanukkah that makes us Jews.

It is Shavuot that makes us Jews. Shavuot occurs exactly 49 days after Passover. Shavuot is the climax of Passover. That is, God did not free us from slavery just to be free. God freed us so that we could willingly make a commitment to the Torah and to our Jewish way of life.

What happened at Sinai? Thousands of years ago, our people heard a call and responded with a commitment. The Torah is the constitution of the Jewish people. It is the source of our fundamental Jewish beliefs, values, and ideals. There are no words more challenging than "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." There is no insight as fundamental as "In the beginning, God," No words so life-enhancing as "You shall rest!" No cry more compelling than "Let my people go." There is no vision more hopeful than "They shall beat their swords into ploughshares." And no summons more demanding than "Justice, justice you shall pursue."

But Sinai is not just an event of the ancient past. The blessings before and after the reading of the Torah are in the present tense. *Barukh Atah Adonai ... notein et haTorah*. God offers us, gives us the Torah every day. The question is: will I accept it? Will I be loyal to it and live up to it?

The words of Torah have outlived monuments and empires. Do we not owe it to our ancestors to keep Torah alive? Do we not owe it to the world to keep Torah alive? Indeed, yes! For the world so desperately needs to hear its messages. Whenever we renew the covenant, we stand at Sinai. Whenever we feel God's presence, we stand at Sinai. Whenever we study and teach words of Torah, we stand at Sinai.

Thousands of years ago, on the mountaintop of Sinai, "Our people found you, found your Torah, found your truth, and embraced the destiny that has shaped worlds...the ancient desert dream we keep. A people touched by God, a certain grace that tells of You. We are locked with You in old

identity, remembering the lightning of that place; something in us of Your awesome will, something of that mountain's thunder still.”

Then and now, a Jew always stands at Sinai. On Shavuot, we recommit ourselves to the eternal truths by which the Jewish people have always lived. On Shavuot, we shall reaffirm, with enthusiasm and with a whole and willing heart, our responsibilities as Jews to make a better world and – to keep the faith.

Sometimes I am asked if the Torah scroll is heavy to hold. I reply that the Torah scroll is light as a feather. For while it may seem I am lifting up the Torah, in actuality, it is the Torah that is uplifting me.

I hope you will be with us on Sunday night or Monday morning to receive the gift of Torah. For if you do, the Torah will always be there to uplift you and to inspire you to be and to do great things.