

RABBI'S MESSAGE

GRADUATING TO SHAVUOT

I always get a feeling of transition during the month of June. As children, we get used to an academic calendar. School is out, and young people transition from one grade to another. Graduating is a big deal, not because it is an ending, but because it is a beginning to the next stage. Today we see graduation ceremonies from elementary and middle schools in addition to high school and college. Each transition is significant.

It is interesting how our Jewish calendar lines up with our secular calendar. We begin with the High Holidays of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur in September when school starts, and right around the time of summer vacation, we have the festival of Shavuot. At the beginning of the year, we prepare ourselves spiritually for a year that includes the three pillars of on which the world stands (according to *Pirke Avot*, the Ethics of our Ancestors): *Torah* (learning), *Avodah* (sacred service) and *Gemilut Hasadim* (deeds of loving kindness). We spend about nine months striving to do our best in these areas. Then, like a graduation ceremony, we acknowledge receiving the 10 Commandments on Shavuot...almost like a diploma.

But Torah is more than a certificate we frame and put on a wall. It is to become the essence of what we do and why. When you graduate from High School, college or any institution, the learning you've achieved is part of you. We may not quote from our textbooks every day, but we've absorbed that learning – both formal and informal – to help lead our lives. The same with Torah. It is always part of us, and the more we learn, the more we develop our sacred souls.

It's become traditional to learn in honor of Shavuot. Many institutions offer all-night learning. Last year, Loren and I spent Shavuot in Israel, and walked with thousands to greet sunrise at the Western Wall. When we received the 10 Commandments at Sinai, it was not the kind of diploma that indicated the end of our journey. It was an invitation to move forward, with a new commitment, to the next stage of life.

Summertime, beginning with Shavuot, is a wonderful time to renew our personal commitments to living the kind of life that exemplifies what we've learned from all our journeys...so far!

L'shalom,

Rabbi Dan Gordon