

Shabbat Parashat B'midbar/Approaching Shavu'ot
Ma'amad Har Sinai/The Revelation at Sinai is the Bar Mitzvah of the Jewish People

With this week's *parasha*, we begin the reading of the fourth book of the Torah: the Book of Numbers/*Sefer B'midbar*. We meet the Israelites still encamped at the foot of Mount Sinai and, after over a full year of receiving the laws and teachings of the Torah from God through Moses, the nation is now preparing for the journey to the Promised Land and the war that will follow our entry into it. However, before we and the Israelites leave Mount Sinai, it is important to reflect on what the experience of Sinai stood for and meant for the Jewish people.

One over-arching theme that emerges from study of the Torah centers around the relationship between God and the Israelites. Beginning with Avram, God acts as the caretaker of the infant Israelite nation. Through the Book of Genesis, God protects the patriarchs, matriarchs, and their families, making and renewing the covenant of the Promised Land and numerous offspring with them until they descend into Egypt as a family of seventy souls. We then endure the long slavery, at the end of which God arrives again as the caretaker, saving us from bondage, leading us through the splitting of the Reed Sea and to Mount Sinai. It is at this moment that the relationship transforms. Prior to the Sinai experience, the Israelites were an infant, toddler, and child nation. However, upon leaving Egypt and arriving at Mount Sinai, they have begun to grow up and become transformed. This maturation is accompanied by the receipt of the obligations and responsibilities commanded to us in the gift of the Torah. In short, **the nation of Israel becomes Bar Mitzvah at Mount Sinai**. Just as today, when a Jewish youth matures and comes of age, s/he becomes obligated for his or her Jewish responsibilities and the commandments. The celebration of Bar/Bat Mitzvah is marked with a symbolic ascendance to the Torah and personal receipt of all that is within it. Our contemporary ceremony to mark this milestone in a young Jew's life mirrors the experience of the Israelite people at Mount Sinai. Each year on Shavu'ot, which begins at the conclusion of Shabbat this weekend, we celebrate the anniversary of this event by re-reading its story, including the Ten Commandments.

As we come into this Shabbat and anticipate the coming of Shavu'ot, the anniversary of our nation's Bar Mitzvah, may we all take the opportunity to reflect upon how we each accept the responsibilities and obligations of Torah in our lives, making them meaningful and personal. Each day throughout our school, our students and teachers engage in learning that deepens Jewish identity and strengthens Jewish commitment. May we all have the opportunity to make this a real focus for ourselves this Shabbat and throughout Shavu'ot as we receive, once again, the gift of Torah as individuals and as a community.

Shabbat Shalom!
Hag Samei'ah!
Happy Anniversary!