

**Shabbat Shalom and Happy Shavuot
from Rabbi Michael Gold**

Candle Lighting Time

Friday Erev Shabbat 7:51 pm

Sunday Erev Shavuot 7:51 pm

Monday Erev 2nd Day Shavuot 8:49 pm (from pre-existing flame)

Services

Shabbat Morning May 31 9:30 am

Sunday June 1 Erev Shavuot 6 pm followed by festival dinner for those with
reservations

Monday June 2 9:30 am

Tuesday June 3 9:30 am, book of Ruth, Yizkor

We mourn the tragic deaths of Yaron Lischinsky and Sarah Milgrim, murdered in Washington D.C. for being Jews. Jew-hatred continues to grow in this country and throughout the world. While I visited Toronto, CA last weekend, several local synagogues were vandalized.

Meanwhile, we continue to pray for the release of the hostages and for peace to come to Israel.

**PARSHAT BEMIDBAR
TORAH FOR HUMANITY**

“On the first day of the second month, in the second year following the exodus from the land of Egypt, the Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting.” (Numbers 1:1)

The portion *Bemidbar* means “in the wilderness.” As the Jewish calendar falls, it is always read on the Sabbath before the Jewish festival of Shavuot. There is an important symbolic meaning to this. Shavuot celebrates the giving of the Torah, beginning with the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai. And Mt. Sinai is in the wilderness, on land not claimed by any people.

If the Torah were meant only for Jews, it could have been given in Jerusalem or somewhere else in the Holy Land. But God gave us the Torah in the wilderness, a land accessible to all people everywhere. The meaning is that the teachings of the Torah were not only meant for the nation of Israel. The teachings of the Torah were meant for everybody – all humanity. To paraphrase Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*, after receiving the Torah “everybody knows who he is and what God expects of him.”

The Rabbis of Talmudic literature laid out this idea of a Torah for all humanity in

a more explicit way. All of humanity are considered *b'nai Noach*, "the children of Noah." The Rabbis laid out what they called, *sheva mitzvot b'nai Noach*, "the seven commandments of the children of Noah." God gave the Jewish people 613 commandments. But God gave all of humanity 7 commandments. But these 7 commandments encompass the most fundamental ethical laws of being human.

Let us briefly summarize the seven commandments of the children of Noah, the fundamental laws for all humanity. At the center is the prohibition of murder. Human life is of infinite value. Humans were created in the image of God. To take a human life, except in extreme situations of war or self-defense, is to mar that very image of God. That is why the Rabbis taught that to destroy one human life is to destroy an entire universe.

Idolatry and similar pagan worship practices are also forbidden. These were often tied to a variety of immoral practices including sacred prostitution. Only God, Creator of the universe and Giver of the Torah, is worthy of worship. Today Jewish tradition has the greatest respect for the various religious traditions of the world, which lead worshippers to belief in the one God.

Various forbidden sexual practices are included in the seven laws. In particular, adultery and incest are mentioned. These are practices which undermine the sacred relationships which make up families. And families are the fundamental building blocks of society. As Sigmund Freud wisely taught, sex is a powerful force in human life which, if not properly channeled, can be extremely destructive.

Blasphemy is also forbidden. To insult God is to undermine the foundations of religion. I would expand this prohibition to forbid any words which mock another person's sacred beliefs or religious practices.

Stealing is forbidden. Society can only function if people have respect for the property of others. Stealing from another person not only involves a loss of property but a threat to their security. The Torah expanded this prohibition against stealing to any dishonest business practices. People can only conduct business with one another from a position of trust.

Included in the seven laws is the prohibition of eating the limb of a living animal. This can be expanded to include any kind of cruelty to animals. The Torah does give humanity mastery over the animal kingdom (an idea which is controversial today.) But with that mastery comes a responsibility to avoid cruelty to animals.

Finally, centuries before the Enlightenment, the seven laws require the establishment of courts of justice. Justice was not to be arbitrary. Already in ancient times, people deserved their day in court. These are the seven laws God gave to all humanity. By obeying these fundamental laws, humanity took a major step towards creating a more ethical society.