

The fifty-day period between the beginning of Passover and the holiday of Shavuot has both agricultural and Kabbalistic significance, the time that takes us from liberation from Egypt to the revelation of Torah at Mount Sinai. Just as every Jew is supposed to imagine her/himself as a slave liberated from Egypt during Passover, our tradition also holds that every Jew who ever lived or will live was present for the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.¹

And what does that mean? There is a beautiful midrash that teaches, “Each and every person heard [Torah] according to their own particular capacity.”² Even traditional Jewish sources from thousands of years ago acknowledge that Torah speaks differently to each of us, and each person will receive the unique message that s/he needs to hear from it. That is why we sing in the Torah service each week, “Its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace.” Multiple ways, plural paths.

And that is why, when we celebrate Shavuot, on June 11th and 12th, our celebration will engage multiple modalities: study, movement, music, and lecture. We’ll be offering Shavuot observance for adults and for children, because Torah is for all of us.

But it isn’t just about Shavuot. We have a community that is widely diverse in terms of beliefs about God, engagement with Jewish practices, and approaches to spirituality. If we are to live up to the legacy of Torah from Sinai, then there must be a way for everyone to engage with Torah “according to their own particular capacity.” And we do offer multiple paths - in this issue, you’ll see cultural offerings, such as our Israel celebration, literature group, and Read with the Rabbi; opportunities to volunteer; opportunities to learn; opportunities for activism; and spiritual offerings such as musical Havdalot, Shabbat services, Yom HaShoah, and Shavuot observance.

This doesn’t mean staying inside of our comfort zones. The whole point of the wilderness wandering from slavery to revelation is to shake us out of our comfort zones enough to be receptive. So whatever your path, in this season of revelation, I want to encourage you to consider a new or renewed way of engaging with the community. Explore an event different from your usual interests, so that when we all stand at Sinai, it will be in a thicker web of community, and we will be able to hear Torah unlike any we’ve heard before.

1 Babylonian Talmud, Masechet Shevuot 39a

2 Pesikta deRav Kahana 12:25