

Should Gentiles Keep Shavuot?

Rabbi Reuven Mann

The Holiday of Shavuot is unique in that, unlike the other holy days, no specific date is assigned to it in the Torah. Rather, we begin the “Count of the Omer” on the second night of Passover and continue this activity until we have counted forty-nine days. The day which follows the culmination of the count assumes the status and holiness of Shavuot.

In that sense, this is not a stand-alone phenomenon. Rather, we must view Shavuot as the completion of the holiday of Passover. The objective of removing us from the enslavement of Pharaoh was to transform us into the nation of Hashem by receiving His Torah and establishing a holy society in the Land of Israel.

But are we to believe that the Torah is intended only for the Jews and for no others? If, indeed, the Torah contains the religious truths revealed by the Creator to His human subjects, why would it be limited to a small group who call themselves Jews?

We should note that the two major world religions, Christianity and Islam, have an interesting attitude to Torah. Both of these religions affirm that it is divine and therefore revere not only Moses but all of the Jewish prophets. Both religions however are not consistent in their attitudes. For if you believe that the Torah is from G-d then it must be true, and if so why don't you observe it? And why are you so mean to the Jews when they are the ones to whom it was given, and who safeguard it and make it available to you? A little appreciation might be in order?

Let us be clear: if the Torah is true and was given to us by Hashem, then the other religions must be man-made. To the extent that other religions retain principles of the Torah (such as, “love thy neighbor as thyself”) they do no harm, but when they depart from Torah and expound their own theological imaginations they deviate from the Word of the A-Mighty.

The Revelation at Mt. Sinai was not intended for Jews alone. Judaism maintains the ideal of the “Righteous Gentile”. He is someone who renounces idol worship and accepts upon himself the seven Noachide laws, which he conscientiously observes. He is considered to be on a very high religious level and merits a share in the world to come.

Judaism does not require or even expect that he should convert and become a member of the Jewish people. If he should desire to do that, then a protocol is prepared for him. If the individual is sincere and wants to reach a higher level of personal holiness by adherence to the six hundred and thirteen commandments and be a full-fledged member of the Jewish community, he may enter a conversion program and at its successful completion become a new member of that special group.

However, the Covenant of Hashem whereby His Nation was established was executed with the Jews, the children of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov whose mode of divine worship found favor with the Creator. And He chose their descendants after them to be entrusted with His Torah, to preserve it and teach it to all mankind.

Those of us who are Jews by birth have been commanded to faithfully fulfill the Torah and its commandments and behave in a manner which inspires those who come in contact with us to admire and seek to emulate our behaviors. This is the meaning of living a life on the principle of *Kiddush Hashem* (Sanctification of the Divine Name).

It is legitimate to affirm that the Jews are the Chosen People, but that in no way implies any devaluation of gentiles. We are not permitted to act in a manner which would cause non-Jews to scoff at our inferior ethical qualities. One who does so desecrates Hashem's Name. And what if someone says, "why should I care what goyim think?"

The answer is, because Hashem, who created *all* humans in His Image desires that they have the opportunity to fulfill their spiritual potential and perfect their souls via adoption of the Torah philosophy. By acting in a foolish and corrupt manner, we turn them away from Hashem.

Hashem gave mankind the Torah which contains two tracks, the seven Noachide Laws which is the level of morality that all mankind must achieve; and the higher level of *Kedusha* (sanctity) reflected in the six hundred and thirteen commandments which only the Jews are obligated to fulfill. The Torah thus constitutes the Divine Revelation not just for the Jews but for all mankind.

There will never be another Torah given to mankind. All the prophets who came after Moshe did not make any alterations, neither through addition nor subtraction or modification, to the Mitzvot. Their entire objective was to strengthen and reinforce observance of the religious system contained in Torah.

The purpose of Shavuot is to affirm and celebrate Torah from Sinai. This is of extreme importance for Jews, for this is the basis and foundation of our religious existence and national identity. But I maintain that Gentiles should celebrate Shavuot as well, for they also have a share in Torah. G-d wants them to keep the commandments intended for them, and thereby elevate their souls to an exalted level; which gives them the status of "righteous among the nations" and enables them to inherit a share in the world to come. May all of us merit it to achieve this.

Chag Shavuot Sameach.

Shabbat Shalom.

Dear Friends,

My newest book, *Eternally Yours: G-d's Greatest Gift To Mankind on VaYikra* was recently published, and is now available at: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B09SHRXS3Q>

I hope that my essays will enhance your reading and study of the Book of VaYikra and would greatly appreciate a brief review on Amazon.com.

Additionally, for those in *Eretz Yisrael*, my books are available at David Linden's bookstore located at Emek Refaim Street 21, Jerusalem and at Pomeranz Book store, Be'eri 5 Jerusalem. They are very nice stores to visit and browse.

—Rabbi Reuven Mann