

Today at 10:45 AM

## SHAVUOS

### Ethical Monotheism

Soon we will celebrate Shavuos. We will remember how G-d appeared to all the Jewish people and gave them at least the first 2 of the Ten Commandments. They all heard them. They were overwhelmed with this direct encounter with G-d. Twice in first few weeks after they left Egypt they apprehended G-d: Once after they crossed the Red Sea and again with much more force at Mt. Sinai. It's therefore very strange that neither of these places are known. There is much disagreement where the Jewish people crossed on the red sea of reed sea and no one knows today where Mt. Sinai is. Many plausible sites are mentioned. On the other hand we all know about Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. Why is the site where all the Jewish people apprehended G-d not known but the Temple Mt. In Jerusalem is known and considered the holiest place in the world. Why wasn't Mt. Sinai considered the holiest place in the world, the place where the Jewish people encountered G-d.

Perhaps if we look in the Torah portion Vayera we can understand this. We read how God appears to Abraham. All of a sudden Abraham spies out three strangers approaching. Abraham then, according to the traditional interpretation of the text, turns to God and, in effect says, "Don't go away, I'll be right back, I have some important business to do". Then he leaves God and goes to welcome the strangers into his home. From this, the Rabbis learn that welcoming guests is even more important than welcoming the Shechinah, God's presence. How can this be? What can this possibly mean? After all, isn't one of man's main goals finding and holding communion with the Master of All?

It seems to me that we have here one of the main teachings of Judaism, and that is Judaism's teaching of how man can feel most human, how man can come to terms with himself and with his Maker. Some religions and philosophies say that man can best find himself and come into harmony with the universe by practicing solitude, by seeking out basically deep inner experiences which have no relation to others. Judaism rejects this approach. At Mt Sinai every Jew experienced his encounter with G-d alone. There was no interplay between the people and between the people & G-d. Abraham did not invent Monotheism, Noah was alive till Abraham was 58. What Abraham invented was Ethical Monotheism.

To Judaism, life is with people. One can only feel most human, most in tune with the world and with his Maker when he is with others. Loneliness is the worst curse that can befall any man. Man was not meant to be alone. Loneliness does not enhance one's vision but distorts it. Abraham knew that he could reach God much more easily by being with people than by being alone. That's, also, why Mt. Moriah, the Temple Mount, is Judaism's holy site and not Mt. Sinai. Although it's true that Moses received the Torah on Mt. Sinai, he was alone there. It was on Mt. Moriah that one Jew was willing to sacrifice for another Jew and that is where we can more easily find God. Where we have one Yud in Hebrew we have only Yachid, loneliness. Where we have two Yudeem side by side we have the name of God. But if we find one yud on top of another then we have oppression and we can't approach G-d. But if we treat each other well then we can approach G-d. First we must be ethical and then we can have a true encounter with G-d.