

Table Talk: Quotes and Questions for Family Discussions

Prepared by Rabbi Marc Eichenbaum
Yeshiva University's Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks-Herenstein
Center for Values and Leadership

“Shavuot is when we celebrate the giving of the law at Mount Sinai. The fact that we read Ruth’s story at this time tells us that society cannot be made by laws alone. It needs something more – the unforced, unlegislated kindness that makes us reach out to the lonely and vulnerable, even if we are lonely and vulnerable ourselves. Then and now, society needs the kindness of strangers.”

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Power of Ideas: Words of Faith and Wisdom* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2021): 78.

- What does Rabbi Sacks think is the reason we read Ruth on Shavuot?
- Can you think of other reasons we read Ruth on Shavuot?
- When was the last time you experienced the kindness of a stranger?

“And Moses went up to God. God called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob and declare to the children of Israel.” Exodus 19:3

- Rashi segments the audience for this into two groups, “house of Jacob” and “children of Israel.” Why?
- What might the different verbs associated with each group teach us?
- When have you used different communication skills to convey the same message to different people?

“Only he who has the commandments of God engraved on his soul and who is not subject to human dictates can be called free. The children of Israel were not summoned to the service of God until they had ceased to be in Pharaoh’s service. The road from Egypt to Sinai represented a momentous spiritual and physical transition and it is this that the text refers to when it states: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, How I bore you also on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself.’”

Dr. Nechama Leibowitz, *Studies in Shemot*, (World Zionist Organization, 1981): 298-299.

- According to Dr. Leibowitz, when is a person truly free?
- Why do B’nei Yisrael need to leave one service to enter another?
- What human dictates are holding you back from being truly free and dedicated to God?

“When the Jews were delivered from the Egyptian oppression and Moses rose to undertake the almost impossible task of metamorphosing a tribe of slaves into a nation of priests, he was told by G-d that the path leading from the holiday of Pesach to Shavuot, from initial liberation to consummate freedom, leads through the medium of time. The commandment of se rah was entrusted to the Jew; the wondrous test of counting 49 successive days was put to him. These 49 days must be whole. If one day is missed, the act of numeration is invalidated... A slave who is capable of appreciating each day, of grasping its meaning and worth, of weaving every thread of time into a glorious

fabric, quantitatively stretching over the period of seven weeks but qualitatively forming the warp and woof of centuries of change, is eligible for Torah. He has achieved freedom.”

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, "Sacred and Profane: Kodesh and Chol in World Perspectives" (Tradition, 1993): 67.

- According to Rabbi Soloveitchik, what is the