

**Shavuot 2018 Sermon Slam**  
**May 19, 2018**  
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Tonight we begin the Festival of Shavuot. Shavuot means weeks, because Shavuot falls 7 weeks after Passover. Thus, Passover and Shavuot are connected. Passover commemorates the Exodus from Egypt. The ultimate purpose of the Exodus was so that the Israelites would receive the Torah, epitomized in the Ten Commandments, at Mt. Sinai. Hence, Shavuot is known as “Zman Matan Toratanu – the time of the Giving of the Torah.

It is very important to differentiate two beliefs that emerge from the Giving of the Torah. One is Torah M’Sinai. The other is Torah Min Hashamayim.

Torah M’Sinai is the belief that the Torah was given at a definite time and place – Mt. Sinai at the time of the wandering in the desert. Scholars give the date as the 13<sup>th</sup> century BCE during the time of Moses. Torah M’Sinai is thus a matter of chronology.

Torah Min Hashamayim is the belief that the Torah ultimately derives from God (literally Torah from Heaven).

Abraham J. Heschel, the Jewish theologian, holds that Torah from Heaven is a far more important belief. It is the basic belief in revelation—the doctrine that God revealed His will to the Jewish people. This is more important than Torah M’Sinai. Why? Heschel says that it is a serious misunderstanding to reduce the problem of revelation to a matter of chronology. This assumes that the authority and sanctity of the Torah depends upon the fact that the Torah was written down entirely in the time of Moses. According to Heschel, the meaning of revelation is given to those who are mystery-minded, not to those who are literal minded. Decisive is not the chronological but the theological dimension—the claim that the will of God reached the understanding of humankind. What does this claim mean? What does it mean to believe that the Torah comes from God? That is the very question to contemplate on Shavuot.

