

I lift up my eyes to the mountains... (Psalm 121:1)

As morning dawned, the Israelites gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai gazing upward in expectation. Thunder rumbled and lightning zigzagged across the vast expanse of sky. The mountain of God was engulfed in smoke, and over the heights hovered a dense, ominous cloud. The air echoed with the piercing blasts of the shofar. The people trembled as they prepared to hear עשרת הדיברות, the Ten Divine Words that would shape their future and forge them into a nation.

The Israelites' journey from the fertile banks of the Nile to the barren wilderness of Sinai and, eventually, to the Land of Israel, was marked by stages. These stages are recorded in meticulous detail throughout the תנ"ך, especially in the Book of Numbers which lists the places in which the Israelites encamped on their journey. Because of the detailed itinerary it's possible to plot the timeline of the Israelites' sojourn or, on a map of the Ancient Near East, to trace their wanderings from place to place. But reading the narrative this way is like reading a resume. You can glean a lot of information from such an exercise, but the essence of the journey is void of substance.

More relevant than the names of the places in which the Israelites encamped or the travel times between their settling in one place or another is how, on this journey, the people changed as individuals and as a nation. Stage by stage, the journey was one of transformation. And truly, isn't that the story of our own lives? Of course the details matter: name, date of birth, places of residence, education history, employment history, hobbies, family members, but such a recitation of facts doesn't define who we are. And when we think of our loved ones who have died, what comes to mind certainly isn't this kind of information. What we recall instead are the loving embraces, the shared laughs, the special ways our loved ones touched our lives and allowed us to be a part of their lives, a part of their journeys. We remember how it felt to be in their presence. We feel the person to person bonds that made our relationship with them so special, so irreplaceable.

Last Shabbat marked the 28th anniversary of my ordination as a Rabbi. The ordination service was held in the historic Plum Street Temple in Cincinnati. Hundreds of people attended. My parents were there. Rick and his parents were there. Becoming a Rabbi was my dream from a very early age. I was overjoyed to have achieved this goal and couldn't wait to begin my career as a Jewish professional. Sadly, someone was missing from that ordination ceremony: my Rabbi. Edwin Soslow was my Rabbi growing up. He was the one who encouraged

my interest in Judaism, who always had time for my questions. Rabbi Soslow made Judaism accessible. He gave me the gift of Torah. Every Shabbat morning he'd invited us kids up to the *bimah* as he read and translated from the *Sefer Torah*. I was in awe! Rabbi Soslow even invited us to his home to help decorate his family's *sukkah*. And no, he wasn't pulling a Tom Sawyer on us. He was the only person I knew who even had a *sukkah*, and how honored I felt stringing popcorn decorations year after year. Rabbi Soslow left my synagogue soon after I became a Bat Mitzvah, and I didn't see him until years later when I was a Rabbinic student at HUC-JIR in Cincinnati.

Rabbi Soslow was in town for the annual conference of Central Conference of American Rabbis. I had absolutely no clue that he was attending the convention until during chapel one morning -- chapel is what we called the morning service -- he tapped me on the shoulder to say hi. Rabbi Soslow had no idea that I was enrolled in the Rabbinic program, but said he really wasn't all that surprised to see me there. Rabbi Soslow told me how proud he was of my decision to become a Rabbi and promised that he would come back to Cincinnati in two years for my ordination. Rabbi Soslow was not at my ordination. He died 16 months earlier of leukemia. He was 49 years old.

Shavuot 5776 שבועות

Yizkor / יזכור

During ספירת העומר, we count 49 days between פסח and שבועות. It's an ancient tradition through which we reenact the anticipation of receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai on Shavuot. Note that when we count the Omer over this 7-week period we count up, from the first day to the 49th. We don't count down as we do when a space shuttle is launched or a new secular year is ushered in. As Jews, we focus not on how much time is left, but rather, we focus on how our time is lived. On this day of memorial, when we think lovingly of those who came before us, may we think not just about THAT they lived, but about HOW they lived, how they made their days count, how they made a difference in this world, how they inspired us to pursue our dreams and our goals, and how important it would be to them that we follow their example by making each and every one of our days count as we continue our own journeys through life.