

IT ALL COMES FROM SINAI

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

Shavuot, the holiday of receiving the Torah, has no special sign -- because the Torah is all we need. As Rabbi Shimon Apisdorf puts it: "On Shavuot, God is the active party, so to speak, and our job is to be receptive to His gift."

On this holiday, we recognize who we are, and _why_ we are who we are. Jews are together as a people because we have the Torah.

Because my work is done on the Internet, I have gradually acquired a number of free subscriptions to technology magazines, one of which is the Industry Standard (www.thestandard.com). It has many interesting articles about the Internet economy and what new technologies we can expect to see down the road.

So, why am I plugging a magazine on the eve of Shavuot? Because this year, they ran a feature they called the "MBA draft," which Americans will recognize as an obvious take-off on the draft of the top prospects for the NBA, the National Basketball Association. These young graduates with a Masters of Business Administration were considered the Standard's "top choices" for business in the year 2000.

Draft choice number three was Dan Rapaport, and given so obviously a Jewish name I was inspired to read his story. I must admit, it came as a very pleasant surprise. Here's an interview question from the Standard, and his answer:

Q: Who's your most important mentor?

A: My father. My father has taught me the importance of integrity and honor. Most people use those words casually and without recognizing what they truly mean and how they differ from each other. To me, integrity is a stock, a scorecard balance sheet of how you measure up to your own principles over time. Honor is therefore the flow -- it's the income-statement side of the equation -- showing how you live up those principles on a day-to-day basis.

Now, I'm not sure I understand how he differentiates between the two, but the underlying statement is that one must live up to an ethical compass, whether or not something looks like a good opportunity for business or pleasure. It indicates that Mr. Rapaport's moral compass is pointing in the right direction.

Just as striking, though, is the fact that he chose none of his teachers, but his father. Why? Because it

was his father who taught him the importance of personal integrity, ethics, and honesty. Despite what people say, one cannot do anything to get ahead, and good guys do not finish last. And some things are more important than business -- even for a top young MBA.

Where did Dan Rapaport's father acquire such a principled understanding of life? I'm sure he would tell us that it was his parents who conveyed this message to him, which he then passed to his son. Where does this message of morality and ethics take us? Back to the source -- to Sinai.

If we recognize Torah principles coming from an MBA, someone entering the "dog eat dog world" to participate in the "rat race," it should be no surprise after all -- because it is the Torah which engraved those principles into our people, just as surely as G-d engraved his Commandments into tablets of stone.

So this Shavuot, let us turn to the Torah, appreciate all it has given us, and push forward in our study. Let Torah have yet another opportunity to implant itself into our hearts, for generations to come!

A Happy Holiday and Good Shabbos,

Rabbi Yaakov Menken