

the MILFORD JEWISH VOICE

SHAVUOT 5786 | SPRING/SUMMER 2026

ISSUE 18

DEAR FRIENDS,

Summer is almost upon us! The holiday of Shavuot, celebrated as the weather turns warmer, marks the giving of the Torah that day in the desert over three millennia ago. The Torah is the foundation of Jewish life and identity. Most of us are familiar with the beginning of the Torah—the story of Creation. What about the end, though?

After recording the entire story of the Jewish people beginning with Abraham, the very first one to recognize one G-d, through the subsequent generations, their ups and downs, you would expect the Torah to conclude with triumph: the Israelites reach the Promised Land and they celebrate. Instead, we are left with a cliffhanger—almost literally. Moses, the greatest leader of our people, stands on a mountain overlooking the land he has led them toward, yet he is not permitted to enter. And then he passes away. There is no happy closure, no neat ending.

But perhaps that is the point. The Torah is not meant to feel finished. It ends as an invitation, not a conclusion. An invitation to step forward, learn from the past, take responsibility, and continue writing the story. What looks like an ending is really a sacred handoff: from G-d to Moses, and from Moses to every generation of Jews—all of us.

Our sages teach that every person must say, “The Torah was given to me.” Not only to those who came before, but personally, to us, in this very moment. Each year on Shavuot we celebrate the Torah anew. This year, we’ll be celebrating 3,338 years of this gift that has been our treasured inheritance. Shavuot is not only a remembrance of revelation, but a renewal of it. We get to receive the Torah again and carry it forward into our daily lives.

Best wishes for a wonderful summer!

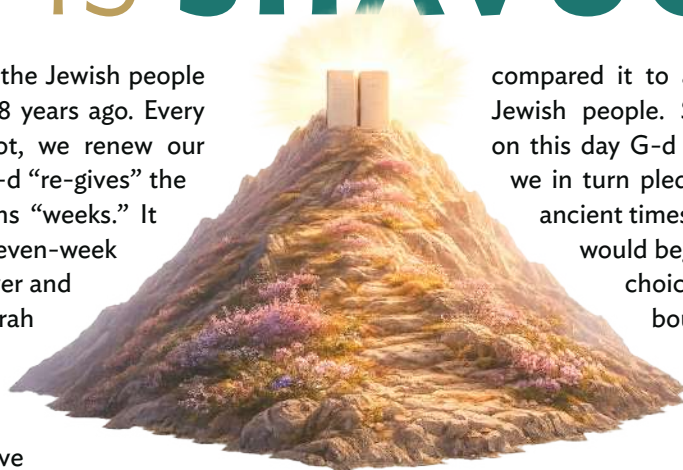


Rabbi Schneur &
Charie Wilhelm

P.S. This summer, we'll be marking 100 years since the founding of the Hebrew Congregation of Woodmont. It's a special time for the Milford community, and we hope you'll join us in celebration at the centennial gala planned for September, G-d willing! Look out for an invitation coming soon!

WHAT IS SHAVUOT?

The Torah was given by G-d to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai more than 3,338 years ago. Every year on the holiday of Shavuot, we renew our acceptance of G-d's gift, and G-d “re-gives” the Torah. The word Shavuot means “weeks.” It marks the completion of the seven-week counting period between Passover and Shavuot. The giving of the Torah was a far-reaching spiritual event—one that touched the essence of the Jewish soul for all times. Our sages have



compared it to a wedding between G-d and the Jewish people. Shavuot also means “oaths,” for on this day G-d swore eternal devotion to us, and we in turn pledged everlasting loyalty to Him. In ancient times, Shavuot was the time that people would begin to bring *bikkurim*, their first and choicest fruits, to thank G-d for Israel's bounty. The holiday of Shavuot is a two-day holiday, beginning at sundown of the 5th of Sivan and lasting until nightfall of the 7th of Sivan (May 21–May 23).

WHAT IS THE TORAH?



The Torah is composed of two parts: the Written Law and the Oral Law. The written Torah contains the Five Books of Moses, the Prophets, and the Writings. Together with the Written Torah, Moses was also given the Oral Law, which explains and clarifies the Written Law. It was transmitted orally from generation to generation, and eventually transcribed in the Mishnah, Talmud, Midrash, and the entire corpus of Torah literature that was developed over the millennia. The word Torah means “instruction” or “guide.” The Torah guides our every step through its 613 mitzvot. The word mitzvah means both “commandment” and “connection.” Through the study of Torah and fulfillment of mitzvahs, we connect ourselves and our environment to G-d. G-d’s purpose in creating the world is that we sanctify all of creation, imbuing it with holiness and spirituality.

On the holiday of Shavuot, the entire Jewish nation heard the Ten Commandments from G-d. The next day, Moses ascended Mount Sinai, where he was taught by G-d the rest of the Torah—both the Written and Oral Laws—which he then transmitted to the entire nation.



CUSTOMS OF THE HOLIDAY

- Women and girls light holiday candles to usher in the holiday, on both the first and second evenings of the holiday (Thursday, May 21 & Friday, May 22).
- It is customary to stay up all night learning Torah on the first night of Shavuot. Join us for our annual late-night study session on May 21 at 11:00 pm.
- Adults and children should go to the synagogue on the first day of Shavuot to hear the reading of the Ten Commandments. (See back page for more info.) Children are an important focus of the holiday. Tradition teaches that G-d asked Moses who would guarantee that the Jewish people would keep the Torah. Moses offered Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the 12 tribes, and even the future leaders, but it was only when Moses offered the Jewish children as guarantors that G-d agreed to give the Torah to the Jewish nation.
- As on other holidays, special meals are eaten, and no “work” may be performed.
- It is customary to eat dairy foods on Shavuot. Among other reasons, this commemorates the fact that upon receiving the Torah, including the kosher laws, the Jewish people could not cook meat in their pots, which had yet to be rendered kosher. At Chabad, we will celebrate with a dairy dinner (see back page).
- On the second day of Shavuot, the Yizkor memorial service is recited.
- Some communities read the Book of Ruth publicly, as King David—whose passing occurred on this day—was a descendant of Ruth the Moabite.

YOUR VOICE



Community Members Speak

In 100 words or less, Which story or episode from the Torah inspires you and why?

Mindy Sonet



My favorite woman of the Bible is Rahab, a gentile living in the walls of the city of Jericho. She was an innkeeper, however, some scholars say she ran a brothel. Joshua sent two spies to scout the city of Jericho, who were noticed going into Rahab's inn. Rahab had been following the plight of the Israelites and embraced the greatness and power of Hashem and decided to help the spies escape. She promised the spies she would hide them if they in turn would have her family spared. She lowered the spies from a window, thereby saving them.

Rahab was a woman who started out involved in a livelihood that was deprecating to her self-image and possibly her family's. The word used to describe her vocation in the Bible is from the same root as the word used in Torah to warn us not to "go after your own heart." I have always felt that meant to not pursue your self interests at the expense of your integrity and decency. Rahab was able to overcome that pull to a weaker, self-serving nature, and instead embraced faith in Hashem. Rahab is an inspiration that you can, through effort and faith, change your circumstances for yourself and your family.

Adam Heyman



My Bar Mitzvah Haftarah was from the book of Samuel, about the story of David and Jonathan (Yonatan), highlighting their friendship and Jonathan's help in saving David from King Saul. I believe it is important to go to any length necessary to have a friend during your journey in this life. Not just a mate or spouse...a friend. A friend is necessary in life. Far too many of us misunderstand this. The value of friendship is not simply to have a companion to do things with.

One needs to have a friend in life to cheer them on, to keep check on them, to share joys and sorrows. To challenge them, to inspire them, to comfort them and to give them "chizuk." This is what friendship is. This lesson was one I encountered in my early teens, and has remained in my heart since then.

Vivian Newman

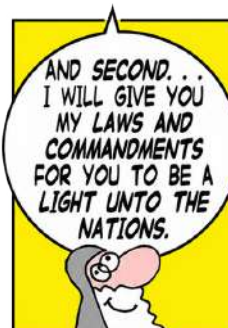


A story in the Torah that has always inspired me is that of Zelophehad's daughters (Numbers 27 and 36). When their father dies without sons, his five daughters respectfully approach Moses and the community, questioning the law that only sons may inherit land. They explain that they do not want their father's name to be lost and ask to retain his land. God affirms their claim, changing the law to allow daughters to inherit.

As the youngest of five girls, I've always related to this story. When I married, I chose to keep my maiden name, in part to preserve my father's name and legacy. Zelophehad's daughters model the importance of asking questions, challenging norms, standing up for what is right, and working together to shape meaningful Jewish traditions—goals I aspire to each day.

THE SHAVUOT DEAL

© DRY BONES



3 FACTS

ABOUT THE TORAH THEY DIDN'T TEACH YOU IN HEBREW SCHOOL

1 Its 304,805 letters have remained unchanged through 30+ centuries

Even though the Torah is the most copied, most read, and most debated book in human history, something extraordinary has remained constant: Not a single one of its 304,805 Hebrew letters has been changed, added, or removed in over 3,300 years.

This staggering precision isn't accidental; it's a religious obligation and an expression of awe. Every Torah scroll in every synagogue around the world is hand-written by a trained scribe called a Sofer. Each letter must be written with intention. If even a single letter is cracked, smudged, or misformed, the entire scroll is considered invalid until corrected. And yes, the scribe must do this all by hand, without vowels, punctuation, or digital tools.

2 The Torah is written in a code

Not a secret one, but a multi-dimensional one. Jewish tradition teaches that the Torah operates on four primary interpretive levels:

- *P'shat*: The simple, literal meaning of the text. This is the level explained by commentators like Rashi, who wrote in 12th-century France but saw his work as clarifying what the Torah meant all along.
- *Remez*: Literally "hint." This level uncovers subtler meanings—using Hebrew wordplay, gematria (numerical values), or alternate pronunciations to surface ideas hidden in plain sight.
- *Drush*: The homiletic level, found in Midrash and Talmud. It explores how verses teach moral, ethical, or spiritual lessons—often reading between the lines to discover deeper patterns.



- *Sod*: The secret, mystical level. This is the realm of Kabbalah, of the Zohar, of cosmic structures and divine energies encoded in the language of the Torah itself.

Together, these four levels form the acronym **PaRDeS**, which means "orchard" in Hebrew.

It's a stunning metaphor. The Torah is not a textbook. It's an orchard, a place of sweetness, beauty, shade, and sustenance. But like any orchard, you don't get the fruit unless you're willing to walk through it, get your hands dirty, and reach.

3 What's missing from the Torah?

While the text has never changed, the Torah still surprises. It's not just what's in it, but what's not. For example, out of 79,976 words, the word "believe" does not appear even once. Not once are Jews told to believe in God.

Instead, we are told to know, to remember, to love, to do, to obey, to listen, to choose. Judaism isn't a religion of belief; it's a religion of covenant and responsibility. You don't believe in fire; you respect it, you engage with it, you use it wisely. The Torah takes the same approach to G-d.

© Adapted from an article featured on www.FutureofJewish.com

What Brings Me Here

BY JAMIE PISANELLE

What brings me here is simple: my child and the Chabad community.

Life moves fast during the week: school, work, activities, homework, and everything in between. But on Sundays, we slow down and make time for something important. We come to Hebrew school.

I bring my child here because I want her to learn more than just Hebrew letters and prayers. I want her to know where she comes from, to feel proud of being Jewish, and to understand she is part of something much bigger than herself. I want her to grow up with traditions, values, and a sense of belonging that will stay with her for life. Of course, not every Sunday morning is effortless. There are tired faces, rushed breakfasts, and moments when staying home sounds easier. But then I hear a prayer practiced in

the kitchen, see a new Hebrew word read with confidence, or watch friendships growing in the hallway—and I'm reminded exactly why we come.

What brings me here is the hope that these Sunday mornings are building something lasting: roots, connection, pride, and memories my child will carry long after Hebrew school ends. And as a Hebrew school mom, that is more than enough reason to keep showing up.



Sleepless in Milford

Late Night Shavuot Study Session

THURSDAY, MAY 21 • 11:00 PM

June 19

Join us for a special Shabbat dinner with a guest speaker, honoring the life and legacy of the Rebbe.

Shabbat of Inspiration

ISRAELI Night Out

WEDNESDAY, JULY 8
6:30 PM

FALAFEL & SHWARMA DINNER
ISRAELI MUSIC

RSVP: WWW.JEWISHMILFORD.COM

M MENTCH CLUB

SCOTCH & STEAK

Monday, July 27
6:00 pm

ENJOY A SCOTCH-TASTING PRESENTATION & GRILLED STEAKS

WOODMONT BEACH ROOFTOP
LOCATION SHARED UPON RESERVATION
COUVERT: \$100, \$250/SPONSOR
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PROJECT MATZAH



JEWISH WOMEN'S CIRCLE



JEW CREW EVENTS



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HEBREW SCHOOL



LAG BAOMER BBQ



THE AMERICAN SOLDIER

WHO STOOD UP TO THE NAZIS—AND WON

The incredible, true story of Roddie Edmonds

By Yosef Kaufmann



Master Sergeant Roddie Edmonds

Journal. He was just a regular Southern American family man. Except for the extraordinary secret he managed to take with him to the grave.

Roddie was a WWII and Korean war veteran. He never really spoke about his experiences in the wars. All he would say was, “we were humiliated; things happened that are too bad to share.” It took a college history assignment to unearth what had really happened.

Chris’s daughter came home one day and told her father she needed to do an oral history report about a family member. So they borrowed Roddie’s wartime diary from Chris’s mom. Most of it was written in short phrases or coded shorthand. Although they were able to glean enough information to complete the project, Chris’s curiosity was piqued. He tried to uncover more information but didn’t understand much from his father’s diary. Frustrated, but not ready to give up, Chris turned to Google. After entering his father’s name and rank in the search bar, an article from *The NY Times* came up. A soldier, Lester Tannenbaum (Tanner), had mentioned that he wouldn’t be alive if it weren’t for the bravery of Master Sergeant Roddie Edmonds. Intrigued, Chris knew he had to find out more. After getting in



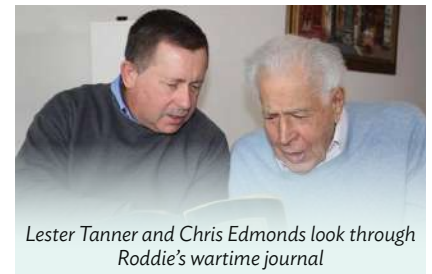
Staff Sergeant Lester Tannenbaum

touch with Lester, he searched for other POWs and started piecing together his father’s amazing story. Roddie, one of four brothers born in Knoxville, Tenn., joined the army in 1941. Within two years he was promoted to the rank of Master Sergeant. In the fall of 1944, Roddie shipped out to the European theater as part of the 106th Infantry Division. He arrived at the Belgian-German border to

reinforce the Siegfried Line, just inside the German border. Six days after their arrival, the Germans began the Battle of the Bulge, bringing the war to them. They were completely outnumbered and outgunned. On December 19, the commanding officer surrendered. Roddie called it a smart move, as “our rifles were no good against tanks and 88 fire.”

Then began their long march through the frozen German countryside. Anyone who couldn’t keep up was shot on the spot. After being loaded into cattle cars at Gerolstein railway station, they were transported in “standing room only” boxcars to Stalag IX-B, near the resort town of Bad Orb.

On the way, Germans pulled the unmarked POW trains into the Limburg train yard. Later that night, the Germans fled, leaving the American POWs

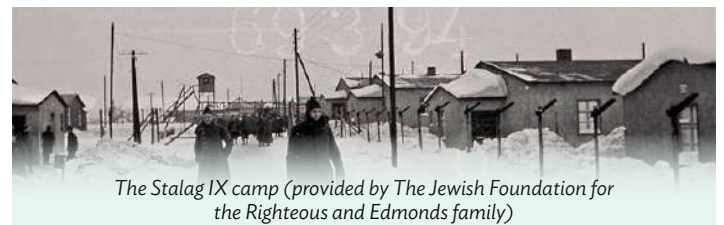


Lester Tanner and Chris Edmonds look through Roddie's wartime journal

locked in the box cars as the British bombed the railyard. He wrote in his diary that that was his worst experience. They heard every bomb whistling their way and it seemed like each one would hit their boxcar. Several hundred Americans died, including Roddie’s chaplain.

After a month at Bad Orb, Roddie and all the noncommissioned officers were taken to Stalag IX-A near Ziegenhain, Germany. Upon arrival, the Germans ordered all the American POWs, nearly 1300 men, to remain standing outside in the knee-high snow.

They were “welcomed” by German soldiers, with their growling dogs, who spent the rest of the day shouting and intimidating them. At the end of the day, a young Russian soldier was brought to the front of the camp, and they were forced to watch the young prisoner being mauled to death by the dogs. Anyone who tried to look away received a butt in the head from a German rifle. “This will happen to any one of you who does not do exactly what we say,” they were warned.



The Stalag IX camp (provided by The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous and Edmonds family)

Master Sergeant Edmonds was now the highest-ranking soldier among the American POWs. The following evening, January 26, 1945, an announcement came over the loudspeaker instructing that the next morning only the Jewish soldiers were to present for roll call. Immediately, Roddie turned to his men and said, "We're not doing that. Tomorrow morning, we all go out."

When Major Siegmann came out for roll, he was enraged to see all 1,292 Americans standing in sharp formation. He stormed over to Edmonds and shouted, "These men cannot all be Jews!" Without hesitation, Roddie calmly replied "We are all Jews here." Furious, Major Siegmann drew his pistol, put it to Roddie's forehead, and screamed, "Sergeant, one last chance. You will order the Jews to step forward or I will shoot you right now!" Unfazed, Roddie replied. "You can shoot me, but you will have to kill all of us, because we know who you are, and when we win this war, you will stand trial for war crimes, and you will pay." Major Siegmann turned white and started to shake. He lowered his gun and stormed off. Roddie's bravery saved more than 200 Jewish lives that day.

Lester Tannenbaum was standing directly next to Roddie and vividly remembered the entire ordeal. "When the officer put his gun in Roddie's face, time seemed to freeze," he said. "I was amazed how calm he was. He had probably never even seen a Jew until he joined the army. He could no more have turned over any of his men to the Nazis than he could have stopped breathing. He just couldn't do it."

Towards the end of the war, with the Allied Forces converging, the Nazis started to evacuate the camp and march the prisoners deeper into Germany.

Once again, Roddie Edmonds' courage was responsible for

saving the lives of his men. He told his men that when the march begins everyone should break rank, eat grass, or otherwise make themselves sick, and run back to the barracks, those who were not ill assisting those who were. Incredibly, it worked!



Ambassador Dermer, former Chief Rabbi Lau and Chris Edmonds at the ceremony recognizing Roddie Edmonds as 'Righteous Amongst the Nations' (provided by the Edmonds family)

Though the Germans threatened them and roughed them up, Roddie and his men stayed the course all day. Finally, as the sun was setting, the commandant threw his hands in the air and said to Roddie, "OK, you win. We give up. You can have the camp. We're leaving."

The Germans marched out, leaving the Americans alone in the empty camp. Lester said, "It was one of the greatest escapes in WWII and we never left the camp! We kicked the Nazis out."

The Talmud tells us that one who saves a life is considered to have saved the entire world. What is it considered then, for someone who saved so many?

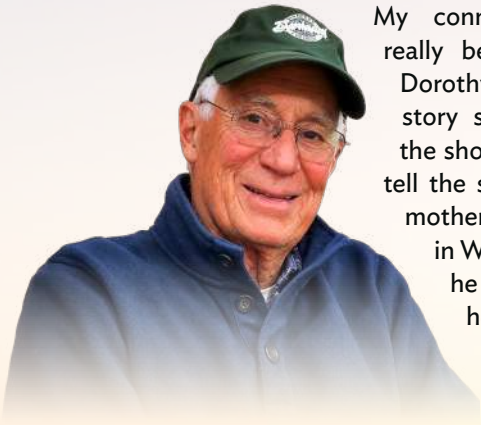
On February 10, 2015, Master Sergeant Roddie Edmonds was posthumously awarded the prestigious "Righteous Amongst the Nations" award from Yad Vashem, becoming the first American serviceman to receive the award.

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CHANUKAH IN MILFORD, STRATFORD, & WEST HAVEN

DR. STEPHEN STEIN



My connection to Woodmont really begins with my parents, Dorothy and Morris Stein. Their story started right here along the shoreline. My father liked to tell the story of how he met my mother: she was riding her bike in Woodmont, took a fall, and he helped her up, brushing her off. That moment was the beginning of a lifetime together.

In the 1920s, my paternal grandfather,

David Stein, began coming here from Waterbury, renting cottages during the summers. By the early 1950s, he built a house of his own on Beach Avenue. I still remember watching him hammering in panels, shaping what would become a central gathering place for our family. My grandmother would spend entire summers there, while my grandfather joined on weekends.

I was born in Waterbury, but Woodmont is where I grew up in many ways. Summers meant beach days, swimming, and time with family. My father was one of four brothers, and between us there were more than ten cousins. Every summer, we all found our way back to Woodmont. It felt like the whole family converged here. We played touch football out on the sandbars, swam at Anchor Beach where it wasn't too rocky, and spent long days in and out of the water. I had a Sunfish sailboat for a few years. The shoreline was our playground.

In the evenings we'd grill hot dogs and hamburgers outside. The Good Humor truck would roll through, a highlight for every kid. I



Steve's parents, Dorothy and Morris Stein, in Woodmont. In the top right corner, you can see a sign advertising kosher rooms for rent.

remember the original Woodmont Tree which was featured on many postcards and was a Woodmont landmark. My grandmother shopped at Treat's Farm, carefully inspecting every piece of produce. As a teenager, I spent time

hanging out at Sloppy Joe's, like so many other teens at the time.

My paternal grandfather was a significant figure in my life. A proud Zionist who immigrated from Eastern Europe, he became the first president of the Jewish Federation of Waterbury. He also worked in the plumbing supply industry and founded Torcco,



what is now a four-generation family business. In Woodmont, though, I got to see another side of him. He took up painting and became an amateur artist. He painted several portraits and scenes, some of which I have framed in my home.

My maternal grandparents owned a bakery in Waterbury, and they would also spend summers in Woodmont. One distinct memory I have as a child was before Passover, when my grandfather would bring back a live carp on the train from New York. It would be kept in the bathtub until my grandmother was ready to prepare it.



Painting by Steve's grandfather, depicting Moses descending from Mt. Sinai

My own path took me to Massachusetts for prep school. I was one of about a dozen Jewish students, and they would bus us to Shul for the High Holidays.

I then went on to Dartmouth for college, and medical school at Harvard. I did my residency at Yale, where I met my future wife, Emily Fine, who was a medical student. We got married in Woodmont, on the porch of the family house my grandfather built—a full-circle moment. Our children, Allison, Sam, and Joseph, were born there, and my son Sam's Bris was also held in that house.



Steve & Emily on their wedding day in Woodmont

Even after settling in Hamden, we returned every summer, until we moved back to Woodmont permanently in the 2000s. Over the many years I have spent in Woodmont, I have watched it evolve. More people began living here year-round, and the area grew more developed, yet its essence never changed.

Today, Woodmont still means the beach to me. I spend time kayaking, swimming, and enjoying the water. Now it's my grandchildren playing on the beach, continuing a cycle that began generations ago.

For more info on Bagel Beach and to read others' memories, visit WWW.BAGELBEACH.COM.

Rabbi, I received the Chanukah edition of The Milford Jewish Voice and I am so very impressed with all that you and your wife do. The Greater Milford Jewish community is fortunate to have both of you. And what you do also positively impacts the rest of the community, as well. May Ha-Shem bless you with good health, joy, peace, and length & strength of days. B'shalom, **JIMMY**

I know I shouldn't open the door to strangers, but this time I had a feeling it would be okay. And I was right. The box of matzo made our seder even more special. We have been in Milford for thirty years. The New York town we came from is the home of many Jewish families: Reform, Conservative. and Orthodox. We had never lived in an area where Jews were in the minority. As Reform Jews we were in culture shock when we settled in Milford. "What do you mean the PTA meeting or the soccer practice is scheduled for Erev Rosh Hashanah?" It never happened where we were raised and where we raised our children. Moving to Milford, the town we have come to love, gave us a picture of the real world. For me, it made meeting other Jews more welcome, more important. I think it's why your kind gift for our seder was so heartily appreciated. I also appreciate the warm letter enclosed with the matzo; the letter contained no request for donation. Unusual and welcome. Thank you. **JUDY**

Dear Rabbi, Now that Pesach is over, I wanted to thank you again for the shmurah matzot which we used (and devoured, entirely!) for our first seder here in Stratford. I also read aloud your paragraph about the making of the matzah and the meaning, especially for this year! Thanks again for all you do to enhance our holidays and our lives. **JOYCE**

I enjoyed the Chanukah celebration in Stratford and seeing you and your family. Thank you. **PATTY**

Last night was the first public menorah lighting ceremony I'd ever been to. After waking up to the horrors of the day, it was a very cathartic and meaningful experience. Thank you for encouraging us to be there. עם ישראל חי **IRIT**

Hello Rabbi, Thank you for reaching out today and delivering some very special matzah to me. I appreciate the support, connection, and good will for the Passover holiday. Shalom, **MICHAEL**

Dear Chanie, Thank you to you and the Rabbi for the gift of the Shmurah Matzah! I will bring it to the Seder at my daughter's and explain by reading your letter. Wishing you and all of your family a Zissen Pesach! Warmly, **JILL**

Wishing you and your family a wonderful summer



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FRIDAY, MAY 22
5:30 PM
AT CHABAD-HCW
15 EDGEFIELD AVE.

HEAR THE TEN
COMMANDMENTS
& ENJOY A DELICIOUS
DAIRY DINNER

NO CHARGE
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RSVP: JEWISHMILFORD.COM/SHAVUOT2026



SHAVUOT SERVICES TIMES

Shavuot Eve

Thursday, May 21

7:52 pm - Light Holiday Candles

11:00 pm - Late Night Study Session

Shavuot Day 1

Friday, May 22

10:00 am - Morning Services

followed by light Kiddush

5:30 pm - Reading of the Ten Commandments

followed by Dairy Dinner

Light candles at 7:53 pm

Shavuot Day 2

Shabbat, May 23

10:00 am - Morning Services

11:30 am - Yizkor Memorial Service

followed by Kiddush

9:00 pm - Holiday ends

203.772.8818 www.jewishmilford.com

SAVE THE DATE

CHABAD OF MILFORD-HCW
CENTENNIAL GALA

