

What an incredible portion we have this week. We learn about justice and how it should be meted out. We learn about the relationship between in-laws, especially with non-Jewish in-laws, and how to be both respectful and separate. We learn to share in the joys of those we love. We learn how to prepare for God's presence amongst us, and we receive the 10 words, the commandments that have come to rest on the doors of many arks and synagogues.

I have wondered why it takes so long to get these mystical words. Why are we already 30% into the 5 books before we're blessed by the Big 10? As a therapist, I'm taught to ask why now?, and that's an important question for this turning point in our relationship with God.

I think that this event, this moment, is the real commitment between God and the Jewish people. This is, in effect, our marriage. We know God, and God knows us. We know that God is flawed, angry, loving, absent. God knows that we are flawed, angry, loving, whiny. And we still pick each other, to have and to hold, from this day forth. And, if we are very lucky, we will remember to forgive each other for that which we cannot do, those ways in which we will always be flawed.

And we are immediately flawed. Back at Mount Sinai, the people are terrified by God's presence, and ask Moses to approach God for them, protecting them by allowing them inexperience and ignorance.

We do this all the time. We try to protect our children from pain by intervening with teachers who judge our children harshly, by encouraging them to stay away from friends who have hurt them. We do it with our partners by not saying those things that only we can be counted on to say. We do it with our friends by agreement when we feel doubt. We protect the people we love by giving them the opportunity to avoid harsh truths.

And we Reform Jews also do it by telling ourselves that we don't have to know very much to be "Good" Jews. We say that what matters is our intent, our good deeds, and that knowledge and effort are the burdens of the orthodox. But I don't believe this to be true. In fact, I think the burden of Reform Judaism is exactly the opposite - we must know, so that we can choose. The act of choosing, like the act of marriage, demands that we know what we need and what we can live without. And the awareness that we are prepared to do without.

Think about it - you wouldn't go to a doctor whose learning had stopped after med school. No, we expect our doctors and our accountants and our teachers to keep learning. They don't have to use everything they learn, but man, they

better keep learning. And we Reform Jews have the same obligation.

Our obligation is to learn and push ourselves and each other. We are taught to learn in communal groups, so that we can challenge and prod each other. And here's our chance:

Join me, Cantor Micah, Melissa Cohavi and other congregants March 13-15 and learn with us on our congregational retreat. We will study together and play together and make music together (I promise not to sing...). We will have opportunities for quiet walks and Tikkun Olam and meditation. Join us as we approach God together - and let's not ask Moses to do it for us. Let's be better than our forebears - let us engage with text, ritual and each other!

Betsy Stone