

350 Left Standing (and Some Sitting) After Shavuot “All-Nighter”

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The tradition of honouring Shavuot with an all-night Torah study session has taken on a non-traditional life all its own within Toronto’s evolving downtown Jewish community.

Shavuot marks the beginning of the wheat harvest, and celebrates the time that the Jewish people received the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai.

Over the last three years the “Downtown Tikkun Leil Shavuot” All-Night Jewish Learning Festival has grown into the largest event of its kind in Canada, with an impressive roster of community leaders presenting on a host of traditional and contemporary approaches to Torah study, philosophy, cooking, meditation, mysticism, storytelling and song.

Attendees were able to choose from a wide range of workshops, exploring the teachings of classical rabbis, poetry from Spain’s medieval Golden Age, twentieth-century liberal theologies, and much more. This year’s festival drew 350 people, including programming and a slumber party for children.

“Toronto’s Jewish community has its roots in the neighbourhoods around Kensington Market, Little Italy, and the Annex, and we’re so proud to bring Sinai back to Spadina,” says Sharoni Sibony, Senior Programmer of Adult Jewish Life at the Miles Nadal Jewish Community Centre, where the festival is held. “Our neighbourhood is once again at the intersection of tradition and modernity, of a renewed spiritual and intellectual Jewish energy that casts its glance back both to our local history and to thousands of years of Jewish tradition.”

The festival offered both traditional approaches to Jewish texts and new reads on ancient themes. It’s “doors-open Judaism”: a diverse, inclusive experience where everyone is invited to nourish their own interests and explore something new.

“It’s a meeting point of so many diverse people, backgrounds, opinions, ways of learning, topics, teachers and trends that it’s practically bursting at the seams,” says Rabbi Elyse Goldstein, author of *New Jewish Feminism* and Director of Jewish Programs and Kollel at the Prosserman Jewish Community Centre.

The event was a collaboration of several organizations: the Annex Shul, Camp Geshar and Habonim Dror, Congregation Darchei Noam, Congregation Shir Libeynu, Downtown Jewish Community School, First Narayever Congregation, Jewish Family and Child Services, Kollel and the Prosserman JCC, Limmud Toronto, Makom: Creative Downtown Judaism, Miles Nadal JCC, Paul Penna Downtown Jewish Day School, and Shores: Jewish Environmental Programs.

Next year’s event is already in the works, slated for Saturday, May 26, 2012.

