

The Best Laid Plans ...

Thought for the Day

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You might not agree, but I'm lucky to be here today! My flight back from Heathrow yesterday didn't do the usual trick of flying up the M6 and M74, but flew west to Bristol, zigzagged across to Newcastle, and then eventually reached Glasgow from the north, I guess to evade the volcanic assault from Iceland on the British way of life!

That's ironic, because I was on my way home to celebrate what is, in a funny sense, the Jewish festival of volcanoes, *Shavuot*. Like the other main festivals, this is partly a harvest festival, and partly historic. The agricultural significance is hinted at in the name, *Shavuot*, which means "weeks", because in the days of the Temple in Jerusalem, farmers brought offerings of the new barley crop at Passover, and then, seven weeks later, of the new wheat crop at *Shavuot*.

But *Shavuot* also marks the revelation of the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai, when, as described in the book of Exodus, there was thunder and lightening and thick darkness, and smoke belched from the mountain as from a furnace, and the mountain shook, and the noise saturated the senses. Tonight, just as the Bible tells us that the Jewish people remained alert to prepare for this overwhelming experience, so many have the custom to stay awake all night studying in preparation for the festival.

That's certainly a better reason for staying awake than all those poor stranded folk who literally don't know whether they're coming or going. As I watch friends' plans to spend the festival with family abroad evaporate in a cloud of ash, and as my own synagogue has had to abandon its planned programme because the American youth leaders are stuck on the wrong side of the cloud, I realise how fortunate I have been not to have been seriously inconvenienced. But there is a more important message for all of us: that the best laid plans of mice and men gang aft agley – or, as my mother was fond of quoting – that "man proposes, but Gd disposes".