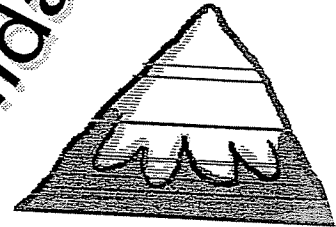
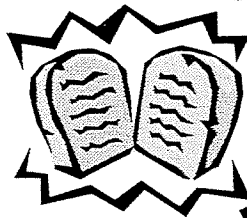




SHAVUOS
The Forgotten Holiday!



Source Materials
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Jewish Celebrations

Holidays and More!

Holidays

Yom Yerushalayim

As Israel celebrates *Yom Yerushalayim*--Jerusalem Day--on June 2, it will mark 33 years since the reunification of Jerusalem. Bluma Zuckerbrot-Finkelstein details the issues surrounding Jerusalem's future status.

Shavuot

Just in time for Shavuot, Alan M. Dershowitz talks to **Jewish Family & Life!** about his new book *The Genesis of Justice: Ten Stories of Biblical Injustice that Led to the Ten Commandments and Modern Law*.

Shavuot is coming. Now is the time to get creative with making those dairy meals, planning an all-night study sessions and arranging the flower decorations. Elizabeth Applebaum offers ten great suggestions to make your Shavuot special.

Dairy Delicacies for Shavuot: Shavuot Cake; Homemade Cottage Cheese; Farmer's Cheese and Yogurt Cheese; Broccoli, Cauliflower, Mushroom and Noodle Casserole with White Wine; Creamy Cheese Blintzes; Spinach Soufflé with Cheese; Lemony Luscious Cheese Pie; and Kids' Favorite Cheese Tarts

Shavuot for Children and Adolescents: A Pajama Party with Ice Cream

Shavuot has been a well-kept secret among the Jewish holidays.

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It's Easy Being Green: New ways to use Flora and Fauna, Plus More Great Ideas for Shavuot

by *Elizabeth Applebaum*

Anybody can be the big cheese on Shavuot--you just have to be a little creative. Dairy foods are traditional on the holiday, with cheesecake topping the list of everyone's favorite Shavuot dessert. If you want to win friends and impress your neighbors, try hosting a top-your-own cheesecake party, with jam and fresh fruit and whipped cream and nuts and chocolate and butterscotch sauce and ice cream all in little bowls for each guest to help him or herself. If it sounds like fun, that's because this holiday, while extremely important (Shavuot marks the time God gave the law to the Jewish people), also is quite unusual for a number of reasons. It means lots of dairy foods (that's right--a Jewish holiday without chicken!), staying up all night and even a touch of mystery, like perhaps the opening of the entire world (see number three below). This year, Shavuot begins Thursday evening, June 8. Here are some ways to help you prepare for, and celebrate, the holiday.

1. Read All About It

While most people are more than familiar with those famous two tablets, in fact these comprise just ten of the *mitzvot* (commandments) God gave the Jewish people. This Shavuot, why not take a look at all 613 and try observing just one more? It doesn't have to be the most difficult; you may even find one that you enjoy, or are amazed by, or want to research further. Consider the following *mitzvot*

- a) A Jew may not curse a judge, ruler or another Jew.
- b) A Jew may not break his or her word.

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Shavuot

Shavuot ["Weeks"] occurs seven weeks after Pesah. Shavuot is one of the major festivals of Judaism, a "Yom Tov." In contrast to Pesah, the most widely celebrated Jewish Holiday among American Jews, the celebration of Shavuot is comparatively muted. Perhaps this is due to the fact that Shavuot lacks a unique home celebration, like the Pesah seder. We at Beth El encourage you not to forget this Holiday.

Shavuot started out as an agricultural holiday. In the days of the Temple, the one in Jerusalem destroyed in the year 70, pilgrims would bring elaborately decorated baskets of their "first fruits" to the Temple.

If this were all there was to Shavuot, then it would be easy to see why Shavuot loses the Festival popularity contest. Few of us are involved in the production of agricultural products. (Other than grass lawns.) And there is no Temple.

This is not a new problem. After Nebuchadnezzar and his happy Babylonians conquered Judea, destroyed the First Temple, and exiled the Jewish community to Babylonia, Jews found themselves in a situation that robbed Shavuot of its agricultural significance.

Judaism has stayed vital by reinterpreting its symbols when the old meanings lost their punch. Many of the world's religions have fallen by the wayside of history; to survive a religion must evolve to be relevant and compelling to the people of the current day.

And so was the case with Shavuot: it was invested with additional meaning to make up for its stale agricultural significance. It became the anniversary of the day the Torah was revealed to the Jewish people at Sinai.

In the 16th century, the Kabbalists [Jewish Mystics] introduced a new innovative practice to put more kick in Shavuot: the Tikkun Leil Shavuot. The Tikkun Leil Shavuot is an all-night group Torah study session. According to legend, the Israelites at Sinai all fell asleep, and Moses had to wake them up to receive the precious Torah in the morning. To show how much we love the Torah, we stay up all night in contrast. Many Reform congregations run a Tikkun; often they do not last all night, however.

In 1847, the Reform movement added its own enhancement to Shavuot, the Confirmation ceremony. This ceremony celebrates the completion of a typically two or three year program in Jewish education by youth typically 15 or 16 years old. The Confirmation ceremony is held either during the Shavuot evening service, or after or before it, and certainly before the Tikkun, if there is one. The idea of "Confirmation" was borrowed from the Christians. Today Confirmation serves as an important inducement to Jewish youth to stay involved in Jewish education after their Bar or Bat Mitzvah at age 13. Rabbi Kraus and Education Director Koritsky have created a wonderful

1 In the third month from the Exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt, on this day, they arrived at the Wilderness of Sinai. * 2 They journeyed from Rephidim and arrived at the Wilderness of Sinai and encamped in the Wilderness; and Israel encamped there, opposite the mountain.

3 Moses ascended to God, and HASHEM called to him from the mountain, saying, "So shall you say to the House of Jacob and relate * to the Children of Israel. You have seen what I did to Egypt, and that I have borne you on the wings of eagles and brought you to Me. 5 And now, if you hearken well to Me and observe My covenant, * you shall be to Me the most beloved treasure of all peoples, for Mine is the entire world. 6 You shall be to Me a kingdom of ministers * and a holy nation." These are the words that you shall speak to the Children of Israel.

7 Moses came and summoned the elders of the people, and put before them all these words that HASHEM had commanded him. 8 The entire people responded together and said, "Everything that HASHEM has spoken we shall do." Moses brought back the words of the people to HASHEM.

9 HASHEM said to Moses, "Behold! I come to you in the thickness of the cloud, so that the people will hear as I speak to you, and they will also believe in you forever." Moses related the words of the people to HASHEM.

10 HASHEM said to Moses, "Go to the people and sanctify them today and tomorrow, and they shall wash their clothing. 11 Let them be prepared for the third day, for on the third day HASHEM shall descend in the sight of the entire people on Mount Sinai. 12 You shall set boundaries for the people roundabout, saying, 'Beware of ascending the mountain or touching its edge; whoever touches the mountain shall surely die. 13 A hand shall not touch it, for he shall surely be stoned or thrown down; whether animal or person he shall not live; upon an extended blast of the shofar, they may ascend the mountain.'"

14 Moses descended from the mountain to the people. He sanctified the people and they washed their clothing. 15 He said to the people, "Be prepared after a three-day period; do not draw near a woman."

16 On the third day when it was morning, there was thunder and lightning * and a heavy cloud on the mountain, and the sound of the shofar was very powerful, and the entire people that was in the camp shuddered. 17 Moses brought the people forth from the camp toward God, and they stood at the bottom of the mountain. 18 All of Mount Sinai was smoking because HASHEM had descended upon it in the fire; its smoke ascended like the smoke of the furnace, and the entire mountain shuddered exceedingly. 19 The sound of the shofar grew continually much stronger; Moses would speak and God would respond to him with a voice.

20 HASHEM descended upon Mount Sinai to the top of the mountain; HASHEM summoned Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses ascended. 21 HASHEM said to Moses, "Descend, warn the people, lest they break through to HASHEM to see, and a multitude of them will fall. 22 Even the Kohanim who approach HASHEM should be prepared, lest HASHEM burst forth against them."

23 Moses said to HASHEM, "The people cannot ascend Mount Sinai, for You have warned us, saying, 'Bound the mountain and sanctify it.'"

24 HASHEM said to him, "Go, descend. Then you shall ascend, and Aaron with you, but the Kohanim, and the people — they shall not break through to ascend to HASHEM, lest He burst forth against them." 25 Moses descended to the people and said [it] to them.

א בחרש השלישי לצאת בני ישראל מארץ מצרים ביום הזה באו

ב מדבר סיני; ויסעו מרפידים ויבאו מדבר סיני ויחגו במדבר ויחון

ג שם ישראל נגד הבור; ומשה עלה אל ה'אלהים ויקרא אליו יהוה מן

ד הבור לאמר זה תאמר לבית יעקב ותגיד לבני ישראל: אתם ראיתם

ה אשר עשיתי למצרים ואשא אתכם על כנפתי נשאים ואבא אתכם

ו אלי; ועתה אם שמעתו כללי ושמתם את פריהי והייתם לי

ז סגולה מפל העצמים בי-לי כל ה'ארוץ: ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת קדושים

ח וגוי קדוש אלה ה'ברבים אשר תדבר אל-בני ישראל; ויבא

ט משה ויקרא לקוץ העם וישם לפניהם את כל ה'דברים האלה אשר

אצוה יהוה: ויעלו כל-העם ויאמרו כל אשר-דבר יהוה נעשה

כא אלהינו כעב הענו כעבור ישמע העם בדברי עמך וגם-בך נאמינו

לעולם ויעד משה את-דברי העם אל-יהוה: ויאמר יהוה אל-משה לך

לא העם וקדושתם היום ומחר וכפשו שמל תום: והיו נכונים ליום השלישי

כי-ו ביום השלישי ירד יהוה לעיני כל-העם על-הור סיני: והגבלת את-

העם סביב לאמר השמרו לכם עלות ב'הור ונגע פקדוהו כל-הנגע ב'הור

מותר וימת: לא-תגוע בו ד' כפי-סוקל ויסקל או-ירה יורה אם-בהמה אם-

איש לא-יחיה במשך היכל המה יעלו ב'הור: וירד משה מן-ה'הור אל-העם

והקדוש את-העם ויכפשו שמל תום: ויהי ביום השלישי בבית הב'הור וירדו כל-

ימיים אל-תנושו אל-אשה: ויהי ביום השלישי בבית הב'הור וירדו

ויברקו ועלו כבד על-ה'הור וקל שפר חזק מאד ויחזר כל-העם אשר

ב'הור וימתו: וירא משה את-העם לקראת ה'אלהים מן-ה'הור ויחזרו

עשנו כעשו הב'הור ויחזרו כל-ה'הור מאד: ויהי קול השפר הולך וחזק

כ מאד משה ירד וה'אלהים יעלנו כקול: וירד יהוה על-הור סיני אל-ראש

ה'הור ויקרא יהוה למשה אל-ראש ה'הור ויעל משה: ויאמר יהוה אל-

כב משה רד העד כעם פו-יהוה אל-יהוה לראות ונפל מפניו רב: וגם

כג ה'הור ויחזרו אל-העם ויחזרו פו-יהוה אל-יהוה ויחזרו פו-יהוה אל-יהוה

אל-יהוה לא-יחזרו אל-העם ויחזרו פו-יהוה אל-יהוה ויחזרו פו-יהוה אל-יהוה

כד הגבל את-ה'הור וקדושתו: ויאמר אליו יהוה לך-רד ועלית אתה ואחור

כה עמך וה'הור ויחזרו אל-העם ויחזרו פו-יהוה אל-יהוה ויחזרו פו-יהוה אל-יהוה

② THE MINHAGIM

In the Scriptures Shavuot is called by these names:

(a) Hag ha-Katzir, “the Feast of the Harvest” (Exodus 23:16), since that holiday occurs in the season (Sivan: May-June) when the wheat begins to ripen. It was from this wheat that two loaves of bread were baked and brought to the Temple as an offering, Shete ha-Lehem, after which the new season’s wheat could be used for the Temple meal offerings.

(b) Hag ha-Shavu’ot, the “Festival of the Weeks,” designated by this name because of the Biblical references, “Seven weeks shall you count unto you” (Exodus 34:22; Deuteronomy 16:9). This refers to the seven weeks beginning with the second day of Passover, a period of forty-nine days, called Sefirat ha-Omer—“the counting of the Omer.” Shavuot is celebrated following this period, on the fiftieth day.

(c) Hag ha-Bikkurim, the “Festival of the First Fruits.” As was noted in (a), immediately after the ritual of offering the two loaves, wheat offerings could be brought from the new crop.

Later the Sages added the name Atzeret, “withdrawal.”

③ KIDDUSH

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר בְּנוּ מִכָּל
עַם, וְרוֹמְמָנוּ מִכָּל לְשׁוֹן, וְקִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו. וְתַתֵּן לָנוּ
יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּאַהֲבָה [שָׁבֻתוֹת לְמִנוּחָה וּמוֹעֲדִים לְשִׂמְחָה חַגִּים
וְזְמָנִים לְשִׂשׁוֹן, אֶת יוֹם [הַשָּׁבֻת הַזֶּה וְאֶת יוֹם]

Shemini Atzeres/Simchas Torah	Shavuos	Pesach
הַשְּׁמִינִי חַג הָעֲצֵרֶת הַזֶּה, זְמַן שְׂמִחָתֵנוּ	חַג הַשְּׁבָעוֹת הַזֶּה, זְמַן מִתֵּן תּוֹרָתֵנוּ	חַג הַמִּצּוֹת הַזֶּה, זְמַן חֲרוּתֵנוּ

[בְּאַהֲבָה] מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ, זָכַר לִיצִיאַת מִצְרָיִם. כִּי בָנוּ בְּחִרְתָּ
וְאוֹתָנוּ קִדְּשָׁתָּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים, [וְשָׁבֻת] וּמוֹעֲדֵי קֹדֶשׁךָ [בְּאַהֲבָה
וּבְרַצוֹן] בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְשִׂשׁוֹן הִנַּחְלָתָנוּ. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, מְקַדֵּשׁ
[הַשָּׁבֻת וְ]יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהַזְּמָנִים.

(.אָמֵן — All present respond)

בְּרוּךְ Blessed are you, HASHEM, our God, King of the universe, Who
creates the fruit of the vine. (All present respond—Amen.)

בְּרוּךְ Blessed are you, HASHEM, our God, King of the universe, Who
has chosen us from every people, exalted us above every
tongue, and sanctified us with His commandments. And You gave us,
HASHEM, our God, with love [Sabbaths for rest], appointed festivals for
gladness, festivals and times for joy, [this day of Sabbath and]

Pesach	Shavuos	Shemini Atzeres/Simchas Torah
this day of the Festival of Matzos, the time of our freedom	this day of the Festival of Shavuos, the time of the giving of our Torah	the eighth day, this Festival of Assembly, the time of our gladness

[with love] a holy convocation, a memorial of the Exodus from Egypt.
For You have chosen us and You have sanctified us above all the
peoples, [and the Sabbath] and Your holy Festivals [in love and in favor] in
gladness and in joy have You granted us as a heritage. Blessed are You,
HASHEM, Who sanctifies [the Sabbath and] Israel and the festive seasons.

④ AKEIDAS YITZHOK

(The Torah does not link Shavuot to the giving of Torah) because there is no appointed time to remember the Torah and its acceptance as for the events commemorated by the other Feasts. The Torah and its study are a permanent obligation, every day and at all times, as it is stated: "This book of the Torah shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate therein day and night" (Jos. 1:8). The Torah must always be new and beloved to us as on the day it was given to us, as it is stated: "This day the Lord your God commands you to do these statutes and judgements, and you shall keep and do them" (Deut. 26:16).

⑤ KLI YAKAR

And you shall offer a new meal-offering — God did not appoint a specific day to mark the giving of the Torah, because we must consider every day as re-enacting the revelation on Mt. Sinai... Indeed, those who study the Torah receive it every day. Hence our Sages declared that the words of the Torah should ever be seen as new, and not as outdated and tiresome lessons. The Torah, in fact, yields novel lessons daily.

Accordingly, the Torah does not refer to Shavuot as the day of the giving of the Torah; it merely alludes to it in the new meal-offering of that day, to intimate that the Torah is daily a new offering. Moreover, the leaven contained in the loaves offering symbolizes man's evil instinct — in Rabbinical literature called "the leaven in the dough" to indicate that where Torah prevails, the evil instinct is powerless...

⑥ R' DAVID TZVI HOFFMAN

No symbolic ritual was instituted for Shavuot to mark the Sinaitic Revelation, seeing that it cannot be translated into the tangible language of symbol. The Children of Israel had been commanded to take heed, that you saw no likeness on the day that the Lord spoke unto you at Horev from the midst of the fire (Deut. 4:15), so as not to become involved in idol worship. They were simply bidden to commemorate the historic experience. They would celebrate on the day of the giving of the Torah the conclusion of the harvest as well, to give thanks to the Lord on bringing their first fruits to the Sanctuary and acknowledge that He is the Lord of all, to Whom it was meet to pay homage and Whose commandments they were to obey. By this they would reenact the promise they made on Sinai, "we shall do and hearken" (Ex. 24:7).

7 SHMA

וְאֶהְבֶּתָּ* אֵת יְהוָה | אֱלֹהֶיךָ, בְּכָל-לִבְבְּךָ, וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ,
 וּבְכָל-מְאֹדְךָ: וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, אֲשֶׁר | אָנֹכִי
 מִצַּוְּךָ הַיּוֹם,* עַל-לִבְבְּךָ* וּשְׁנַנְתָּם לְבִנְיָה, וּדְבַרְתָּ בָּם, בְּשַׁבְתְּךָ
 בְּבֵיתְךָ, וּבְלַכְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ, וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ:
 וְקִשַּׁרְתָּם* לְאוֹת | עַל-יְדֵיךָ, וְהָיוּ לְטֹטְפֹת
 בְּיָדְךָ | עֵינֶיךָ: וּכְתַבְתָּם | עַל-מְזוּזֹת בֵּיתְךָ, וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ:

Touch the arm-tefillin at ... and the head-tefillin at ... then kiss your fingertips.

וְאֶהְבֶּתָּ! You shall love* HASHEM, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your resources. Let these matters that I command you today* be upon your heart.* Teach them thoroughly to your children and speak of them while you sit in your home, while you walk on the way, when you retire and when you arise. Bind them* as a sign upon your arm and let them be tefillin between your eyes. And write them on the doorposts of your house and upon your gates.

8 EXODUS 24

א וְאֶל-מֹשֶׁה אָמַר עָלֶיךָ אֱלֹהֵי-יְהוָה אֶתָּה וְאֶהֲרֹן נָדָב
 וַאֲבִיהוּא וְשִׁבְעִים מִזִּקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם מֵרֶחֶק:
 ב וּנְגַשׁ מֹשֶׁה לְבֵדּוֹ אֶל-יְהוָה וְהֵם לֹא יִגָּשׁוּ וְהָעַם לֹא יַעֲלוּ
 ג עִמּוֹ: וַיָּבֹא מֹשֶׁה וַיְסַפֵּר לָעַם אֵת כָּל-דְּבָרֵי יְהוָה וְאֵת כָּל-
 ד הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים וַיַּעַן כָּל-הָעָם קוֹל אֶחָד וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים
 ה אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר יְהוָה נַעֲשֶׂה: וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה אֵת כָּל-דְּבָרֵי יְהוָה
 וַיִּשְׁבֹּם בְּכֹתֵב וַיָּבִין מִזִּבְחַת תַּחַת הַהָר וּשְׁתֵּים עָשָׂר מִצֵּבֵה
 ו לְשָׁנִים עָשָׂר שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת-נֹעֲרֵי בְנֵי
 ז יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיַּעֲלוּ עֹלֹת וַיִּזְבְּחוּ זִבְחִים שְׁלָמִים לַיהוָה פָּרִים:
 ח וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה חֲצִי הַדָּם וַיִּשֶׂם בְּאַגָּנֹת וְחֲצִי הַדָּם זָרַק עַל-
 ט הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: וַיִּקַּח סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית וַיִּקְרָא בְּאָזְנֵי הָעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ
 כָּל אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר יְהוָה נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע: וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת-הַדָּם
 וַיִּזְרַק עַל-הָעָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה דַם-הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר כָּתַב
 יְהוָה עִמָּכֶם עַל כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה:

¹To Moses He said, "Go up to HASHEM, you, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and you shall prostrate yourselves from a distance. ² And Moses alone shall approach HASHEM, but they shall not approach, and the people shall not go up with him."
³ Moses came and told the people all the words of HASHEM and all the ordinances, and the entire people responded with one voice and they said, "All the words that HASHEM has spoken, we will do."

⁴ Moses wrote all the words of HASHEM. He arose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵ He sent the youths of the Children of Israel and they brought up elevation-offerings, and they slaughtered bulls to HASHEM as feast peace-offerings to HASHEM. ⁶ Moses took half the blood and placed it in basins, and half the blood he threw upon the altar. ⁷ He took the Book of the Covenant and read it in

earshot of the people, and they said, "Everything that HASHEM has said, we will do and we will obey!" ⁸ Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people, and he said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that HASHEM sealed with you concerning all these matters."

The Gemara elaborates further upon the declaration of "We will do and we will hear":

בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁהִקְדִּימוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל, נִעְשָׂה – R' Elazar said: אָמַר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר – At the time Israel preceded we will do to we will hear, יָצְתָה בַּת קוֹל וְאָמְרָה לָהֶן – a Heavenly voice emanated and said to them: מִי גִילָה לְבָנֵי רֹזֵה שְׂמֵלֵאכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת מִשְׁתַּמְשִׁין בּוֹ – "Who revealed to My children this secret which the ministering angels use?" – דִּבְתֵּיב – For it is written^[52] that this is the way of the ministering angels: בְּרָכּוֹ ה' מְלֵאכָיו גְּבוּרֵי – Bless Hashem, O His angels; the strong warriors who do His bidding, to hear the voice of His word. עָשִׂי – First it is written: who do, וְהִרְרֵ – and then it is written: to hear.^[53]

← (9) TALMUD (SHABBOS 88a)

(10) IBID
↓

בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁהִקְדִּימוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל – R' Simai expounded: דָּרַשׁ רַבִּי סִימַאי – At the time Israel preceded we will do to we will hear,^[38] בָּאוּ שְׁשִׁים רִיבּוּאֵי שְׁל מְלֵאכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת לְכָל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד – sixty myriads^[39] of ministering angels came to each and every Jew.^[40] קָשְׂרוּ לוֹ שְׁנֵי כִתְרִים – They tied two crowns on [each Jew], אֶחָד כְּנָגֵד, נִעְשָׂה – one corresponding to we will do, וְאֶחָד כְּנָגֵד, נִשְׁמָע – and one corresponding to we will hear.^[41] וְכִיּוֹן שֶׁחָטְאוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל – But when Israel sinned with the Golden Calf, גָּדְרוּ מֵאָה וְעֶשְׂרִים רִיבּוּאֵי מְלֵאכֵי הַבְּלָה – one hundred and twenty myriads of destructive angels descended and removed [the crowns].^[42] שָׁנְאָמַר – This^[43] is as it is stated:^[44] וַיִּתְּנֻצְלוּ בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-עֲדֻתָם מִהָרַ – The Children of Israel were stripped of their jewelry from Mount Horeb (i.e. Sinai).^[45]

(11) TALMUD (AVODAH ZARAH 2a)

..⁶ What did He seek in Seir, and what did He seek in Mount Paran?⁷ – R. Johanan says: This teaches us that the Holy One, blessed be He, offered the Torah to every nation and every tongue, but none accepted it, until He came to Israel who received it. [How, then, can they say that the Torah was not offered to them?]

(12) SUMMA

Hear, O Israel: * HASHEM is our God, HASHEM, the One and Only. *¹

שְׁמַע | יִשְׂרָאֵל, * יְהוָה | אֱלֹהֵינוּ, יְהוָה | אֶחָד:

(13) EXODUS 18

PARASHAS YISRO

¹ Jethro, the minister of Midian, the father-in-law of Moses, heard everything that God did to Moses and to Israel, His people — that HASHEM had taken Israel out of Egypt. ²

פִּרְשַׁת יִתְרוֹ

וַיִּשְׁמָע יִתְרוֹ כֹּהֵן מִדְיָן חֹתֵן מֹשֶׁה אֵת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אֱלֹהִים לְמֹשֶׁה וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל עַמּוֹ כִּי-הוֹצִיא יְהוָה אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיִם:

(14)

The person who is trapped between personal desires, obligations, demands, mores of society, and conflicting professional values finds it difficult, if not impossible, to develop a consistent unified philosophy of life and action. How can he? He understands his need for self-gratification, and his obligation to God, and the need to sacrifice for spouse and children, and the requirements to adhere to the tenets of his profession. The average man is torn by many conflicting allegiances, but the *we-will-do-person* has only one. Because he knows that his allegiance belongs to One alone, he can 'hear' with more receptive ears and learn to reconcile everything he does with the paramount factor in his life.

ring begin with the first day of *Sefirah* and continue for thirty-three days. According to this opinion all the restrictions mentioned above would be lifted on the thirty-fourth day.

(b) Others maintain that the restrictions remain in force until *Shavuot* but only begin after the first fifteen days of *Sefirah*. In either case, the thirty-third day (*Lag ba'Omer*) would be included in this period of restraint.

(c) Later authorities, on the other hand, accept the period of mourning of thirty-three or thirty-four days but leave it to the individual to choose his dates either from the beginning or towards the end of the *Sefirah* period but *Lag ba'Omer* (the thirty-third of the *Omer*) is in any event excluded because on that day there was a relief from the epidemic.

Sephardi Jews observe the mourning period through the thirty-fourth day of the *Sefirah*, while most Ashkenazi Jews observe the mourning until the thirty-third day.³

Another manifestation of Jewish grief for the epidemic that struck down the disciples of Rabbi Akivah is the custom not to perform any menial labor from sunset to sunrise every day during the *sefirah* period until *Shavuot*. In early times both men and women refrained from doing any work during these hours. Later custom was relaxed as far as the men were concerned and women adhered to it. There are two reasons for this custom:

(a) For some unknown reason, the disciples died just before sunset. Therefore, the people at that time had to close their shops and stop their labors in the evening to tend to the funeral arrangements and join in the funeral cortege. The women were particularly active in this task because arrangements had to be included even before the men could leave their daily tasks.

(b) When the Torah describes the holiday of *Shavuot* it instructs us to count *sheva shabatot*, "seven Sabbaths," the equivalent of forty-nine days. Then, on the fiftieth day, the holiday of *Shavuot* was to be celebrated. *Shabatot* is derived from the word *Shabbat*, to rest. In a totally different context, the Torah uses the word *Shabbat* (Leviticus 25:4) as meaning to refrain from specific work. There the Torah is speaking about the

shemittah year when all agricultural activities must cease. The common denominator between *shemittah* and *sefirah* is the word *Shabbat*. Hence, the authorities deduced that just as in the *shemittah* year the Jew was forbidden to work so must he refrain from work during the counting of the "Seven Sabbaths." When the counting is actually done, i.e. at night, no labor should be performed.⁴

Generally one recites the *she-heheyanu* upon the performance of any seasonal mitzvah recurring in the calendar year. This is true of shofar, lulav, megillah, etc. Why do we not recite the *she-heheyanu* at the commencement of counting the *Omer*? Because this benediction is an expression of joy and an acknowledgment of God's grace. The counting of the *Omer*, on the other hand, is performed with a sadness in our heart as it is a reminder of the Temple, now destroyed, where this counting was in preparation for the *Omer* offering the following day.⁵

In preparation for the holiday of *Shavuot* it is customary to decorate the synagogue and the homes with flowers, shrubbery and foliage. (Sephardi Jews decorate the Scrolls with floral arrangements). In Lithuania Rabbi Elijah, the Gaon of Vilna, abolished this custom as of pagan and Christian origin. Most communities throughout the Jewish world, however, still observe this practice. The following reasons are given:

(a) According to the Mishnah (Rosh ha-Shanah 1:2) it is on *Shavuot* that the trees and their fruits are judged by God who decides whether the year will be one of abundance or scarcity. This judgment will affect the quality of the *bikkurim*, the first fruits, that are brought to the Temple. We embellish the synagogue with greenery to remind us to pray that the trees yield an abundance of fruit, which would add honor to the donor of the *bikkurim*.

(b) *Shavuot* is the holiday in which we celebrate the giving of the Torah to Israel on Mt. Sinai. Moses was the leading figure in this dramatic event. The long chain of events that led to Mt. Sinai had its beginning at the discovery of Moses amidst the reeds on the Nile. The foliage reminds us of the reeds where Moses was

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DECORATING
SYNAGOGUE

found and rescued.

(c) In contrast to all the surrounding mountains, Mt. Sinai was, according to tradition, unique in that a verdant oasis stood at its foot. This tradition stems from the instruction that God gave to the Children of Israel through Moses, to keep their flocks from grazing at the foot of the mountain. This prohibition implies that shrubbery grew there.⁶

In all Jewish communities most men, young and old alike, remain awake during the entire, or most of the night of Shavuot, occupying themselves with *tikkun lel shavuot*, (lit. the improvement, or restoration, of the night of Shavuot). This activity takes the form of intensive study which includes parts of the Scriptures, sections of the Mishnah and Talmud and chapters of the Kabbalah. There are three early sources for this custom:

(a) One Midrashic source has it that on the night preceding the giving of the Torah, many of the Children of Israel went com- placently to sleep. They felt no eager anticipation for the most world-shaking event in human history that was about to unfold. This callous indifference was an affront to God. In order, therefore, to amend the wrong of our forefathers, we remain awake the entire night, awaiting the dawn of the next day when we will celebrate the receiving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai.

(b) According to another Midrashic statement, the Children of Israel at the foot of Mt. Sinai refused to accept any more than the Written Torah. God had to coerce them into accepting the Oral Law by raising Mt. Sinai over their heads and threatening to crush them underneath it. The Midrash further relates that Moses, standing on the peak of Mt. Sinai, enshrouded in clouds, could tell the difference between night and day only when he heard the masses of people, at the foot of the mountain, studying the Oral Law and then he knew it was night. Hence, we remain awake all night to rectify our ancestor's failure to accept the Oral law willingly and doing so only after being threatened with extinction. This is also the reason why we concentrate our study for the most part on the Talmud, the Oral Law.

(c) Another early source is the Zohar, the classic kabbalistic

work. There, (Emor 98), Shavuot is described as the wedding day of the Children of Israel, the bride, and the Torah, the groom. Much had to be done by the bride to prepare herself spiritually for her wedding day. The Children of Israel bring to their marriage as a dowry their hours of study of the previous evening. Accompanied by this "trousseau" of learning, the Jewish People come to their Betrothed with the full recognition and appreciation of his virtues and value.⁷

Until about two hundred years ago the Jews of Yemen had never heard about the *tikkun lel shavuot*. They too, remained awake all night but instead of reading excerpts from the Mishnah and Talmud, they concentrated on the *Sefer ha-Mitzvot* by Maimonides.⁸

Until the middle of the eleventh century no one ever thought that the Torah would or should acquire a foreword or introduction. It was about that period that an outstanding Rabbinic authority and poet, Rabbi Meir the son of Rabbi Isaac of Worms (d. circa 1096) composed the famous poem *Akdamut*, "The Prelude." The reading of the Ten Commandments on the first day of the Shavuot Festival is dramatically introduced by the chanting of this vivid poem written in Aramaic. In rich imagery it depicts the angelic hosts singing God's praises on high, and His people Israel loving His Torah and singing God's praises before men.

"Could we with ink the ocean fill,
Were every blade of grass a quill,
Were the world of parchment made,
And every man a scribe by trade,
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry;
Nor would the Scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky."

It reaches its climax in the call, "Then let us rejoice that He blessed us and gave us the Law." This poem with its ninety-seven verses is a double alphabetical acrostic, with an additional acrostic giving the name of the author, "Meir, son of Isaac, may

CUSTOM
#2

TIKKUN
LEL
SHAVUOT

CUSTOM
#3

AKDAMUT

he grow in Torah and in good deeds. Amen. And be strong and of good courage."⁹

In the first part of this poem, the author gives exalted praises to God for creating the world, the angels to serve Him and the Children of Israel to praise and laud Him. The second part describes the repeated efforts of the peoples of the world to persuade the Children of Israel to abandon their ancient faith and assimilate. The plaintive tune with which the *Akdamut* is chanted was composed in London in 1870.¹⁰

Communities differ however on where the *Akdamut* should be chanted. Some call the first person (kohen) to the Torah, read one verse from the Torah and then begin to recite the *Akdamut*. The reason for this arrangement is to demonstrate the superiority of the Torah over any other literary creation, important and holy as it may be. Therefore, we commence with the reading of the Torah and then turn immediately to the *Akdamut*. The standard practice is to chant the *Akdamut* before the first person called to the Torah recites the blessing in order not to interrupt the reading of the Torah.¹¹

Another custom universally observed in the synagogue on Shavuot is the public reading of the Book of Ruth. This is an ancient custom dating back to the days of the Talmud. In *Masekhet Sofetim* (14:18), the Rabbis stated that half the Book of Ruth was read at the conclusion of the first day of Shavuot and the rest at the conclusion of the second day of the holiday (here the reference is obviously to the two days of Shavuot observed in the diaspora). In a later period, the authorities fixed the second day of Shavuot for reading the entire Book of Ruth. There are a number of reasons why this book of the Scriptures is read on Shavuot:

(a) To remind the Jew that just as Ruth's conversion to Judaism was attained through adversity and hardship, so knowledge of the Torah, which was received on Shavuot, is acquired only through assiduous study and unflinching diligence.

(b) The story of Ruth is the only historical event of great

spiritual significance that has any connection with the harvest. Therefore, we read the story of this great convert on Shavuot which also occurs during harvest time.¹²

(c) From the very beginning of her life, Ruth was destined to embrace Judaism and accept the yoke of the *mitzvot*. Before she took the final step she was obliged to observe the Noahide laws. The numerical values of the letters of her name add up to six hundred and six. (The *Resh* equals two hundred; the *Vav*, six; and the *Tav*, four hundred.) Thus the six hundred and six *mitzvot* which she accepted after conversion plus the seven she was obliged to keep before her conversion, add up to six hundred and thirteen. The Torah, by the count of most authorities contains six hundred and thirteen *mitzvot*.

(d) When Ruth became aware that David was to be descended from her, she became apprehensive, filled with misgivings and guilt feelings. Her non-Jewish origin troubled her. Similarly, the Children of Israel standing at Mt. Sinai ready to receive the Torah were for all intents and purposes non-Jews. In their prolonged enslavement in Egypt they could not circumcise their sons. They had to undergo the entire process of conversion, including circumcision and ritual immersion. Hence, on Shavuot, when we celebrate God's gift of the Torah to the Children of Israel, we read the story of Ruth as if to reassure her: "Have no fear; Before we received the Torah, we, too, were non-Jews."

(e) Tradition teaches us that King David died on Shavuot. His devotion to God knew no bounds. His Psalms attest to his faith in, and love for, God. His firm resolution to seek communion with God stood the tests of crises and tribulations. It is proper, then, that on the anniversary of his passing we read the story of Ruth from whom he was descended.

(f) "Why read the story of Ruth particularly on the day when we celebrate the acceptance of the Torah at Mt. Sinai?" queries an outstanding authority, and proposes the following answer. The Torah as we know it cannot be succinctly defined as "Scriptures," the Written Word. By all classical definitions, Torah must also include the Oral Law; one is inconceivable without the

עוֹשֵׂה מִצְוֹת
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מִשְׁפָּחַת רֹאשׁ

other. The Oral Law clarifies and expounds the written word. In Deuteronomy (23:4) we are instructed, "A Moabite shall not enter into the assembly of the Lord." According to the Talmud, the Oral Law, this implies that a Moabite *male* may *not* marry a Jewess, but that a Moabite *woman* is permitted to marry a Jew. Ruth was a Moabite. If not for the validity of the Oral Law, Ruth would not have been allowed to marry Boaz the Jew. In that event, King David would never have appeared on the scene. We therefore, read the story of Ruth on Shavuot because it was then that the Torah, comprised of the Oral Law and the Written Law, was fully accepted by the Children of Israel.¹³

(g) Although Ruth was a woman of high intellectual accomplishments and personal integrity, she achieved the fulfillment of her life only when she embarked on the course that led to her embracing the One God and His *mitzvot*. The moral to be learned from her is that no one should rely upon his intellectual achievements in order to attain fulfillment in life. The only way to realize that goal is through total submission to the will of God.¹⁴

(h) The Talmud (Yevamot 47a) states: When a non-Jew expresses the desire to convert to Judaism we impart to him, among other things, the laws of charity. These include such *mitzvot* as *pe'ah*, and *shikhhah* and the like. When reaping his crops, the owner of the field was obliged to leave a corner of his field unharvested. This was called *pe'ah*. Another benefit granted the poor was the rule that forgotten sheaves were not to be recovered by the owner but left behind for the poor. This was called *shikhhah*. There were yet other ways of gleaning by which the needy could sustain themselves. All forms of gleaning differ from the popular concept of charity. In the case of charity the donor has a right to choose the recipient and the manner in which the gift was to be offered. In the case of gleanings, however, the donor had to renounce all his rights to the produce. Any poor person could come when he wanted and take what he wanted as if the produce belonged to no one.

The true test of a convert is when he accepts these laws

without questioning their validity and is ready to abide by them.

During her early life as a Jewess, Ruth suffered privation. She had to resort to gathering gleanings in the fields to sustain herself. Later she became the wife of Boaz, a wealthy landowner. Seeing her husband allocating produce for the poor, she heartily approved both the laws of charity and the laws of gleaning. She passed the test. It is for this reason that on Shavuot, the holiday of the harvest, we read about the famous convert who met the requirements of conversion as set down by the Rabbis.¹⁵

CUSTOM

#5

EATING DAIRY

It is a universal custom in Jewish homes, with the exception of Yemenite Jews, to serve dairy foods on Shavuot. Some eat dairy food, and then, after a short while, partake of a meat dinner. Others eat dairy food only. A number of reasons have been advanced:

(a) It was only when the Jews received the Torah that they realized that specific laws governed the proper slaughtering of animals and the extraction of the blood. They suddenly discovered that all their utensils were not kosher because they had been used for non-kosher food. Since, according to tradition, the Torah was given to them on a Sabbath day when work is forbidden, they had no opportunity to make their utensils kosher by scalding (*hag'alah*). Thus they had no alternative but to eat dairy food.

(b) The numerical values of the Hebrew letters of *halav*, milk, add up to forty. This was to remind us of the forty days and nights that Moses spent on Mt. Sinai in preparation for the giving of the Torah to the Children of Israel.

(c) One of the Noachide laws which applied to the Jews before they received the Torah was the injunction against eating part of an animal while it was still alive. Milk comes under that category. However, upon receiving the Torah, on Shavuot, milk became permitted to them.

(d) In Genesis (18:1-18) we are told of three men, really angels, who visited Abraham and Sarah to foretell the birth of Isaac. "And he took cream and milk and the calf which he had

dressed and set it out before them." They ate milk and meat at the same time. By either partaking of milk products alone or of eating both but with an interval between them as prescribed by the Torah, we show that we stand on a higher level than the angels and therefore deserved to receive the gift of all gifts, the Torah.

(e) The Jews who made their exodus from Egypt required circumcision. They were, therefore, compared to infants who are circumcised on the eighth day after birth. The food of infants is milk.

(f) According to the calculations of the Sages, Moses was taken out from the reeds of the Nile by Pharaoh's daughter on the day of Shavuot. Jochebed, Moses' mother, was summoned to nurse the baby. According to tradition, Moses refused to be nursed by any Egyptian woman. "Can it be possible that the holy mouth that was to utter the word of God should suck at the breast of a pagan?" We eat dairy products to remind us of the breast feeding of the infant Moses.

(g) Meat contains blood. This is symbolic of the red hot passions of sin. Milk is white and is symbolic of purity. By studying the Torah which was presented to the Jew at Mt. Sinai on Shavuot, and by observing the tenets, the *mitzvot*, we can avoid the flames of passion and emerge purified.

(h) Earlier we established that Shavuot, in a way, was a continuation of Passover. In fact, on the second day of Passover there began the preparatory period of forty-nine days, which ended with Shavuot. Some authorities would bring the two holidays even closer in ritual and significance. They maintain that Passover and Shavuot should have similar features to indicate this continuity. Today, we place two food products on our seder plate: one to symbolize the *korban pesah*, the paschal lamb, the other to symbolize the *korban hagigah*, the festival sacrifice. Shavuot, therefore, should also have two separate food products to correspond to those of Passover. We thus partake of two separate meals, one dairy, one meat. However, these two meals may not be eaten together because we are forbidden to mix meat

and dairy products. If we are to separate them it would mean that two separate loaves of bread would have to be prepared, one for each meal. These two loaves, in turn, would remind the Jew of the two loaves that were brought into the Temple as the first offerings of the wheat harvest on Shavuot. Without the dairy meal there would be no necessity for the presence of two loaves on the table.

(i) Dairy food is the customary diet for infants, and by eating it, we indicate that no matter how much one has studied the Torah, he is like an infant who has not even begun to fathom the depth of God's word.

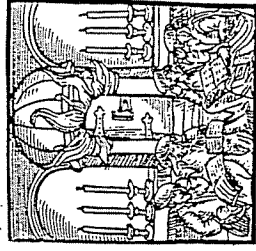
(j) By chemical process the body converts blood into milk. Eating milk products on Shavuot symbolizes that, through Torah and *mitzvot*, the *middat ha-din*, the attribute of strict justice, can be transformed into *middat ha-rahamim*, the attribute of mercy. In other words, God will deal with man with compassion rather than with inflexible justice. (In Kabbalah, white is the symbol of *Hesed*—mercy, red is the symbol of *Din*—strict justice.)

(k) We have dealt before with the custom of remaining awake all night (*tikkun leil shavuot*) in remembrance of *Mattan Torah* when the Children of Israel were awake all night awaiting the dramatic moment when the Torah would be given to them. When that momentous event came to an end they suddenly felt hungry. They could not wait to go through the process of koshering their meats and so they resorted to dairy meals and produce which were readily available.¹⁶

Yemenite Jews never adopted the custom of eating dairy products on Shavuot for any of the reasons cited above. They abide by the Midrashic statement that Abraham, the first Jew, observed all the six hundred and thirteen *mitzvot* and that he handed down this tradition to his progeny. At Mt. Sinai, therefore, the Children of Israel already had kosher utensils, and kosher meat was available.¹⁷

Jewish communities in Arab countries observed the custom of ascending to the roof of the synagogue on Shavuot and throw-

ing apples down to the ground. The origin of this custom is traced to the similarity of the exclamation of the Children of Israel at Mt. Sinai to the growth of an apple. The fruit of the apple begins to develop before the leaf. Similarly the Children of Israel proclaimed *na'aseh ve-nishma*, "We will do and we will listen," whereas the logical order would have been, "We will first listen and then act." They, however, announced their resolution to perform the *mitzvot* before they could listen and analyze them.¹⁸



Tish'ah Be-Av

There are four types of fast days in the Jewish calendar. Two are ordained in the Torah: Yom Kippur which has a set date, the tenth of Tishri, and a fast undertaken by an individual for personal reasons in fulfillment of a vow. The other two types are post-Biblical in origin and were instituted by later authorities. These are: the "Four Fast Days" and the Fast of Esther, and fasts on occasions of communal or personal crises. We shall not deal in this chapter with the fasts of Yom Kippur and Esther, nor with fasts in connection with vows or crises. The first two will be dealt with in their proper places; the other two types are beyond the scope of this work. Here, we shall concentrate on "The Four Fast Days", with a more detailed analysis of *Tish'ah be-Av*.¹

The four fasts are:

(a) *Tzom Gedaliah*—the Fast of Gedaliah (ben Ahikam) which occurs on the third day of Tishri. Gedaliah was an official appointed by Nebukhadnezzar to govern the Jews who remained in their homeland after the Temple had been destroyed in 586 B.C.E. and the vast majority of Jews driven into exile in Babylonia. Gedaliah maintained that the remnant should be loyal to the Chaldeans (Babylonians). Opponents of this course assassinated him. In retaliation Nebukhadnezzar inflicted severe reprisals upon the Jewish people. Because of the calamitous consequences, a fast day was instituted.

(b) *Asarah be-Tevet*—the Tenth Day of Tevet. It was on this day that Nebukhadnezzar laid siege on Jerusalem. This was the beginning of all the subsequent calamities that befell the Jewish people and it has been designated as a fast day.

SOURCES

1. *Arukh ha-Shulhan* 494:2.
2. *Ta'ame ha-Minhagim* p. 279; *Sefer ha-Mat'amim* p. 57.
3. *Tur Oraḥ Ḥayyim*, *Bet Yoseph*, *Darke Mosheth*, *Derishah* 493; *Sefer ha-Toda'ah* p. 245-246; *Ta'ame ha-Minhagim* p. 279; *Arukh ha-Shulhan* 493:1-7; *Otzar Yisrael* Vol 10 p. 30.
4. *Tur Oraḥ Ḥayyim* 493; *Sefer ha-Toda'ah* p. 247; *Arukh ha-Shulhan* 293:9.
5. *Hayye Avraham* p. 43b.
6. *Sefer ha-Mat'amim* p.58; *Sefer ha-Toda'ah* p. 273; *Ta'ame ha-Minhagim* p. 279; *Arukh ha-Shulhan* 494:6; *Otzar Yisrael* Vol. 10, pp. 30-31.
7. *Sefer ha-Toda'ah* Vol II p. 283; *Ta'ame ha-Minhagim* p. 279; *Sefer ha-Mat'amim* p. 58.
8. *Halikhot Teiman* p. 32.
9. See *Rabbinical Council of America Prayer Book* p. 504.
10. *Otzar Yisrael* Vol. 2, p. 182.
11. *Sefer ha-Toda'ah* Vol. II p. 275; *Otzar Yisrael* Vol. 2, p. 182.
12. *Avudraham* p. 128.
13. *Sefer ha-Toda'ah* Vol. II p. 301.
14. *Hayye Avraham* p. 45a.
15. *Minhage Yeshurun* pp. 198-199.
16. *Rama*, *Hilkhot Shavuot* 494:3; *Sefer ha-Mat'amim* p. 59-60.; *Ta'ame ha-Minhagim* p. 281-282; *Arukh ha-Shulhan* 494 par. 5.
17. *Halikhot Teiman* p. 31.
18. *Minhage Eretz Yisrael*, Zemanim p. 50-51.