

# Preparation הכנה

May 2013

Sivan 5773

## **Kehillat Chovevei Tzion**

**Kehillat Chovevei Tzion**  
Route 25A at Nicolls Road  
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Visit us on-line at  
[www.kct.org](http://www.kct.org)

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**Counting The Omer: From Pesach to Shavuot**



Preparing  
to  
Celebrate  
Shavuot  
at  
Kehillat  
Chovevei  
Tzion

Photos and graphics courtesy of Corbis, the OU and the respective artists

5773

**5773**  
SCHEDULE  
OF  
SHAVUOT  
AND  
SHABBAT  
SERVICES

תיקון ליל שבועות

TIKKUN  
L'AYL  
SHAVUOT

KEHILLAT  
CHOVEVEI  
TZION

**5 SIVAN**

**EREV SHAVUOT**

.....  
**TUESDAY MAY 14, 2013**

*\* Even though there is no charge for the dinner or lunch,  
PLEASE RSVP if you are coming to the dinner and/or  
the lunch, to Ritual@KCT.org by Thursday, May 10 at 2 PM*

Candle Lighting	7:42 PM
Mincha	7:00 PM
Study Session Aleph	7:15 PM
Ma'ariv	8:15 PM
A Light Dinner	8:30 PM
Study Session Bet	9:30 - 11:00 PM

**6 SIVAN**

**FIRST DAY SHAVUOT**

.....  
**WEDNESDAY MAY 15, 2013**

Shacharit	9:00 AM
Musaf	
Study Session Gimel	

.....  
**The KCT Tradition Renews:**

The Annual Shavuot Dairy Lunch and Cheese Cake Kiddush

Mincha / Ma'ariv	7:30 PM
Candle Lighting	8:40 PM

**7 SIVAN**

**SECOND DAY SHAVUOT**

.....  
**THURSDAY MAY 16, 2013**

Shacharit	9:00 AM
Yizkor and Musaf	
Study Session Daled	

.....  
**The KCT Tradition Deepens:**

The Internationally Acclaimed KCT Ice Cream Kiddush

*Yom Tov ends 8:50 PM*

*Celebrating, studying and growing together as a community of the committed, the extended member families of Kehillat Chovevei Tzion will again come together this year, for its compelling twentieth year, in its Setauket Beit Midrash for the Shavuot holiday period. The KCT Ritual Committee is delighted to provide you with this compendium for self-study, for family and individual use, in preparation for the upcoming holiday.*

**Until the day after the seventh week, you shall count fifty days.  
And you shall bring a New Grain Offering to Hashem. Vayikra 23:16**

**Chag Sameach !**

**. . . . The Holiday's Biblical Roots**

The laws, dates and celebration of the pilgrimage festival of Shavuot are derived primarily from a brief series of biblical statements by HaShem, which evolved by interpretation and exegesis into the *hilchot* that govern the holiday:



“You shall count for yourselves - from the morrow of the rest day, from the day when you bring the Omer of the waving - seven weeks, they shall be complete. Until the day after the seventh week, you shall count, fifty days; And you shall bring a new-meal offering to Hashem” . . . . . (Vayikra 23:15-16)

“And you shall declare on that very day, that it is a Holy Day unto you. You shall do no manner of work; It is an Eternal Statute, in all your habitations, for all your generations” . . . . . (Vayikra 23:21)

“You shall count for yourselves seven weeks, from when the sickle is first put to the standing crop shall you begin counting seven weeks. Then you will observe the Festival of Shavu'ot for the LORD, your God” . . . . . (Devarim 16:9-10)

**Shavuot  
5773  
at  
Kehillat Chovevei Tzion**

**. . . . Counting the Omer**

**סְפִירַת הָעוֹמֵר**

According to the Torah, we are obligated to count the days from Passover to Shavuot. This period is known as the **Counting of the Omer**, an omer being a unit of measure. Starting on the second day of Passover, in the days of the Temple, an omer of barley was cut down and brought to the Temple as an offering. This daily grain offering was referred to as the Omer. ~K~

**. . . . Tzedakah and Yizkor**

*Shavuot offers an opportunity for both tzedakah remembrance . . . the Yizkor donation associated with recalling and sanctifying the memories of departed family members adds to the personally compelling nature of the Yizkor service.*

The essence of *Yizkor* is an act of *tzedakah*, a contribution made on behalf of loved ones, of which the *Kodosh Baruchu* takes note, to earn merit for the deceased in His eyes. Our Kehillah has made a significant, ever-growing commitment to *tzedakah* over the years. We encourage you, as you plan your individual *tzedakot*, for whatever contributions are within your means and family custom, to consider **Kehillat Chovevei Tzion** as a worthy beneficiary of your generosity and support at this time and throughout the year. ~K~

**. . . . The KCT Memorial Wall**

In the KCT Beit Midrash, the Memorial Wall represents the *Kehillah's* commemoration of our loved ones. Each plaque contains the name of the person recalled, in Hebrew and English, and the

date of death in both the secular and Hebrew calendars. *Yahrzeit* lamps at each plaque are lit during the week of the appropriate date and for *Yizkor*. New additions to the Memorial Panel are specially dedicated at the next *Yizkor* service following placement, and each is individually remembered at every *Yizkor* service that follows. Please let us know if you'd like to order a plaque or if you have any questions about the Memorial Wall.

~K~

### .... The Kehillah Remembers

The **Yizkor** service is recited on the morning of the the second day of Shavuot, **Wednesday May 16<sup>th</sup>**. The Kehillah remembers with great fondness and respect all the loved ones whom we have individually lost over the years and those whose names have been inscribed in the Kehillah's Book of Remembrance, which will be available at services. *Yizkor* is at once both a collective experience and an individual one, and is the timeless prayer of personal memory of the Jewish people.

~K~

### .... Our Shavuot Scholar

**Tikkun Leyl Shavuot 5773:**  
**Scholar-in-Residence:**  
**Rabbi Jay Stein**

***Exploring the Jewish foundational concepts of self-improvement . . .***

**Empowering Ourselves to Live  
a Positive, Energized Life**

The next installment in the continuing exploration of topics of Jewish ethics, values and perspectives brings us to a broad-based conversation guided by Jewish texts and scholarly thinkers, in areas including prayer, self-realization, relationship with Divinity, and traditions in Jewish literature.

Read about this unique and powerful three day Shavuot Kallah in the special **Tikkun Leyl Shavuot** section of this booklet.

**PLEASE note that in order to plan appropriately, it is absolutely necessary that all attendees for the opening dinner on Tuesday evening May 14<sup>th</sup>, RSVP to [Ritual@KCT.org](mailto:Ritual@KCT.org) by Thursday, May 10<sup>th</sup> at 2 PM, if not earlier!**

~K~

### .... Preparation Through Study

*Drawn from various sources, ancient, historic and modern, the following section of personal study materials is presented by the editors with a view toward stimulating thought, study, discussion, agreement and disagreement, and evaluation approaching and leading into the days of Shavuot.*

### .... Names, Names, What's in a Name?

*Excerpted from materials produced by the Hillel Foundation for Jewish Campus Life.*

Shavuot has several names . . . some say five, some even say eight . . . most often referred to as:

**Chag HaShavuot** (the Festival of Weeks)  
**Chag HaKatzir** (the Festival of the Harvest)  
**Yom HaBikurim** (the Day of First Fruits)  
**Chag Ha'Atzeret** (the Festival of Conclusion)  
**Chag Mattan Torah** (the Holiday of the Giving of the Torah).

Originally an agricultural festival in the month of Sivan, Shavuot was celebrated in accordance with biblical requirement by pilgrimages to the Temple in Jerusalem, where Jews offered the first fruits of their harvest. The Torah was received by the Children of Israel on Shavuot. As it was queried in the Talmud: "Why is the sixth day singled out among the days of creation?" For the sixth day has a special article preceding it, noting it as "the day." It is to teach that the creation made a deal with the Holy One: "If Israel accepts the Torah, all will be well. If not I'll return the world back to chaos." (*Talmud Shabbat 88a*) Rashi comments that "the day" is the Sixth of Sivan, the Festival of Shavuot.

~K~

**Enjoy learning at KCT?  
Ask us about sponsoring a holiday  
mailing or a Shabbat D'var Torah.**

### .... Shavuot: New Name, New Meaning

*Extracted from the writings of Rabbi Ronald H. Isaacs, the spiritual leader of Temple Sholom in Bridgewater, NJ. He has served as the publications committee chairperson of the Rabbinical Assembly.*

*In the Torah, the Holiday of Shavuot was simply an agricultural festival that occurred 50 days after Pesach. First fruits and wheat were to be brought to the Temple. However by the time of the Talmud, the holiday of Shavuot was transformed to commemorate the giving of the Torah at Sinai.*

*Shavuot History: Rabbinic Development:*  
Shavuot Takes on a New Name and a New Meaning

What is most likely the earliest Talmudic statement on the date of the revelation on Mount Sinai may be found in the Talmudic tractate of Shabbat (86b).

According to the calculations of the sages, the Jews left Egypt on Friday, the 15th of Nisan. The Torah was given on Saturday, the sixth of Sivan, which was the equivalent of the 50th day of the omer, the day on which Shavuot was permanently fixed in the Scriptures.

Rabbi Jose, a second century sage, offers a dissenting view. He states that the Jews left Egypt on Thursday, the 15th of Nisan, and that the Law was given on Saturday, the seventh of Sivan. Interestingly, the ecclesiastic calendar of the Book of Jubilees corroborates Rabbi Jose's date of the giving of the Law.

The author of Magen Avraham (Orach Chayim 494) points out that the seventh day of Sivan was the equivalent of the 51st day of the omer, one day after the fixed day of Shavuot. Consequently, Shavuot could not mark the anniversary of the Law.

### ***Shavuot in the Talmud . . .***

The first step in the development of Shavuot after the exile was the official establishment of the date of the revelation on Mount Sinai. The date indicated by the ancient sages was the sixth of Sivan, which was accepted by the majority of rabbis. One of the first official rabbinic texts to connect the giving of the Torah with Shavuot was a passage in the midrash [commentary], Exodus Rabbah, chapter 31, attributed to Rabbi Meir. Here, mention is made of the "Festival of the Harvest on which the Torah was given to Israel."

An entire talmudic tractate, called Bikkurim, deals with the offerings of first fruits in the Temple. The Mishnah of Bikkurim 1:6 states that the period for bringing the first fruits was any time from Shavuot to Sukkot. The villagers would first assemble in the

large town of the district and would go up together with their first ripe fruits to the Temple where they would be welcomed with song by the Levites. The Mishnah of Bikkurim (chapter 3) graphically describes the scene:

"At the rise of morning an official says, 'Rise and let us go up to Zion, to the House of the Lord our God.' An ox walked before them, its horns covered with gold, and with an olive crown on its head. The halil (flute) was played before them till they reached the vicinity of Jerusalem. Upon coming close to Jerusalem, they sent word ahead and decorated their bikkurim. The important officials went out to meet them...and all the tradesmen in Jerusalem stood before them and greeted them, 'Our brothers, the men of such and such a place, you have come in peace.'

"The flute was played before them till they reached the Temple Mount. Even King Agripas took the basket on his shoulders and carried it till he reached the courtyard. When the pilgrims reached the courtyard, the Levites sang, 'I will exalt You, O God, for You have saved me and You have not rejoiced my enemies over me.'

"With the basket still on his shoulder, the Israelite read, 'I have told the Lord your God this day that I have come to this land that the Lord swore to our fathers to give us. My father was a wandering Aramean and he went down to Egypt and he sojourned there and he became there a great, mighty, and numerous people. And the Egyptians harmed us, and they afflicted us and they put hard labor upon us, and we cried out to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice, and the Lord took us out from Egypt with a strong hand...and God brought us to this place, and God gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now, I bring the first fruits of the land that you have given me, O God.' After completing the entire parashah [portion], the Jew places the bikkurim basket by the side of the altar, he bows down and goes out."

The High Priest then acts on behalf of the people as a whole, presenting before the altar the special Shavuot wave-offering, two loaves of bread made of wheat, the first products of the spring wheat harvest that begins just as the barley harvest comes to an end. Thus, Shavuot in [second temple] times celebrated the bounty of the spring harvest season.

## **The Festival is Transformed . . .**

In rabbinic times, a remarkable transformation of the festival took place. Based on the verse "In the third month after the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day they came into the wilderness of Sinai," [Exodus 19:1] the festival of Shavuot became the anniversary of the giving of the Torah at Sinai.

Although Shavuot was known in the Bible by several names, including the Feast of the Harvest, the Festival of Weeks, and the Festival of the First Fruits, the sages added the name "Atzeret"--withdrawal. In the Torah, the last days of the two other pilgrim festivals (Passover and Sukkot) are referred to as Atzeret to indicate on the seventh day of Passover and on the eighth day after the beginning of Sukkot, there must be a withdrawal from all menial labor.

Shavuot, too, was given the name of Atzeret by the Rabbis so as to emphasize the necessity of abstaining from menial labor on this holiday as well. In fact, for this reason, the sages referred to Shavuot by the name Atzeret almost exclusively. They refused to adopt the theme of "Giving the Torah" in assigning a name to the festival, because in their thinking it would be sacrilegious to limit the celebration of the giving of the Torah to a single day. To them, every day of the year should be considered as a day of receiving the Torah anew. ~K~

### **. . . . Shavuot: From Coercion to Love**

*Rabbi Mark Ankorn (a 2002 graduate of the Zeigler Rabbinic School of the AJU) investigates how a relationship based on threat and fear develops into one of love, by taking a closer look at the Talmudic midrash of the mountain held over the heads of Bnai Yisroel.*

*Once Shavuot became associated with the giving of the Ten Commandments, the rabbis speculated as to why God chose the Jewish people. Did the Israelites at Sinai accept this myriad of laws voluntarily or were they coerced? And so the midrashim abound. At the end of the Book of Esther, the megillah tells us the Jews at that time voluntarily accepted upon themselves the observance of Torah mitzvot. Similarly, each year we stand in shule as the Ten Commandments are read and recommit to the observance of mitzvot.*

There are a number of different conceptions of what happened at Mount Sinai on the day the Torah was

given to us. One famous midrash from the Talmud, Shabbat 88a, reads:

"They stood at the foot of the Mountain" (Shemot / Exodus 19:17) Rav Avdimi bar Hama bar Hasa said, This teaches that the Kadosh Baruch Hu [God] covered them with the mountain as though it were an upturned vat, and said to them "If you accept the Torah, fine; if not, here will be your graves!" Rav Acha bar Yaakov said, This furnishes a strong protest against the Torah.

The verb "covered them" has its root in כָּפַה, the same as *kippah*—dome or yarmulke, the headcovering we wear in shul and at other times during the day. Thus, God turned the mountain into a dome over the people and threatened them with it.

Rav Avdimi is trying to make sense of the language of the verse. It reads *b'takh'tit ha'har*, literally "inside the bottom of the mountain," instead of *tachat ha'har*, "at the foot of the mountain."

This is extremely disturbing, the idea that Torah was not given to us and we accepted with a full heart, but rather that our eternal covenant with the Creator was forced upon us.

The sugya from the Talmud concludes thusly:

Rava said, Nevertheless, they accepted it again in the days of Achashverosh, as it is written "The Jews established and accepted [the holiday of Purim. Esther 9:27]" They established that which they had already accepted.

In other words, it might have been a shotgun wedding, but we renewed our vows, so everything's fine. Ignore, of course, the plain text of Esther 9:27 which is very clearly only about the holiday of Purim and in no way makes reference to Torah.

What I find comforting is the underlying urge to shake off the yoke of the mitzvot. Why else does this Midrash exist, if not to subtly defend the idea that no rational person would accept these strictures without coercion? And if we're honest with ourselves, we'll admit that on occasion, sometimes, in the three o'clock in the morning of our souls, we wish we didn't have this task of being called to higher service by God. As Tevye puts it in Fiddler on the Roof, "Can't you choose somebody else just once?"

Second, it shows that even the early rabbis were bothered by a lack of consent to the *mitzvot*, seeing it as a kind of contract. We, the Jewish People, agree to keep kosher and observe Shabbat and not wear garments of linen and wool mixed together, and You, Oh Great and Merciful Ruler, agree to give us the land of Israel as our heritage and make our offspring as numerous as the stars in the sky. One might argue that consent just doesn't matter—we're just obligated. God gave us the Torah, chose us for holiness, and that's it. After all, did we consent to the Constitution? In any real sense, was there consent? In 1789, women couldn't vote, neither could free African Americans, let alone slaves. In some states, a man had to be a registered property owner in order to vote. Even putting that aside, the ratification of the Constitution was a close run thing. Yet we still find our deepest expression of democracy and the core values of our Republic embedded in that document.

Does the lack of consent matter? Fundamentally, it does. This is Torah and theology . . . the idea that God cannot command our love and obedience is essential to Judaism. As we say every morning in the *birkot hashachar*, we are free people, not slaves. Free to choose not to love God, free to be fools about our lives—suffering the consequences of our actions, certainly, but free to opt out.

Finally, the last bit of the Talmud passage that twists around the Esther story is ultimately an expression of love. It tries to find every possible way to salvage the traditional understanding of the relationship.

But it's also acceptance at a moment of triumph. Having defeated Haman and his ilk, we are victorious. Not slaves on the run, escaping from the world's largest army, scared and desperate. Not people with seven weeks of freedom after 430 years of slavery. Instead, at the end of the Esther story, we are triumphant, exultant, victorious. And if we accept the Torah at that moment, it's an entirely different thing than standing at Sinai.

This vision, as a-historical and as a-texual as it may be, of embracing Torah and mitzvot after victory—which came as we'll recall without divine intervention; the name of God is nowhere mentioned in the Book of Esther—is a beautiful idea. It reframes Torah as not a yoke and a burden, but as our greatest treasure: what other people would have the courage to set before themselves such a task?

What other nation in the world would proudly take on the challenge of being God's partner?

Maybe at the outset, Rav Avdimi bar Hama bar Hasa is right. Nobody with a brain would agree to this stuff. But after generations of living Jewishly, embracing *mitzvot* as pathways to God, having those commandments open up vistas of meaning impossible to imagine, then Torah truly does become a triumph and a treasure.

Let us celebrate this day a holiday of renewal, when we stand once again as an entire people and with one voice reaffirm our commitment to being God's sacred, beloved, special partner. It's a huge, daunting task, but one we are uniquely qualified to fulfill. Chag Sameach! ~K~

### . . . . Shavuot at Home

*Compiled by the editors of "My Jewish Learning" ([www.myjewishlearning.com](http://www.myjewishlearning.com)), this presentation offers another view of how foods contribute to the "multi-sensory" appreciation of the holidays.*

Shavuot is a festival with both agricultural and historical significance. The most ancient references to Shavuot, in the Torah, refer to a harvest festival, the "festival of first fruits." Both of these are reflected in the various alternative names for Shavuot, *Hag HaKatzir* (harvest festival), and *Yom HaBikkurim* (day of the first fruits). Another name is *Zeman Matan Torataynu* (time of the giving of Torah), as it was calculated to be upon this day that the Israelites received the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai. All of the above have a part to play in the home rituals and food eaten on the festival of Shavuot.

There is no Jewish law regarding home practices or rituals on Shavuot. Jewish practice regarding food on Shavuot is the result of customs and traditions. The main custom is the eating of dairy dishes, mainly dishes containing milk products and cheese. There are a number of theories about how this practice developed. In Song of Songs, chapter four, which is a beautiful love poem containing wonderful descriptions of Spring in the holy land, it states that "honey and milk are under your tongue." The poem was interpreted by the ancient rabbis to be a metaphor for the love between God and Israel and the "honey and milk" of that verse were interpreted to mean Torah. Consequently Jews eat milk products on Shavuot, the commemoration of the

time they received Torah on Mt. Sinai; many traditional Jews eat dairy as the main meal on the first day of Shavuot and meat as the main meal on the second day.

Some other reasons for eating milk-containing products are as follows: At the Passover seder there were two sacrificial offerings on the seder plate, the shankbone and the egg. Likewise, Shavuot focuses on two food items, milk and meat, to reflect the sacrificial offerings of Shavuot. The custom for those who mark two days of Shavuot is to eat milk products on the first day and meat on the second day.

An alternative reason for milk on the first day and meat on the second is linked to Exodus 23:19, which states, "You shall not seethe a kid in it's mother's milk." This was extrapolated to mean that dairy and meat and milk products should not be eaten at the same meal--one of the basic laws of keeping kosher. Another compelling reason for consumption of dairy rather than meat products on Shavuot is so that the Jews will not be reminded of the sin of the golden calf, when Moses was so angry with the people that he broke the sacred tablets he dictated from God's direct revelation.

Finally, there is an explanation that focuses on the reception of the kashrut (dietary) laws. It is only after the revelation that the Israelites would have been aware of laws of kashrut and thus aware that they had no immediately available kosher meat to eat. Consequently, they ate dairy products. The Torah was gained by giving up excess, showing restraint and self-control. It is thus more fitting to commemorate its reception by showing restraint and giving up meat for that day.

Two special challot are baked for Shavuot. As there were two breads offered in the Temple, so Jews eat two challot. It is a special feature of Shavuot to place a braid in the shape of a ladder on top of the bread. In Hebrew, letters all have numerical values assigned to them; the word for ladder in Hebrew, "*sulam*," adds up to the same number as "*Sinai*."

One of the old Eastern European customs associated with Shavuot is that young children between three and five were introduced to yeshivah study, the study of Torah, at this time of year. They were given cakes, honey and candy to associate Torah study with sweetness and joy.

Another dietary practice of Shavuot was to eat triangular "kreplach," or dumplings. The three-cornered shape reflects the three patriarchs by whose merit the Israelites received the Torah. It also reflects the three categories of Jews; Kohen, Levi and Israel, as well as the three sections the Hebrew Bible (*Tanakh*) - *Torah*, *Neviim* (prophets) and *Ketuvim* (writings).

In addition to triangles, round shapes also play a symbolic role on Shavuot. The circle manifested in round *challot* may be interpreted as a symbol of *shelemut*, spiritual integrity, that Jews achieved on Shavuot when they were given the Torah. This fits with the Rabbinic reading of the Sinaitic revelation as the day when the two types of Torahs – the written and the oral – were given to the Jewish people, the circle representing the unity of two diverse parts of Judaism. ~K~

### . . . . Why Shavuot Has Few Rituals

*The Holiday of Shavuot has very few rituals especially as compared to Rosh Hashanah, Pesach, and Succot. It is a short (only one day in Israel) synagogue based holiday. Only recently has it become associated with studying and the institution of the all night Tikun.*

*Written by Rabbi Ismar Schorsch, immediate past chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, and a renowned historian with a specialty in the history of the German Jewish community.*



If observance were a function of theology, Shavuot would be the most widely observed of Jewish holidays.

But precisely the opposite is the case among modern Jews. No major festival suffers from greater neglect. Yet Shavuot, which caps the period of seven weeks since the second Passover Seder and simply means "weeks," is rife with gravity. As the liturgy for the day constantly reminds us, Shavuot commemorates the divine gift of Torah received at Mount Sinai, in consequence of which Judaism spawned a text-centered religious community, possibly the first in human history. Shavuot, then, is about the essential and unique nature of Judaism, a portable religion based on a canon susceptible to unending interpretation. At Sinai, freedom from slavery was recast into fidelity to law and literacy, staying up all night to study *tikkun leil shavuot* .

But that defining content is not enough to imbue Shavuot with power or popularity. And the reason tells us something about the workings of Judaism. Shavuot is ritually bereft. Unlike Pesach or Sukkot, it lacks a set of distinctive practices that would convey experientially its meaning and message. There is nothing comparable to the seder or Sukkah for Shavuot, no absorbing home ritual that might unite family and friends in preparation and observance.

The commemoration of revelation is largely confined to the synagogue. The few paragraphs devoted to Shavuot in the *Shulhan Arukh* [Jewish Code of Law] deal solely with the adjustment of the liturgy (*Orah Hayyim*, 494). Nothing ever came to replace the bringing of first fruits to the Temple on Shavuot, which expressed the festival's older agricultural meaning. To shift the impact of Shavuot from nature to history did preserve its character as a day of thanksgiving, but without the ritual choreography that could engage the solitary Jew. Disembodied theology has never been the fare of popular religion.

In short, Shavuot begged for ritual enhancement and this is the need increasingly met by the custom of *Tikkun Leil Shavuot*, the practice of spending the first night of Shavuot awake in the study of Torah in heightened anticipation of the anniversary of its revelation. Usually done together with at least a minyan [quorum] of participants, the rite, like the seder, is one of re-enactment. With the first crack of dawn, group study turns to communal prayer, culminating in the reading of the Ten Commandments given at Sinai in the unnamed third month of Sivan after the exodus (Exodus 19:1). The combination of extraordinary acts--an all-nighter followed by a sunrise service--created exactly the kind of experiential ritual able to express the particularity of Shavuot. In the last decade both in Israel and America, the ritual in one form or another has caught on among non-Orthodox Jews in ever widening circles. Many synagogues are now lit throughout the night and have multiple services in the morning for early birds and regulars.

The ritual itself is post-talmudic, originating most likely in kabbalistic [mystical] circles in medieval Spain. The Zohar, which seems to know of the practice, attributes it to early pietists who perhaps sought to distinguish themselves from their ancient ancestors. According to one midrash [commentary], the latter slept nonchalantly through the night

preceding the event and had to be roused by lightning and thunder. Forcing ourselves to go sleepless the night before the commemoration of that momentous event thus constitutes an act of rectification (hence *Tikkun*). Another Zoharic explanation suggests the image of marriage. At Sinai, the Torah as bride and Israel as groom were joined in eternal union. To recall the feverish preparation of the night before the wedding, pietists reenacted the vigil and labor by studying through the night (*Magen Avraham*, O.H. 494; *J.D. Eisenstein*, *Otzar Dinim u-Minhagim*, p. 393).

In time, the ritual gave rise to an extensive collection of texts, which stressed completeness rather than appropriateness. During the course of the night, the group was to recite (rather than study) a few verses from every parashah in the Torah and every book of the Tanakh, including all of Ruth, a few passages from every tractate of the Mishnah, and the passage from the Zohar describing revelation as union. The final text of the *Tikkun* lists the 613 commandments of the Torah as compiled by Maimonides. What is unfurled in this sprawling canvas teeming with texts is the implicit affirmation that each and every aspect of Judaism is but a branch of the original tree of life planted by God at Sinai. The freedom to interpret the infinite meaning of God's words is the sap that has sustained and yielded this luxuriant growth.

Indeed, the Torah became the bedrock of Judaism not so much by assertion as by ritual. Liturgy reinforced the claim to canonical status. The progressive chanting (not reading) of Torah from beginning to end every Shabbat in the synagogue, whether annually as in Babylonia or triennially as in Palestine, transformed the Jews into a people imprinted by a book. Its narrative functioned as the unifying meta-history of the nation and the building blocks of public discourse, even as its legislation garnered widespread acceptance and adherence. The synagogue developed into the national theater in which Scripture and liturgy converged to reenact weekly the awesome transmission of Torah at Sinai. Every aspect of the ritual was meant to convey the numinous quality of the original drama.

In the Ashkenazic rite [which is practiced by Jews with Eastern European roots], after the Torah has been set down to read, but before the first aliyah, the gabbai recites four verses from Scripture (Psalm 19:8-9, 29:1, 2 Samuel 22:31) that enunciate the conviction that our Torah is just, pure, and perfect,

and its divine author without blemish. As he finishes, the congregation affirms in unison with another verse that "Those of you who hold fast to the Lord your God are still alive this day" (Deuteronomy 4:4). This prologue amounts to a creedal declaration explaining the ritual. Nothing less than the embodiment of God's will, the Torah is the Jewish key to salvation.

The constant reading of Torah in the synagogue made of every Shabbat Shavuot. It is inconceivable to me that the Torah would ever have become the dominant and pervasive text of Jewish life without it. The diffusion of theology requires ritual. Modern Jews are at risk not because they have lost their faith, but because they have lost their appreciation for ritual. ~K~

### ... The Book of Ruth

*Written by Rabbi Ronald Isaacs and excerpted with permission from "Every Person's Guide to Shavuot" (Jason Aronson, Inc). On each of the three Pilgrimage Festivals, one of the five megillot are read: Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) on Succot, Shir HaShirim (Song of Songs) on Pesach, and Ruth on Shavuot.*

In traditional settings, the Book of Ruth is read on the second day of Shavuot.

The book is about a Moabite woman who, after her husband dies, follows her Israelite mother-in-law, Naomi, into the Jewish people with the famous words "whither you go, I will go, wherever you lodge, I will lodge, your people will be my people, and your God will be my God." She asserts the right of the poor to glean the leftovers of the barley harvest, breaks the normal rules of behavior to confront her kinsman Boaz, is redeemed by him for marriage, and becomes the ancestor of King David.

The custom of doing this is already mentioned in the talmudic tractate of Soferim (14:16), and the fact that the first chapter of the Midrash of Ruth deals with the giving of the Torah is evidence that this custom was already well established by the time this Midrash was compiled. [*Tractate Soferim is one of the latest books of the Talmud, probably dating no earlier than the eighth century.*]

There are many explanations given for the reading of Ruth on Shavuot. The most quoted reason is that Ruth's coming to Israel took place around the time

of Shavuot, and her acceptance into the Jewish faith was analogous of the acceptance of the Jewish people of God's Torah.

A second explanation relates to genealogy. Since the Book of Ruth ends with the genealogy of David, whose forebearer Ruth was, it has been suggested that it is read on Shavuot because there is a legend that David died on Shavuot.

Another reason for the reading of Ruth on Shavuot is that its story takes place at harvest time, and Shavuot also occurs at the time of the spring harvest. ~K~

### ... On Second Thought <GRIN>

*The "Ten Commandments" Sermons, related by Rabbi Michael Zimmerman, of Kehillat Israel in Lansing, MI*

Abe and Sadie made a rare appearance in synagogue. It's probably true to say that they are not the most observant of Jews. In fact, they only go to shul two or three times every year—and this Shavuot happened to be one of those days. At the end of the service, Abe shook Rabbi Rosen's hand.

"Sadie and I both thoroughly enjoyed your service today, Rabbi, especially your sermon on keeping the commandments."

Rabbi Rosen replied, "It's nice of you to say so, Abe; so why don't you and Sadie come here more often?" "It's difficult," he replied, "but at least we keep the Ten Commandments."

"That's really good to hear," said Rabbi Rosen.

"Yes," said Abe proudly, "Sadie keeps 6 of them and I keep the other 4."

~

A story is told about Rabbi Stephen S. Wise that, while attending a public dinner, he was seated next to a prominent woman. Apparently attempting to impress the rabbi, the woman mentioned that one of her ancestors was present at the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Rabbi Wise was said to have quickly responded, "That's wonderful. My ancestors witnessed the giving of the Ten Commandments." ~K~

graduations - birthdays - last child moving out - weddings - engagement promotion - thanking a teacher - passing the bar - moving into your new home children's accomplishments - employment advancement - dedication - special yahrzeit first-year - remission - empty nest at last new computer - publication - brit milah new boss at work - mortgage-burning baby naming - thanking a teacher - successful thesis defense - adoption - purchasing a new car - selling the house - studying Torah - fixing the leak - upshirin - pain going away - paying off debt - new office at work - getting an answer to your ad - finding your beshert - graduations - birthdays - weddings - moving into a new home - recovery from illness - getting away from that crazy neighbor - engagements - promotions better employment - retirement at last advancement - dedication to that special someone - special yahrzeit - first-year celebration - remission - new computer publication - new boss at work - mortgage burning - baby naming - thanking a teacher - thesis defense - brit milah adoption - new car - selling the house graduations - birthdays - last child moving out - weddings engagement - promotion - passing the bar - moving into your new home recovery - relocation - employment retirement - advancement - dedication special yahrzeit - first-year - remission empty nest at last new computer publication - brit milah - new boss at work - mortgage-burning - baby naming lehning Torah - successful thesis defense adoption - new car - selling the house at last - new baby - fixing the leak - upshirin pain going away - dedication to that special someone - special yahrzeit - first-year celebration - remission new computer publication - new boss at work mortgage

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