



Around the Shabbat Table

Shavuot

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Shalom!



Introduction

Shavuot is one of the three pilgrimage festivals, described and commanded in the Torah. The three are Sukkot, Pesach and Shavuot. Shavuot is celebrated beginning on the 6th of Sivan which this year corresponds to June 2. Shavuot marks the culmination of the counting of a period of seven weeks from the second day of Pesach to the 50th day, Shavuot. In ancient Israel it marked the end of the barley harvest and the beginning of the wheat harvest.

There are several names given to this festival, three of which deal with the agricultural aspects of the holiday. It is *Hag HaKatzir*, the Festival of Reaping, mentioned in Exodus 23:16. In Exodus 34:22, we are commanded to observe *Hag Hashavuot*, the Holiday of Weeks, the time from one harvest to the next and in Numbers 28:26, it is called *Yom HaBikurim*, the Time of First Fruits (the first of the harvest). Later in the early years of the Common Era, an historical component was added to the holiday, along with a new name. Shavuot became the day on which the Israelites were given the Torah and it was now called *Z'man Matan Torateinu*, the time of the giving of our Torah. Later in the Talmudic period, *Atzeret*, the conclusion, was added as a name. This inferred that Shavuot concluded the Pesach holiday and the nervous waiting period from one harvest to the next.

In the synagogue, we read from Exodus 19:1 to 20:23 and from Numbers 28:26-31. The Exodus portion describes the dramatic experience of standing at Mount Sinai and of being given the Torah, specifically the Ten Commandments. God gives the tablets to Moses who, in turn, reads these Ten Commandments or sayings to the people. The few verses in Leviticus from Parashat Pinchus, describe the Shavuot offering which is to be brought.

In addition to these passages in the Torah, we read from the Book of Ruth on Shavuot. This short book is found in the Writings, the third part of the Bible. It has several connections to Shavuot. It tells the

story of Ruth who will become the great grandmother of King David, believed to have died on Shavuot. It takes place at harvest time. Ruth is a convert who takes on the responsibility of Torah.



Questions for Your Family's Discussion

1. Why is it that Shavuot is overlooked more than the other two festivals, Pesach and Sukkot? The Torah gives it equal status to the other two. Does the time of year in which it falls have anything to do with it? Is it its lack of many ritual practices? Compare it to the rituals of Sukkot and Pesach.
2. What can you do as a family to celebrate this holiday to enhance your appreciation of the holiday? Research through many web sites what are some of the customs regarding Shavuot that you can incorporate into your family's celebration.
3. Compare the Ten Commandments from Exodus 20 to those repeated by Moses in Deuteronomy 5. What are the differences? Can you find both versions reflected in the Shabbat Eve Kiddush?
4. Why was the concept of *Z'man Matan Torateinu* added on as a basis for the celebration of Shavuot?
5. Shavuot is the time of the "giving" of the Torah. Why is it not called the time of the Receiving of the Torah? Is receiving the Torah a one-time gift?

Texts to Wrestle With

1. In Exodus 19, verse 6, it says "but you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation". What does that mean to us? Does it imply certain responsibilities that we must take on?
2. The Book of Ruth is filled with examples of Chesed, loving-kindness. Read through the Book of Ruth and find some examples. [You can find the book online in Hebrew and English at <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt2901.htm>] How does this relate to the Torah reading for Shavuot?



Towards an Action Agenda

1. Agriculture and nature are key aspects in both the celebration of Shavuot as described in the Torah and in the Book of Ruth. Check out the web sites for some organizations that are working to protect the environment in Israel, such as
 - a. [Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel](#)
 - b. [Jewish National Fund - Keren Kayemet LeYisrael](#)
 - c. [Hazon](#)
 - d. [New Israel Fund](#)

Supporting these organizations or expressing your concern for the environment to the Israeli government are actions you can take.

2. We share in the care of the world with God. What can you do in your own back yard or neighborhood? Do you recycle as much as you can?
3. Redemption that was the Exodus culminates in Revelation, the giving of the Laws. Freedom without restrictions is not freedom. What do we do with our freedom to make it more meaningful, to make us more worthy of having the freedom? Action is up to each one of us.
4. There are many web sites and books that have wonderful midrashim about Mt. Sinai and the gift of the Laws. Some good sites include: [jewfaq](#) , [Jewish Theological Seminary](#) , [JR Shavuot Links](#) .



Shabbat Shalom

Please join in sharing your thoughts and ideas with other families and subscribers by sending your responses to RavADS@bjeny.org . We'll post them to the list and to our website.

Around the Shabbat Table is a project of the Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York Nassau/Queens Center. If there is any way we can be of service, please contact Rabbi Arnold D. Samlan at the BJE Nassau Queens Center, 516-876-6535, or see our web site: www.bjeny.org

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