

חג השבועות

## LET'S MEET UP AT SINAI: A SHAVUOT LEARNING KIT



Photo Credit: Marsha Lynn  
Congregation Beth Ahm Israel Trip November 2015

*I stood at Sinai, my soul cool on the pink stones.  
We are resilient in our wanderings,  
despite traumas of the past imprinted within us,  
the stories of their running live in all of us.*

from Lynne Golodner's Poem of Remembering

# LET'S MEET UP AT SINAI

*By Sharona Shapiro*

**F**or such an important holiday, Shavuot often gets overlooked or celebrated rather simply. When I was growing up, blintzes and cheesecakes were served at our holiday meals. Two special days were set aside to stay home from school. I got to go to shul where I could hang out with friends and read Jewish story books without interruption, and my mother would light not only the holiday candles but extra *yahrzeit* candles to remember her father and other members of her family who had passed away.

And while in shul, I read the stories about a little Jewish boy named K'tonton written by Sadie Rose Weilerstein. One of her beloved stories is titled "How K'tonton Wished a Wish on Shavuot Night." In the story, it is Erev Shavuot and K'tonton waits through the night until midnight, hoping to see the night stars part so that he can see the heavens and make a wish. The awesomeness of that experience was to help children understand what it was like to be at the foot of Mount Sinai and to look up awaiting Moshe receiving the Torah.

When I grew up and had children of my own, I knew I wanted to incorporate the specialness of that story into our family's Shavuot experience.

When each of my children became six years old, I read them the story just before Shavuot. Then I woke them up a few minutes before midnight during the first night of the holiday, bundled them up in coats over their pjs and took them outside. I asked them to look at

the stars and see if the heavens were opening ready to receive their wishes. My children would close their eyes, make their wishes and we would then go back inside. I would return them to their beds, bring them ice cream treats and stay with them for a few minutes until they drifted away to sleep.

Now all of my children are adults and I have been blessed with beautiful grandchildren. I know that each of them will celebrate the holiday of Shavuot in ways that are meaningful to them. Some may even remember what I did when they were six and read this story to their children.

"Let's Meet at Sinai, a Shavuot Kit" is a collaborative effort to encourage you to celebrate Shavuot this year in meaningful ways that you may not have in the past. Read the essays, study the texts, visit the prayer book and meditate on t'fillot, share the questions included in this kit at your holiday meals, try the gardening tips and the recipes and play the Ten Commandments search game with your family. Check out the resource links found on Congregation Beth Ahm's website <https://www.cbahm.org/event/shavuotresources2020>.

Most of all have a *chag sameach!*

# **JUST WHEN YOU HAVE FINALLY FOUND YOUR LAST PILE OF MATZAH CRUMBS LEFT OVER FROM PASSOVER AND STARTED TO THINK ABOUT THIS YEAR'S FLOWER BEDS AND VEGETABLE GARDENS, YOU FIND OUT THAT ANOTHER JEWISH HOLIDAY IS WITHIN A FEW DAYS. WHAT IS THIS HOLIDAY AND WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT?**

*By Rabbi Steven Rubenstein*

Shavuot is one of three Pilgrimage festivals found in the Torah – along with Pesah and Sukkot. Shavuot means 'weeks' and the festival gets its name from the fact that the Torah tells us to celebrate seven weeks following Pesah. Shavuot has two main origins and, therefore two main themes. Shavuot is a harvest festival and was meant to celebrate the beginning of the spring harvest. In one place, the Torah refers to the holiday as *Chag HaKatzir!*

The Festival of the Harvest. (That's why it is good that we are thinking about gardening!) More well-known is the fact that Shavuot is the celebration of the revelation at Mt. Sinai and the receiving of the Torah. That is why Shavuot is also called *Zman Matan Torateinu* -The Season of The Receiving of Our Torah.

**SHAVUOT IS A 2-DAY FESTIVAL OUTSIDE THE LAND OF ISRAEL (AND 1-DAY IN ISRAEL). IN ADDITION TO CANDLE-LIGHTING, HOLIDAY MEALS, AND SPECIAL SERVICES IN SYNAGOGUE WHICH INCLUDE RECITING HALLEL AND YIZKOR, THERE ARE SEVERAL UNIQUE PRACTICES FOR SHAVUOT.**

## **Tikun Leil Shavuot**

All-night study session to celebrate Torah in our lives. There is a midrash that The Children of Israel slept in on the morning we were to receive the Torah and had to be woken up by Moses. To repair (to do a tikun) of this error on the part of our ancestors, we show our excitement to receive the Torah through studying Torah.

## **The 10 Commandments**

We read the story of the Sinai revelation in the Book of Exodus and the 10 Commandments on the first day of Shavuot.

## **Dairy**

Shavuot is known as a holiday for eating dairy and foods such as cheese blintzes and cheesecake are specialties of the holiday.

## **The Book of Ruth**

The story of Ruth both takes place during the harvest season and also shows how Ruth was (and we can be) changed through our acceptance of the Torah. Some say that just as love/chesed is the theme of The Book of Ruth, love/chesed is the key theme of the whole Torah.



Photo Credit: Marsha Lynn

# THE SOUL AND SOIL OF SHAVUOT

## יום הבכורים

**Y**om HaBikkurim (Day of the First Fruits) is another name for Shavuot. It refers to Biblical times when farmers brought offerings of freshly harvested fruit to the Temple in Jerusalem at Shavuot. The finest of the first-ripening fruits would be presented with great ceremony in ornate baskets. The bringer of first fruits recited the vidui bikurim, a lengthy declaration describing how he came to be there. Beginning with “My father was a wandering Aramean,” he goes on to recount how the Jewish people were enslaved in Egypt, how they cried out to God who saved them, took them out of Egypt and brought them to the Land of Israel - the best of whose fruits he is now bringing to the Temple. **Where did we hear this before? The Passover Seder, of course! Just barely 50 days ago.**

The farmer tells a story to account for his good fortune that stretches back to the beginnings of the Jewish people. Full gratitude comes from understanding the roots of his present situation. As the Sefer HaChinukh (a medieval compendium of the 613 mitzvot) says, the reason for the declaration is to etch on our hearts the reality of God’s kindness.

Over the centuries, Jews at Shavuot have decorated their homes and synagogues with flowers and greenery based upon the midrash that the foot of Mount Sinai was carpeted with greens and sweet-smelling flowers upon the granting of the Torah.

Explanation by Rabbi Julian Sinclair  
The Jewish Chronicle, Nov. 4, 2008



Photo Credit: Marsha Lynn

# THE SOUL AND SOIL OF SHAVUOT

Some activities we can do before or just after this holiday are: Donate or volunteer at an urban garden. Tour Yad Ezra's Giving Garden. Start your own fruit, vegetable or flower garden.



Photo Credit: Martin Darvick

## 5 TIPS FOR GARDENING FROM MASTER GARDENER CATHY LICHTMAN

- 1). Gardens grow in soil; dirt is for roads. Think compost; it's best if you can make your own or buy some. In the Fall, cover your plant beds with leaves. Your soil will thank you in the Spring.
2. Plant for the pollinators. Buy your plants from nurseries that DON'T use chemicals harmful to bees and butterflies, for example neonicotinoids or glyphosate (such as Roundup). Buy plants native to Michigan like Purple Coneflower, Echinacea Purpurea, some type of milkweed, Asclepias (Monarch butterflies will love you), Asters such as New England Asters or Late Purple Aster for Fall color.
3. Location. Check the plant tag for where to place your plant and when to plant it. Remember plants grow over the years, so leave some room.
4. Water in the morning, never in the bright sun or in the evening. Leaves need to "dry off" before nightfall so they don't get diseases. Use mulch to conserve moisture and to keep out weeds.
5. Get started. Wear sunscreen and watch out for poison ivy!

# TIKUN LEIL SHAVUOT – THE SONG OF TORAH

It is a long-standing tradition to learn Torah on the first evening of Shavuot and through the night as part of a Tikun Leil Shavuot. We share this page on Torah study and viewing Torah as song as a tool for your Shavuot Torah study.

*By Rabbi Steven Rubenstein*

## **RABBI YEHIEL MIKHEL EPSTEIN, ARUKH HASHULHAN, PREFACE TO HOSHEN MISHPAT**

Truly, for one who understands a matter in all its richness, all the controversies of [our ancient and medieval rabbis], and the decisors of Jewish law are the words of the living God, and all are grounded in the law. Indeed, this is the glory of our pure and holy Torah, the whole of which is called a song. And the glory of the song is that the individual voices differ from one another; this is the essence of its delight. And one who explores the sea of the Talmud will experience the diverse delights of all these distinct voices.

1. Controversies can easily be depicted in a negative light, but Rabbi Epstein calls all of the controversies over Jewish tradition a song. Think of a time when your verbal disagreement with someone was most like a song.
2. It isn't difficult to see how disagreement might have a negative impact on society. But how might it prove a positive force for a community or society?

## **MAIMONIDES, MISHNEH TORAH, TORAH STUDY 3:13**

Although it is mandatory to study by day and by night, no one acquires most of their wisdom at any time but during night-time. Therefore, whoever desires to attain the crown of the Torah should take care of all of their nights, not to spend even one of them in sleeping, eating, drinking, conversation, or in like matters, but in study of Torah and in matters of wisdom. The sages said: "The voice of the Torah cannot be heard save at night, as it is said "Arise and speak loud in the night" (Lamentations 2:19).

Whoever pursues the study of the Torah by night has a thread of God's lovingkindness drawn upon himself by day, as it is said: "By day the Lord will command his lovingkindness and in the night His song shall be with a prayer unto the God of my life" (Psalm 42:9)

1. Why do you think Maimonides focuses on night-time as the best time to study Torah?
2. How might light (daytime) and darkness (night-time) serve as metaphors for Torah study?

## **DEUTERONOMY 31:19**

Now therefore write this song for you, and teach it to the children of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for Me against the children of Israel.

1. This verse is seen by Sefer HaChinukh as the final mitzva of the Torah--#613. It is commanding us to write/own our own Torah scroll. This mitzva has a variety of permutations but clearly ascribes value to keeping the words of Torah close to us.
2. In the ancient and medieval world, accessibility to the written word was an issue that contemporary Jews do not face. Can you imagine a different interpretation of this mitzva which would keep the words of the Torah ('this song') close to you?

## **RABBI JONATHAN SACKS, "TORAH AS SONG"**

And why call the Torah a song? Because if we are to hang on our faith and way of life to the next generation, it must sing. Torah must be affective, not just cognitive. It must speak to our emotions. As Antonio Damasio showed empirically in *Descartes' Error*, though the reasoning part of the brain is central to what makes us human, it is the limbic system, the seat of the emotions, that leads us to choose this way, not that. If our Torah lacks passion, we will not succeed in passing it on to the future. Music is the affective dimension of communication, the medium through which we express, evoke and share emotion. Precisely because we are creatures of emotion, music is an essential part of the vocabulary of mankind.

# FOOD FOR THOUGHT

By Debra Darvick

Long before I ever celebrated Shavuot, I came across a cheesecake recipe that I have now made for decades. That dairy is the holiday's food group of choice is a very happy coincidence because the cheesecake, in addition to becoming the Darvick family's cake of celebration, is always a great dessert to bring for Shavuot.

Why dairy? As with all questions Jewish, there are a multitude of answers. I'll give you three for starters: we eat dairy in acknowledgment of Israel as "a land flowing with **milk and honey**" (Exodus 3:8); the Israelites abstained from eating meat before receiving the Torah and then, having just received the Torah, were like newborns whose only food is milk.

## NEW YORK CHEESECAKE

Mimi Sheraton, possibly

- 8 double graham crackers, crushed
- 1 1/2 cups sugar, plus 2 tbs
- a sprinkling of cinnamon
- 1/4 lb butter, melted
- 2 lbs cream cheese, room temp - use Philadelphia, the original
- 4 eggs
- 1 1/2 tbs lemon juice
- 1 1/2 tsp vanilla
- 1 pint sour cream,

**1** Preheat oven to 300°. Tightly cover 8"-9" outside lower third of springform with two layers of aluminum foil.

**2** Stir crumbs, 1/2 cup sugar, a sprinkling of cinnamon and melted butter until well mixed. Press the mixture evenly over the bottom of a springform pan. You can also put foil wrapped springform pan on a cookie sheet to bake the crust. This will catch any melted butter from messing up your oven. Bake at 300° for 8 - 10 minutes, or until crumbs are lightly toasted. Remove from oven and turn oven up to 375°.

**3** Beat the cream cheese until smooth and fluffy, Add 1 cup of sugar gradually. Beat in eggs one at a time, then 1 tsp vanilla and lemon juice. Pour over crumb crust and bake at 375° for 40 minutes. Timing may vary. You don't want the center "jiggly." Remove from oven and turn oven to 475°.

### Topping:

2 tbs sugar  
1 pint sour cream  
1/2 tsp of vanilla  
Mix together and spread over cheesecake.  
Bake for 5 - 7 minutes.  
Remove from oven to cool and put in refrigerator overnight.

### Water Bath

It helps keep the cake top from splitting if you put it in a water bath before baking. Fill a Pyrex baking dish scant 1/2" with hot water. Place the cake (in the foil-wrapped springform pan) in the bath before baking.

But Shavuot celebrants cannot live on cheesecake alone (well, maybe we could but for the purposes of this article, let's leave that temptation aside.) Shavuot actually has three names: Giving of the Torah (Zeman Matan Torateinu); Festival of First Fruits (Chag Ha Bikkurim); and Feast of the Harvest (Chag HaKatzir). These last two open up the menu to all sorts of wonderful grains, fruits and veggies. The recipe below incorporates all of the Seven Species: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates.

## SEVEN SPECIES SALAD

Faye Levy, Jerusalem Post, May 24, 2006

Photo Credit: Martin Darvick

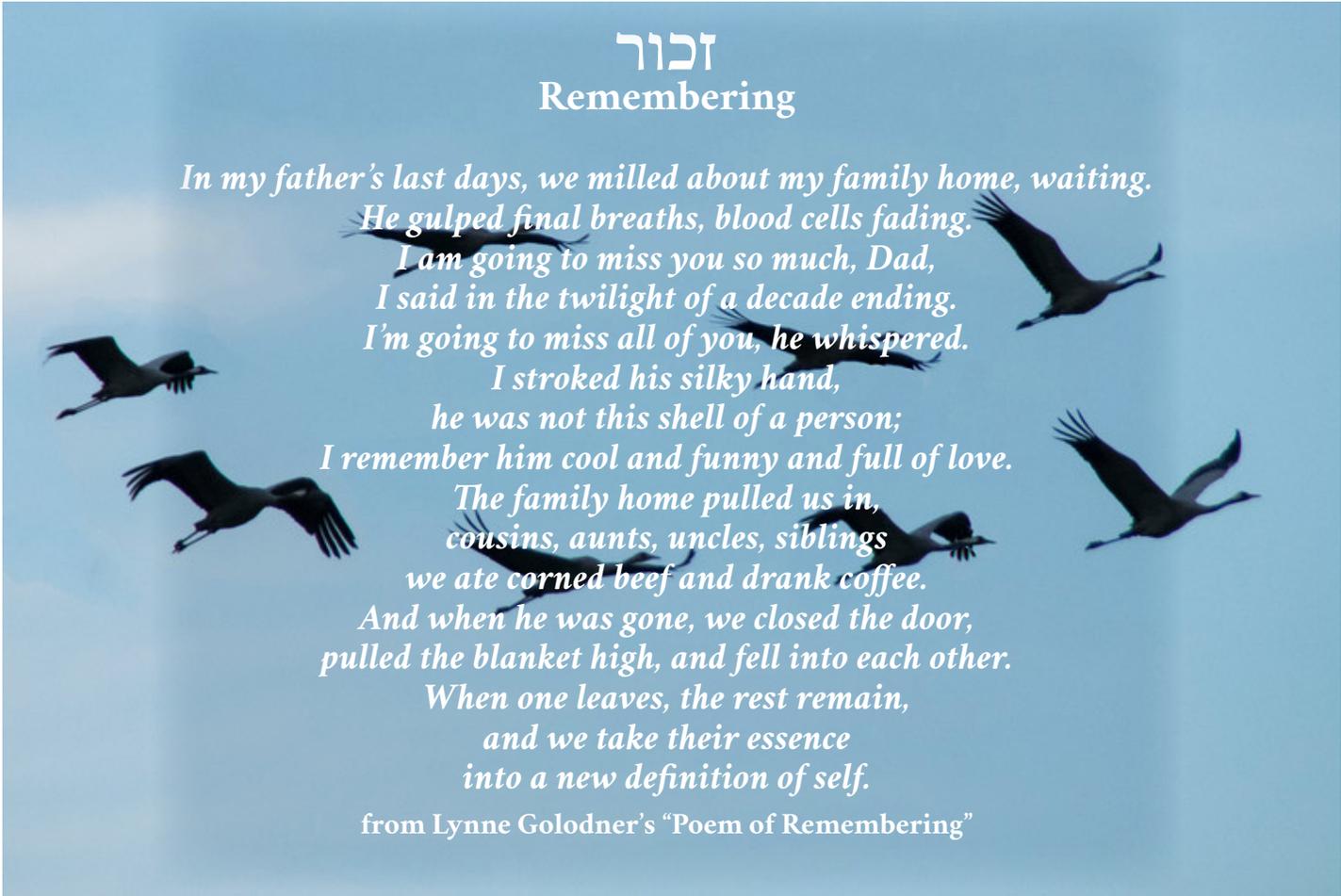
A few spoonfuls of pomegranate seeds are a lovely, tasty addition.

- 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, or more if needed
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 3/4 cup pearl barley
- 1 3/4 to 2 cups vegetable broth
- salt and freshly ground pepper
- 2 teaspoons fresh or 1 teaspoon dried thyme or 1 teaspoon dried za'atar
- 3/4 cup medium bulgur wheat
- 1/3 cup dried figs, cut in thin slices
- 1/4 to 1/3 cup raisins
- 2 teaspoons pomegranate paste (optional)
- 2 tablespoons wine vinegar
- 2 teaspoons honey (optional)
- 1/4 cup chopped green onion
- 1/4 cup chopped parsley
- 2 or 3 small cucumbers, diced
- 1/3 cup pitted black olives, halved (optional)
- 1/2 to 3/4 cup crumbled feta or diced goat cheese (optional)
- 1/4 cup sliced almonds, toasted



Heat 2 tablespoons of oil in a large, heavy saucepan. Add onion and saute over medium-low heat, stirring often, until softened but not brown. Remove half of onion and set aside. Add barley to pan and saute, stirring, 1 minute. Add 1 3/4 cups broth, salt, pepper, and thyme and bring to a boil. Cover and cook over low heat for 40 minutes or until barley is tender, adding more broth if liquid evaporates before barley is cooked. Spoon reserved onion into another saucepan and heat it. Add bulgur wheat and saute, stirring, for two minutes. Add 1 1/2 cups water, salt and pepper and bring to boil.

Cover and cook over low heat for 10 minutes. Add figs and raisins, cover and cook for 5 more minutes or until water is absorbed and bulgur and fruit are tender. Fluff barley with a fork. Lightly fold in bulgur wheat mixture. Cool to room temperature. For dressing, whisk pomegranate paste with vinegar, honey, salt and pepper. Add remaining oil. Fold into barley mixture. Add green onions, parsley, cucumbers and half the olives. Taste and adjust seasoning. Serve topped with remaining olives, cheese and almonds. Makes 6 to 8 servings



זכור  
Remembering

*In my father's last days, we milled about my family home, waiting.  
He gulped final breaths, blood cells fading.  
I am going to miss you so much, Dad,  
I said in the twilight of a decade ending.  
I'm going to miss all of you, he whispered.  
I stroked his silky hand,  
he was not this shell of a person;  
I remember him cool and funny and full of love.  
The family home pulled us in,  
cousins, aunts, uncles, siblings  
we ate corned beef and drank coffee.  
And when he was gone, we closed the door,  
pulled the blanket high, and fell into each other.  
When one leaves, the rest remain,  
and we take their essence  
into a new definition of self.*

from Lynne Golodner's "Poem of Remembering"

In Jewish tradition, Yizkor is the public observance for the community of bereaved. Yizkor means "may [God] remember," from the Hebrew root zachor.

Originally, Yizkor was recited only on Yom Kippur. Its primary purpose was to honor the deceased by committing to giving *tzedakah* [charity] in their memory, on the theory that the good deeds of the survivors elevate the souls of the departed. It also enhanced the chances for personal atonement by doing a deed of lovingkindness. Since the Torah reading on the last day of the pilgrimage festivals [the holidays of Sukkot, Passover, and **Shavuot**] mentions the importance of donations, Yizkor was added to these holiday services as well.

This Shavuot discuss with your family about charitable giving. Learn about organizations and projects that help connect you with the loved one you are remembering. Recite the following meditation and write your own poem, prayer or meditation.

*By Sharona Shapiro*



## MEDITATION

May God remember the soul of my (mother, father, wife, husband...) \_\_\_\_\_ who has gone to her/his eternal home. In loving testimony to her/his life, I pledge tzedakah to help perpetuate ideals important to her/him. Through such deeds, and through prayer and remembrance, may her/his soul be bound up in the bond of life. May I prove myself worthy of the many gifts with which she/he blessed me. May these moments of meditation strengthen the ties that link me to her/his memory. May she/he rest in peace forever in God's presence.

Much gratitude and appreciation to the Beth Abraham Cemetery Association which supports our congregational yizkor gatherings during holidays including Shavuot.

# THE STORY OF RUTH

By Vered Hollander-Goldfarb

Torah Sparks produced by the Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem.

The story of Ruth is set in the time in which judges led the people of Israel, a period known for lack of order, government, and cohesiveness among the tribes of Israel. The story is set in the midst of the additional crisis of a famine. Against this backdrop we meet Elimelekh and his sons, Makhlon and Kilyon, a well-to-do family from Bethlehem in Judah, who moved to Moab in trans-Jordan. There they settle, the sons marry Moabite women, and subsequently all three men die. They leave behind three women, all of whom seem to be minor characters in the story of these men.

Naomi's attempts to convince her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, to return to their land and nation were only partially successful. We believe Naomi when she says that Ruth and Orpah should turn around. It would be better for them; it would be easier for her to face her hometown without having to explain the Moabite woman who returned with her. On the other hand, being lonely and poor, "empty" – as Naomi defines herself, makes for a very difficult old age. Ruth's loyalty went beyond all that could be expected of her. She sealed the matter by an oath to share Naomi's nation, God, and fate. As people in Biblical times knew, an oath could not be broken without dire consequences. Now they will face the wagging tongues of Bethlehem together.

The people of Bethlehem are not criticized any more than we would criticize any ordinary, curious, and a bit thoughtless group of people. Against the backdrop of this ordinary town we meet Boaz, a rich landowner in the town with extraordinary views. Upon inquiring about "the new girl" collecting in his field, he finds out from his work manager that "she is a Moabite girl, the one that returned with Naomi." (Ruth 2:6) The manager (who seems to be a good representative of the people of the town) identifies her first and foremost as a foreigner. However, Boaz sees something else; what she had done for her mother-in-law after the death of the man that linked them, and all she gave up to join a nation that was foreign to her (notice that his words in Ruth 2:11 recall the words of God to Abraham in Gen. 12:1).

The reader of a short story of this nature might at this point expect, along with Ruth herself, a happy ending. That ending seems long in coming. The harvest season draws to an end, and Ruth's hopes of ever living better than her current hand-to-mouth situation dims. Now it is Naomi's turn to intervene. She is the one who decides to push Boaz towards more substantial assistance. Ruth deserves more than handouts, she should have a home, as Naomi tells her "my daughter, I shall seek for you a place of rest that will be good for you" (Ruth 3:1). Ruth may have hesitated to carry out the plan, and Boaz may have used some "creative" ways to get Ruth married (to him), but by the end of chapter 4 we can finally put down the book with the satisfaction that the story has come to its proper conclusion. Ruth, Boaz and Naomi live happily ever after, rewarded with offspring including a great grandchild that will become known as King David.

However, this is a biblical book, and as such we might wonder why the book of Ruth was canonized. As Rabbi Ze'ira asks in Midrash on Ruth, "It does not contain any legal value, it does not elucidate any other issues, why include it?" He answers that Ruth was canonized, "To teach you how great is the reward of those who grant loving kindness (chesed)." It does not contain any villains, the people of Bethlehem are ordinary people, the family of Elimelekh is selfish, but no more than most. Orpah only did as she was begged to do. Against all that gray and ordinary human scenery there are three extraordinary individuals; Naomi, Ruth and Boaz who rose above what was commonly expected from human beings; they are people of hesed (loving kindness). It is not coincidental that on the day that the Jewish tradition considers to be the day we received the Torah, the Law, the rabbis included a reading that stresses hesed – loving kindness that goes beyond the letter of the law.

## **QUESTIONS FOR THE SHAVUOT TABLE**

By Sharona Shapiro

1. What are examples of chesed that we observe and experience in our everyday lives?
2. How can we do more acts of chesed in our everyday lives?
3. How can we motivate our community and our leaders to pursue chesed?
4. Why do you think the rabbis of old linked the Story of Ruth to Shavuot?

# FAMILY TORAH FUN

Elissa Berg, Jewish Educator

On Shavuot, God gave the Hebrews the Ten Commandments and the Torah so they could learn how to live as a people in the Holy Land. Can you imagine trying to live together without any rules? Here is a Ten Commandments activity that will help you to learn about some of these rules.

## Preparation:

Draw two blank tablets on a large sheet of paper or paper grocery bag. Divide each "tablet" into 5 sections. On each section write one of the commandments below.

1. **I am the Lord your God who took you out of the land of Egypt.**
2. **Do not worship other gods or idols.**
3. **Do not swear falsely using God's name.**
4. **Remember Shabbat and keep it holy.**
5. **Honor your father and your mother.**
6. **Do not murder.**
7. **Do not take another person's husband or wife.**
8. **Do not steal.**
9. **Do not lie about another person.**
10. **Do not wish to own what belongs to someone else.**

Cut the "tablets" into ten pieces (keeping each Commandment intact). Put the pieces in a bag or large envelope. Each family member should draw enough pieces so that all the Commandments are distributed.

## The Search:

Find at least one thing in the house that has something to do with the Commandment(s) you are looking for. Pick up or take a picture of the item.

Example: Commandment #10 -- car keys. Do you want the car so badly that you might take the keys and drive the car without permission?

### Additional (optional) questions:

Early elementary: Why did the Children of Israel need the Ten Commandments?

Elementary: Why do you think these particular Commandments were chosen?

Middle School: What, if anything, is missing in the Ten Commandments? Explain.

High School: What values are demonstrated within the Commandments? Why those values at that time? Example: Commandment #10 -- car keys. Do you want the car so badly that you might take the keys and drive the car without permission?

### Other possibilities:

- Make two sets of commandment cards. Divide the family in half. Each group takes an envelope and decides what would be the best order. Present and discuss the choices.
- Search online (or catalogues, newspapers, magazines) for pictures of people observing or breaking one of the commandments and make a collage for each commandment that is chosen.
- Search online for Ten Commandment songs.

Debbie Friedman: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4dmAW5ud0g>

Cantor Jeff Klepper: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mk1LCbNW6gc>

- Make an edible Ten Commandments: Slice one half of a banana lengthwise. Lay each quarter (flat) on a graham cracker. Push 5 raisins or chocolate chips on each side -- one for each of the commandments. ENJOY!



Photo Credit: Marsha Lynn  
The Louis and Fay Woll Memorial Bible Garden

## LET'S MEET UP AT SINAI: A SHAVUOT LEARNING KIT

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For suggested books, websites and other resources for self-directed Shavuot learning, visit <https://www.cbahm.org/event/shavuotresources2020>.

To support future special educational projects just like this one, please call 248.851.6880. Visit Congregation Beth Ahm's website [www.cbahm.org](http://www.cbahm.org) to learn about other congregational learning opportunities.



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