

Shavuot - The Festival of Weeks

6-7 Sivan, 5768 • June 9-10, 2008

WHAT IS SHAVUOT?

Shavuot, a beautiful late-spring Jewish festival is celebrated exactly seven weeks after Passover, hence its name, which means “weeks” in Hebrew. Shavuot celebrates the beginning of the wheat harvest, and also the giving of the Ten Commandments to the Jewish people on Mt. Sinai. In some ways, the Ten Commandments can be seen as the “harvest” of the Jewish exodus from Egypt: the Jews were transformed from slaves into free people abiding by the rule of law.

In ancient Israel, Shavuot was a time when farmers made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to offer the “first fruits” of their harvest. All aspects of Shavuot mark and celebrate journeys, growth, reaping and fulfillment.

SHAVUOT AT HOME AND IN THE COMMUNITY

In keeping with tradition, it is customary to eat dairy products on this day. In observant of this holiday there are special Shavuot readings in the synagogue including piyutim (medieval poems) and the Book of Ruth. Another Shavuot tradition is to participate in a Tikkun Leil Shavuot (on all night study session focusing on sacred texts) marking the holiday.

It is also customary to decorate one's home, synagogue of community center with flowers and greenery in celebration of Spring. This tradition stems from a midrash (rabbinical homily), which teaches that the barren desert burst into bloom when the Torah was revealed.


THEMES AND THEOLOGY

Shavuot is a holiday that celebrates the cycles of nature by celebrating the wheat harvest, and the foundations of civilization, by celebrating the Ten Commandments. The holiday commemorates the foundational events in Jewish historical memory, the Exodus from Egypt, and the subsequent Revelation of Torah on Mt. Sinai.

If Passover is a holiday that celebrates freedom, then Shavuot is a holiday that celebrates the responsibility that comes with freedom.



THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

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1. אַנְכִי הַיְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם.
 2. לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים. לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לְךָ פֶסֶל וְכָל-תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם.
 3. לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת-שֵׁם אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוּא.
 4. זָכוֹר אֶת-יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ.
 5. כְּבֹד אֶת-אָבִיךָ וְ אֶת-אִמְךָ.
 6. לֹא תִרְצַח.
 7. לֹא תִנְאָף.
 8. לֹא תִגְנוֹב.
 9. לֹא-תַעֲנֶה בְרַעְדָּךְ עַד שֶׁקֶר.
 10. לֹא תַחְמֹד.

1. I am the Eternal One your G-d who brought you out of the Land of Egypt.
2. You shall have no other gods besides me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image or any likeness of what is in the heavens above.
3. You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Eternal One your G-d.
4. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.
5. Honor your father and mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness against anyone.
10. You shall not covet.