

Hebrew Day Institute

לכבוד שבת

L'chvod Shabbat



May 18, 2007



## Torah Fair

Congratulations to all of the students on the wonderful Torah Fair. All the students worked very hard on selecting their topic, conducting their research, preparing their projects and giving their presentations.

The variety of projects reflects the level of work students put into this program. From viewing the projects you could learn about a variety of essential questions, and the students' opinions and answers for those questions.



## Shavuot

The holiday of Shavuot begins on the evening of May 22 this year. Because it is a holiday that does not have a lot of specific practices and rituals, it is one of the least practiced or understood holidays. We have put together some information on Shavuot that includes the origins and meaning of the holiday; customs and ways we celebrate today; customs from around the world; recipe links and craft ideas you can try at home. Material for this article was compiled using a variety of resources, including the following websites:  
<http://www.torah tots.com>  
<http://www.ou.org/chagim/shavuot/>  
<http://www.aish.com>  
<http://www.myjewishlearning.com>  
<http://www.holidays.net/shavuot/>  
[http://urj.org/\\_kd/Items/actions.cfm?action=Show&item\\_id=7848&destination=ShowItem](http://urj.org/_kd/Items/actions.cfm?action=Show&item_id=7848&destination=ShowItem)  
<http://www.ujc.org/page.html?ArticleID=77809>  
<http://www.hillel.org/jewish/holidays/shavuot/default.htm>

Shavuot, one of the 3 Pilgrimage Festivals, has several names that tell us about the meanings of the holiday.

**Chag HaShavuot**, the Festival of Weeks, refers to the timing of the festival which is held exactly seven weeks after Pesach.

**Zman Matan Torateinu** (the Time of the Giving of Our Torah) celebrates the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai.

**Chag HaBikurim** (The Festival of the First Fruits) points to the holiday's agricultural roots. Shavuot celebrates the time when the first fruits of the Seven Species (see pictures on page 3 and 5) grown in Israel were harvested and brought in fancy baskets to the Beit Hamikdash in Jerusalem as a sign of thanksgiving.

**Chag HaKatzir** (the Festival of the Harvest) refers to the beginning of the wheat harvest in Israel.

On the first day of Shavuot, the Aseret Hadibrot (the Ten Commandments) is read during services. The Megillat Ruth is read on the second day. Shavuot can be a special time to reawaken and strengthen our special relationship with Hashem.

### Customs Today Flowers and Greens

A beautiful *Shavuot* tradition is the decoration of our homes and synagogues with fragrant flowers, leaves, tree branches, and greens. There are several reasons given for

## Keep in Mind

**May 22**  
2nd Grade Chumash Ceremony  
Noon Dismissal for all

**May 23 - 28**  
School Closed for Shavuot and Memorial Day  
Classes Resume May 29

**Tuesday May 29 at 1:30pm.**  
New Date for Spelling Bee

**June 6 - 8**  
6th Grade Trip to NY

**Thursday, June 14**  
6th Grade Graduation

**Friday, June 15**  
Last day of school  
Noon Dismissal

(Continued on page 2)

  
*Shavuot**(Continued from page 1)*

this custom.

- One is that Our Sages taught that although Har Sinai was situated in a desert, in honor of the Torah the desert bloomed and sprouted flowers.
- Because the Torah is the “Tree of Life” (Prov. 3:18).

***Tikkun Leil Shavuot*** (literally, a Shavuot night repair)

This is the custom of holding an all-night Torah study on the first night of Shavuot, to commemorate preparing for the time when we received the Torah. Two popular explanations are given, based on the Jews not sleeping the night before receiving the Torah:

- To atone for when the Israelites slept late and had to be awakened by Moses to receive the Torah.
- Thunder and lightning struck throughout the night that Moses received the Torah and the Israelites could not sleep.

***Megillat Ruth (the Scroll of Ruth)***

Megillat Ruth is read on the second day of Shavuot, before the reading of the Torah. There are several reasons we read Megillat Ruth on Shavuot.

- The Torah is loving kindness, and this Megillah is about loving kindness.
- The act of Ruth's conversion took place during the harvest season, 'at the beginning of the barley harvest' to the 'end of the wheat harvest' which includes the time of Shavuot.
- The harvest is central to the story as it is to this holiday which is a harvest festival.
- The giving of the Torah marks the beginning of the Jewish Nation and our Covenant with Hashem, and Megillat Ruth tells how Ruth chose to enter into that Covenant.
- Megillat Ruth is the history of the roots of King David and the last verse continues the line of Boaz, ending with David. Shavuot is also the birthday and Yahrzeit of King David so we read Megillat Ruth which starts the story.

***Eating Dairy Meals***

It is customary to eat a dairy meal at least once on *Shavuot*. There are several reasons given by our Sages for the custom of eating a dairy meal on *Shavuot*.

- When we received the Torah at Mount Sinai, we got special instructions about Kashrut. Before this we didn't have those laws and so milk and meat were cooked in the same pots, using the same utensils. Now, all the pots were not kosher. The only choice was to eat dairy. We could not cook, slaughter new, kosher animals, or boil water to kosher the pots

because it was Shabbat. Before Sinai Jews did not eat dairy, but when we received the Torah, we were permitted to eat dairy. So they had a dairy meal.

- Another reason is connected to the description of Israel as "a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:8).
- The Torah is likened to milk in the Song of Songs 4:11. The verse says "Like honey and milk [the Torah] lies under your tongue." The tongue could be understood as God's Torah.
- Just as milk can fully sustain the body of a human being (think of nursing babies), so can the Torah provide all the spiritual nourishment needed for the human soul.
- The gematria (numerical value) for the Hebrew word for milk, *Chalav*, is 40. Moshe spent 40 days on Mount Sinai receiving the Torah. He then spent 40 more days praying for forgiveness for the Golden Calf. And he spent 40 more days before coming down the mountain with a new set of stone tablets.
- Moshe was born on the seventh day of Adar, and stayed at home for three months with his family, before being placed in the Nile River on the sixth of Sivan. He was rescued by Pharaoh's daughter and given to Yocheved, his mother, to nurse. The sixth of Sivan is the day on which Shavuot falls and eating dairy can help commemorate the early life of Moshe.

***Children's Study of Torah***

Linking children's study of Torah to Shavuot is another tradition. In the Middle Ages, a child was first introduced to the Hebrew alphabet on Shavuot and then given sweets so “the Torah might be sweet on his lips.” Now, many synagogues celebrate the beginning and end of formal religious school education around Shavuot.

- Consecration ceremonies for children beginning their religious studies
- Confirmation ceremonies for teenagers who have finished two years of post bar-bat mitzvah Jewish education.

***Customs from Around the World***

- Moroccan Jews begin the evening meal by reciting Kiddush and then taking a few matzot that have been saved from Passover, breaking them into small pieces and blending them with a mixture of milk and honey. The matzah is a reminder of the escape from Egypt. It combines with the sweetness of the newly received Torah. Moroccan Jews taste the matzah, milk and honey mixture before the meal to symbolize that Shavuot is the conclusion of the Exodus from Egypt.

*(Continued on page 3)*

Shavuot  
(Continued from page 2)

- Syrian Jews bring bouquets of flowers to the synagogue.
- An old custom among Ashkenazi Jews was to create paper cuts of flowers, particularly roses, to display in the windows of their homes for this holiday.
- A custom among the Sephardim (Jews of Spanish or Portuguese origin) was to bake a seven-layer cake for Shavuot called Siete Cielos, or Seven Heavens, symbolizing the seven celestial spheres God traveled across in order to present the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai. This cake is made of seven graduated circular layers, one placed atop the other in tiers, the largest at the bottom. It is decorated with various Jewish symbols including a Star of David, the staff of Moses, the two tablets of the Law, manna, Jacob's ladder and the Ark of the Covenant. If you want to try this, but a seven-layer cake is too challenging, consider using a Bundt pan to create a round, high cake. Use a favorite cake recipe or a cake mix, then decorate the completed cake with frosting and Jewish symbols made out of icing or cake decorating gels.

Also: [http://www.aish.com/shavuotfeatures/shavuotfeaturesdefault/More\\_Shavuot\\_Recipes.asp](http://www.aish.com/shavuotfeatures/shavuotfeaturesdefault/More_Shavuot_Recipes.asp)

Shavuot dairy desserts deluxe at [http://www.aish.com/shavuotfeatures/shavuotfeaturesdefault/Shavuot\\_Dairy\\_Desserts\\_Deluxe\\_.asp](http://www.aish.com/shavuotfeatures/shavuotfeaturesdefault/Shavuot_Dairy_Desserts_Deluxe_.asp)

and Dairy treats [http://www.aish.com/shavuotfeatures/shavuotfeaturesdefault/Dairy\\_Treats\\_.asp](http://www.aish.com/shavuotfeatures/shavuotfeaturesdefault/Dairy_Treats_.asp) including spinach feta quiche with fresh basil.

#### Crafts

Paper cuts are a Jewish folk art that grew in importance in the 17<sup>th</sup>- 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. You can make them simply with tools you already have (paper, pencil and knife) so even the poor could make them. They were used to fulfill the mitzvah of hiddur mitzvah (beautifying the mitzvah). Paper cuts were hung in synagogues and homes for different ritual purposes. One use was for Shavuot decorations. They are traditionally made by folding a sheet of paper in half, drawing one half of the design starting at the fold and cutting with a sharp knife. This gives you a symmetrical design when you unfold the sheet. The pictures cut included flowers, Jewish symbols and animals but no people or scenes from daily life. Some artists included text in their paper cuts as well.

#### Crafts and Recipes

Check out some interesting dairy recipes at [http://www.aish.com/shavuotfeatures/shavuotfeaturesdefault/Shavuot\\_Recipes.asp](http://www.aish.com/shavuotfeatures/shavuotfeaturesdefault/Shavuot_Recipes.asp)

where you'll find recipes for different kinds of cheesecake, blintzes, salmon in puff pastry, French onion soup (vegetarian), cucumber yogurt sauce, Greek tomato salad, rice pudding, sour cream coffee cake and more.

#### Decorate your home with paper flowers

Materials: scissors, origami paper, or gift-wrap cut into squares

#### Directions:

Keep the color side of the paper inside, and fold the paper square in half, fold in half again. You will have a small square. Cut designs on the edges of this small

(Continued on page 4)



**DATES**

## 7 Species



**POMEGRANATE**

Pictures of 7 Species continued on Page 5

*Shavuot*  
(Continued from page 3)

square making sure to leave uncut parts on each of the sides, otherwise your paper square will fall apart into small pieces. Carefully open up the paper square to see a beautiful pattern, and use it to decorate the windows of your home! Experiment with other folding and cutting techniques to create other flower patterns.

Try these Paper Cuts

From Brinn, Ruth Esrigg. *Jewish Holiday Crafts for Little Hands*. Rockville: Kar-Ben Publishing, 1993.



## SHAVUOT PAPER CUTS

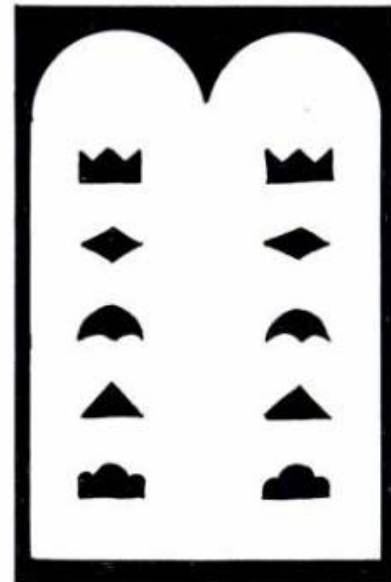
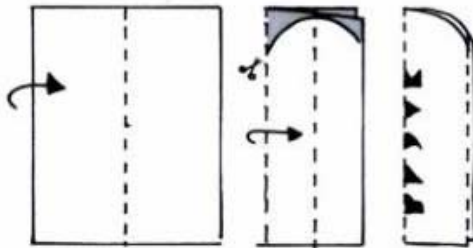
### What You Need:

Colored paper  
White paper  
Scissors, glue

### What You Do:

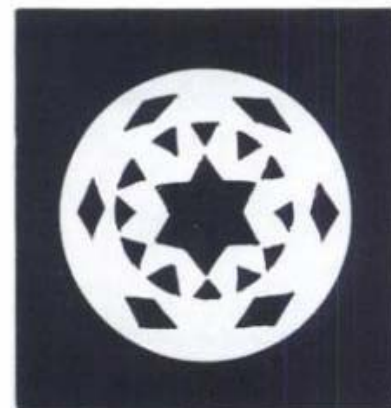
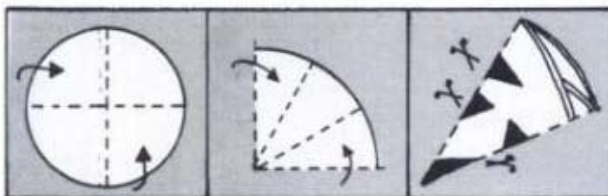
TEN COMMANDMENTS: 

1. Fold a piece of white paper in half. Cut a curve along the top two edges.
2. Fold the paper in half again. Cut five shapes on the long folded side.
3. Unfold and glue onto colored paper.



STAR OF DAVID: 

1. Fold a circle of white paper in half and in half again. Then fold in each side to make an ice cream cone shape.
2. Cut off the bottom point at a slant. Cut out shapes along the folds on the sides and top.
3. Unfold and glue onto colored paper.





**OLIVES**



**FIGS**



**BARLEY**

**7 Species**



**GRAPES**



**WHEAT**



Hebrew Day Institute  
1840 University Blvd., West  
Silver Spring, MD 20902  
Phone: 301-649-7870  
[www.hebrewdayinstitute.org](http://www.hebrewdayinstitute.org)