

Questions to Explore for All Faiths and Backgrounds

- Rather than asking, “Did God write the Torah?” we might inquire, “What does the Torah teach us?”
- How can we each work towards self-reflection and character refinement so that we better receive the teachings of our wisdom traditions?
- How might we open our hearts, families, and communities to people who want to join us on our journey, like Naomi did for Ruth?
- What food gives you such joy that its taste lifts you up in celebration?

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The PJCC is proud to be a part of the Koret Initiative on Jewish Peoplehood. We are honored to present this program through the Taube Center for Jewish Peoplehood at the PJCC.



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Happy Shavuot

חג שבועות שמח

Sundown, Tuesday, June 11 – Nightfall, Thursday, June 13, 2024

What is Shavuot?

Shavuot (Shah-voo-ote), the Festival of “Weeks,” is celebrated seven weeks after Passover, 50 days after the first Seder. Along with Passover and *Sukkot*, Shavuot was one of the three pilgrimage festivals in the *Torah*, when ancient Israelites were commanded to appear in Jerusalem, bringing offerings of the first fruits of their harvest. Shavuot also commemorates the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, the source of wisdom for the Jewish community and Western Civilization.

The Texts of the Holiday

Two sacred texts support Shavuot’s themes of receiving the Torah in every generation. One special synagogue-based tradition is chanting the Ten Commandments at sunrise, re-enacting the initial revelation at Mount Sinai. This service is often the culmination of the *Tikkun Leil Shavuot*, an all-night Torah study session, inspired by Kabbalistic Jewish practice in 16th century Tzfat and still popular in many communities and synagogues.

The other primary text read on Shavuot is the Book of Ruth. The story of Ruth shares a very human tale of two women trying to keep their family together during difficult circumstances. Ruth becomes a poignant role model as an early convert to Judaism, saying to her mother-in-law Naomi the famous phrase: “Wherever you go I shall go, your people shall be my people, and your God my God.” Together, these two texts remind us that anyone can become part of the Jewish community and feel a special connection to this beautiful tradition.

Edible Symbols of the Holiday

Enjoying dairy products has become a favorite custom of Shavuot, as both the words of Torah and the land of Israel are likened to milk and honey. Cheesecake, cheeseboards, cheese blintzes, and even ice cream tend to be popular at Shavuot celebrations. Shavuot also marks the transition from the barley harvest to the wheat harvest, so pastries of fine flour tend to make a special appearance.

Counting the Omer

The period between Passover and Shavuot is a time of transition and transformation. We experience a mental shift from being oppressed by Pharaoh to being in relationship to God. For the 49 days from *Seder* to Shavuot, we can partake in a beautiful spiritual practice of evaluating our personal and divinely given qualities, such as humility, perseverance, kindness, discipline, and balance. Each day is an opportunity to meditate on a unique blend of two of these qualities. Ideally, when we arrive at Shavuot on Day 50, we feel prepared to take on the wisdom of Torah with a pure and open heart.

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*Every person has a special portion in the Torah, therefore
Torah appears to us as water, reflecting our own souls.*

— Sfatai Emet, Chasidic rabbi 19th century

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