

# Shavuot (Pentecost)

## A Messianic Jewish Shavuot Haggadah

(an unfinished work in progress)

**We have never been the same since the day on which  
the voice of God overwhelmed us at Sinai. . . .**

**The Torah is not the wisdom but the destiny of Israel,  
not our literature but our essence.**

—Abraham Joshua Heschel, *From God in Search of Man*

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# Shavuot

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## Laws and Traditions

**Scripture #1:** Shows the beginning point of the 50-day count, Leviticus 23:10-11. This is the day of offering Barley Firstfruits during Passover. In the time of the rabbis, and still today, there has been controversy over what “day after the Sabbath” means. Is it the day after the weekly Sabbath (and thus always Sunday) or the day after the Passover Yom Tov (and thus always the second day of Passover).

**Scripture #2:** The basic regulations for Shavuot, Leviticus 23:15-21. Count 49 days and on the 50th, it is Shavuot. This is the Firstfruits for wheat.

**Scripture #3:** Shavuot as one of the three pilgrim feasts, Deuteronomy 16:16.

**Tradition #1:** Shavuot is the day God gave the commandments from Sinai. This is based on Exodus 19:1 and following. The third month here means the third month of the year, Sivan. Israel had journeyed about 45 days to Sinai starting on Passover (Aviv/Nisan 15). Counting Sivan 1 to set up camp, Sivan 2 for Moses to ascend and hear from God, and Sivan 3-5 as the three days of purification, it would be on Sivan 6 that God gave the Torah. This reconstruction is approximate and certainly does not prove that Torah was given exactly on Shavuot. There is something fitting to the idea of God revealing redemption on Passover and Torah on Shavuot.

**Tradition #2:** Reading the book of Ruth, which features grain harvest (mostly barley).

**Tradition #3:** Staying up all night on Shavuot Eve and reading scripture (traditionally there is a *Tikkun Lel Shavuot* book to follow which includes the beginning and ending of all portions of the Torah, small excerpts from each Mishnah and Talmud section, and the entire book of Ruth).

**Tradition #4:** Decorating with flowers and eating dairy dishes (such as cheese blintzes or cheesecake). Some say this is to remind that God’s revelation is like milk sustaining us.

**New Testament Significance:** Acts 2 tells the story of a certain Shavuot (Pentecost) when God gave the Holy Spirit. It is beyond interesting that the Spirit was given on an anniversary of the giving of the Torah. The New Testament explores the relationship of Law and Spirit.

## On the Obligation of Rejoicing at Festivals

A man has nought else to do on a festival save to eat and drink or to sit and study. Divide it: devote half of it to eating and drinking and half to the beit midrash [house of study].”

–R. Joshua, Babylonian Talmud, Pesachim 68b

If the way is too long for you, so that you are not able to bring the tithe, when the Lord your God blesses you, because the place is too far from you, which the Lord your God chooses, to set his name there, then you shall turn it into money, and bind up the money in your hand, and go to the place which the Lord your God chooses, and spend the money for whatever you desire, oxen, or sheep, or wine or strong drink, whatever your appetite craves; and you shall eat there before the Lord your God and rejoice, you and your household.

–Deuteronomy 14:24-26



## The Five Days Preceding Shavuot

Shavuot falls on the 6th of Sivan. According to the Bible and tradition, each of the five days preceding Shavuot has spiritual significance. The following readings may serve for family observance preparing for the festival or for individual meditation.

### The First Day, When Israel Arrived at Sinai

*On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone forth out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. -Exodus 19:1*

Consider the terrifying events that came before Israel arrived at Sinai. Imagine the change in the lives of men and women and children who had known only slavery.

*And when they set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, they encamped in the wilderness; and there Israel encamped before the mountain. -Exodus 19:2*

It is not possible to tell from the English translation, but for a reason of grammar, Rashi makes the following comment: *Israel encamped — like one man with one heart.* Why does he say this? It is because the verb for encamped is singular and not plural, a difference noticeable in the Hebrew. In other words, it is as if Torah says, “*And Israel, he encamped there,*” instead of “*they encamped there.*”

Could it be, after the perils they had endured together, that Israel was, for that brief period in time, soft of heart and ready to receive whatever God had for them? Did they know of this mountain, called both Sinai and Horeb, that it was the mountain on which Moses had heard the God of Abraham speak from many years before?

*When the Holy One, blessed be He, sought to give Torah to the children of Israel, Mt. Carmel came from Aspamea and Mt. Tabor from Beth-elim. -Midrash on Psalm 68*

There is a legendary story that some other tall mountains wanted to be the one from which God spoke. Anyone who has seen Mt. Carmel knows what a beautiful mountain it is, and also Mt. Tabor, from the land of Israel. And yet God chose a mountain in the desert. According to the tradition, God chose Sinai because it was lowly and so it became one of the world’s most famous mountains. God has a way of choosing people and places often overlooked and making them great.

Like Israel camped at the foot of Mt. Sinai, we can prepare ourselves to celebrate the giving of God’s Torah and God’s Spirit to his people. As Yeshua said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children” (Matt. 11:25). We too are lowly and yet God chose us to hear and understand his words.

### **The Second Day, Moses' First Ascent**

*And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel... -Exodus 19:3*

Tradition says that it was not until the second day that Moses first went up Sinai, with the first day being needed to establish camp. When Moses did arrive at the top, God had a proposal for him and all Israel. God proposed a covenant, an agreement between himself as the mighty king and the people as his needy subjects.

*If you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine... -Exodus 19:5*

God's proposal was a covenant, an agreement, with the people of Israel doing what God commands and in return becoming a special people to God. Who wouldn't want to hear God say, "You are my very own, my treasured people"?

*...and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation -Exodus 19:6*

The second day of Sivan is also known as the Day of Distinction, the day when Israel was distinguished from the other nations. On this day, Israel discovered God had a purpose for them, to be priests to the other nations. Priests represent God and so Israel was to be the nation people would look at and think of the God of Israel. Isn't it an important job to be seen by others as a representative of God?

Yet before God proposed this covenant with Israel he reminded the people how they came to Sinai. They did not get themselves to Sinai. They did not set themselves free from slavery. They did not cross the Sea of Reeds and evade the Egyptian chariots by their own power.

*You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself -Exodus 19:4*

It was God who first redeemed Israel from slavery and then taught Israel to obey. This is the way God worked not only in the days of Moses, but also in the days of Yeshua. Yeshua redeemed us on a Passover day and brought us to a special Shavuot fifty days later in Jerusalem. Our ancestors stood in the Temple courts on Shavuot when something like Sinai all over again happened:

*Suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. -Acts 2:2-4*

We did not bring ourselves to that special Shavuot in Acts 2. Yeshua brought us there. And none of us became God's Spirit-filled people by our own power, but Yeshua brought us where we are himself.

### **The Third Day, Boundaries at the Base of the Mountain**

*You shall set bounds for the people round about, saying, ‘Take heed that you do not go up into the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death’ -Exodus 19:12*

Israel was not yet ready to come close to God. Just as a child may need temporarily to keep a little distance from an angry parent, so the time for Israel to approach God was not yet. Young Israel had a lot to learn, but on this third day, some big steps toward God would happen.

*Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the Lord had commanded him. And all the people answered together and said, ‘All that the Lord has spoken we will do.’ -Exodus 19:7-8*

On this third day Moses reported God’s words to the people. He gathered from all the tribes the elders who spoke for entire clans. On behalf of all the people, these elders said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do.” This was a big step for every Jew who was there, but was it only for them or for us too?

*As soon as God came to Israel, they exclaimed, ‘All that the Lord has spoken we will do and obey.’ Accordingly, it is only proper that **you** should hearken; as it says, ‘Hear the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob’ (Jeremiah 2:4). For if you do not, you will be punished on account of **your** pledge. -From Exodus Rabbah*

Once Israel entered into a covenant with God it was indissoluble and permanent. God’s covenant is forever, as it says in many places, including, “The things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deuteronomy 29:29). We have agreed to obey God’s voice and keep his covenant. He has agreed to keep us as his treasured possession, close to his heart. Don’t we want God to keep us close to him forever?

*And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Lo, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you for ever.’ -Exodus 19:9*

Hearing the voice of God is not as easy as the people thought at first. Later, after they heard the thunderous words of the Almighty, people realized how terrifying such a powerful God can be. They asked Moses to hear God’s words and then tell them so they would not have to be afraid of God’s deafening voice.

*One who hears from the mouth of the messenger cannot be compared to one who hears from the mouth of the King himself. -Rashi on Exodus 19:9*

It is a beautiful thing to hear God’s voice either in person, through a mediator like Moses, or even to read it in a book, written down for ages by those who came before us. As our Messiah said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’” (Matthew 4:4).

### **The Fourth Day, Sanctifying Today and Tomorrow**

*Then Moses told the words of the people to the Lord. And the Lord said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow.” -Exodus 19:9-10*

When a person is about to appear before a king, he or she first makes certain to be ready. It would not do to have the wrong clothes, to be slovenly in appearance, or to be uncertain what will be said and how to carry oneself. There are certain preparations for meeting with God also. While we can talk to him at any time, if we were to appear in his close presence, we would take more care than in everyday prayer.

*“Let them wash their garments, and be ready by the third day; for on the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.” -Exodus 19:10-11*

Is there anything in the Torah about laundering clothes and being pure before God? It certainly does in places like Leviticus 15 and Numbers 19. Those who have become unclean usually wash their garments and then immerse themselves also in water. Thus, Ibn Ezra assumes that when God told the Israelites to wash their clothes, they were to understand to wash their bodies also. All Israel was baptized before receiving the words of God from Sinai.

*Moses went down from the mountain to the people, and consecrated the people; and they washed their garments. And he said to the people, “Be ready by the third day; do not go near a wife.” -Exodus 19:14-15*

Many things in Torah cause uncleanness and what do they all have in common? They all have to do with death or loss of life. Thus, husbands were not to be intimate with wives during this period of consecration. When speaking with the God of life, to be symbolically pure is important.

There is also another way that marriage symbolism enters into the story of Israel preparing for Sinai. When Moses is told to “consecrate them,” the Hebrew is *kiddash-tam*, which is similar to *kiddushin*, the Aramaic word used for betrothal. Israel was appearing before the Lord as a bride before the groom at Sinai.

*But stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high. -Luke 24:49*

Just as Israel waited and prepared to receive God’s Torah, so in Jerusalem many generations later the disciples waited to receive Messiah’s promise of power from on high. Israel at Sinai saw a storm and a fire on the mountain and the disciples in Jerusalem years later heard a rushing wind and saw fire come on their own heads. Israel heard the voice of God at Sinai while the disciples were anointed with God’s Spirit at that special Shavuot much later.

God does not always believe we are ready at any moment. Good things from God often come after a time of preparation. Israel was sanctified for three days. The disciples waited for ten days and received power from on high (Acts 1:8).

### **The Fifth Day, The World's Last Day Without Torah**

*Lo, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you for ever. -Exodus 19:9*

What would it be like to have only one day until God publicly descended on the mountain before a whole nation and spoke the words of Torah? The fifth day was the second day of the people consecrating themselves. On the third day of consecration, God would speak. It was, literally, the world's last day without Torah. Why had God said earlier that he would speak with Moses in the sight of all the people so they would believe?

*Although the people believed in the message of Moses after the performance of miracles [the plagues], they retained some doubt about whether God really communed with mortals . . . God, however, desired to remove this doubt. -Judah HaLevi, Ha-Kuzari 1:87*

If we really saw how magnificent God is, we too would wonder if it was possible for people to talk face to face with him. After watching a river turn to blood, the sun be blotted out, and the rescue of the firstborn according to God's word, we might be so in awe as to imagine that no mortal could stand before God. And yet the words Moses delivered from God had to be believed. They are the basis of Jewish life in every way and without them, there is no life in and with God.

*The fire remained visible to the people forty days; they also Moses enter it and emerge from it; they distinctly heard the Ten Commandments, the source and foundation of the Law. -Judah HaLevi, Ha-Kuzari 1:87*

God showed the people what seemed impossible. Just as he told Moses beforehand, he spoke with Moses in the sight of all Israel so all would see and believe. They would believe, says Exodus 19:9, in the words of Moses forever, that they were words that came from God.

*He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead.' -Luke 16:31*

Yeshua told a story about something else hard to believe in: life after death. A rich man was in torment in the afterlife and wanted at least to send word back to his brothers to warn them. If they did not listen and do God's commandments, to help the weak and support the fallen, they would also find themselves in torment. Yeshua's response is that Moses' words should be enough.

Nothing Yeshua did was different from what Torah would lead us to expect. Redemption comes only from God. God is gracious and compassionate, says the Torah. He forgives iniquity. He prepares a way for people to come near.

If we do listen to the Torah and the prophets, and if we also know that Yeshua came back from the dead, we have every reason to believe Yeshua's words forever as well as Moses' words. God showed the people Moses on the mountain so they would believe. In the same way, we see Yeshua has returned from death and our faith in the one adds to the other.

## Readings from Jewish Literature

### Exodus Rabbah 5:9

When God gave the Torah on Sinai, he displayed untold marvels to Israel with his voice. What happened? God spoke and the voice reverberated through the world. Israel heard the voice coming to them from the south, so to the south they ran to meet the voice. From the south it changed round to the north, so they ran to the north. From the north it shifted to the east, so they ran to the east; but it shifted to the west, so they ran to the west. From the west it shifted to the heavens. But when they raised their eyes heavenwards, it seemed to proceed from the earth, so they glanced to the earth. Then did the Israelites say to one another, “But wisdom, where shall it be found?” (Job 28:12). The Israelites were inquiring, “Where does the Lord come from, from the east or south?” as it is said, “The Lord came from Sinai; he shone upon them from Seir [to the north]” (Deuteronomy 33:2), and it is written, “God comes from Teman [to the south]” (Habakkuk 3:3).

### Talmud (Bab.) Shabbat 88b

At the time Moses went up to heaven to receive the Law, which the Lord, blessed be he, was giving him, the angels said, “Lord of the universe, what is a mortal man doing here in the heavens among us?” And the Lord replied, “He has come to receive the Torah.” Then the angels said, “Will you hand over to man that hidden jewel which you have treasured up with you during 974 generations, before you created the world? What is man whom you have created? Leave the Torah here and do not give it to man.”

### Deuteronomy Rabbah 8:6

“Surely, this instruction . . . it is not in the heavens” (Deuteronomy 30:11-12). Moses said to Israel, “Do not say, ‘Another Moses will arise and bring us another Torah from heaven’; I therefore warn you, “It is not in the heavens,” that is to say, no part of it has remained in heaven.”

### Deuteronomy 4:9-10

Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children’s children— how on the day that you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, the Lord said to me, ‘Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so.’

### Maimonides, based on Deuteronomy 4:9-10

The Torah commands a positive mitzvah that we make known to our offspring from generation to generation all that transpired there [Mt. Sinai], both visually and audibly. There is a very great purpose to this mitzvah.

### Abraham Joshua Heschel, from God in Search of Man

We have never been the same since the day on which the voice of God overwhelmed us at Sinai. It is forever impossible for us to retreat into an age that predates the Sinaitic event. Something unprecedented happened. God revealed his name to us, and we are named after him. “And all the nations shall see that the Lord’s name is proclaimed over you” (Deuteronomy 28:10). There are two Hebrew names for Jew: Yehudi, the first three letters of which are the first three letters of the Ineffable name, and Israel, the end of which, el, means God in Hebrew.

If other religions may be characterized as a relation between man and God, Judaism must be described as a relation between man with Torah and God. The Jew is never alone in the face of God; the Torah is always with him. A Jew without the Torah is obsolete.

The Torah is not the wisdom but the destiny of Israel, not our literature but our essence.

**S.B. Unsdorfer, *The Yellow Star* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1961).**

Strangely enough it was on the pyre of the camp, in that hellhole of Buchenwald, that I received my first injection of vitamin R—Religious Revival.

A few days before our scheduled departure for Czechoslovakia, the camp loudspeakers blared out an announcement that the Jewish chaplain to the U.S. forces would be conducting religious services in the evening to mark the festival of Shavuot—the anniversary of the receiving of the Law by the Jewish people on Mt. Sinai.

Having lost my handwritten diary, as well as my Haggadah, during the march from Nieder-Orschel to Buchenwald, this announcement came as a pleasant yet disturbing surprise.

Since my childhood I had always looked forward eagerly to the arrival of our wonderful and inspiring festivals, and particularly so in the tragic war years. But I wondered whether we weren't being put to test too soon. Who among those thousands of physical and mental cripples would want to attend services and prayers so soon after their tragic experiences? The Festival of Receiving the Torah! Within a few weeks after liberation, religion, which had seemed to do so little for us, was now challenging us and our loyalties.

But as you cannot measure the physical strength of an oppressed people, so you cannot gauge its spiritual wealth and power.

On that evening, Buchenwald staged a fantastic demonstration of faith and loyalty to God. Thousands upon thousands of liberated Jews crowded into the specially vacated block for the first postwar religious service to be held on the soil of defeated Germany. The Mussulmanner, the cripples, the injured, and the weak came to demonstrate to the world that the last ounce of their strength, the last drop of their blood, and the last breath of their lives belonged to God, to Torah, and to the Jewish religion.

As Chaplain Herschel Schacter intoned the evening prayers, all the inmates in and outside the block stood in silence, reaccepting the Torah whose people, message, and purpose Hitler's Germany had attempted to destroy. Jewish history repeated itself. Just as our forefathers who were liberated from Egypt accepted the Law in the desert, so did we, the liberated Jews of Buchenwald, reaccept the same Law in the concentration camps of Germany.

# Akdmut אקדמות

*Akdmut means introduction, prelude, or before. It is the first word of an ancient hymn, written by a German cantor named Meir ben Isaac Nehorai in the eleventh century. As is typical in some Biblical poetry, the Akdamut makes use of literary features involving letter sequences. In the first half, the lines begin with letters in order of the Hebrew (Aramaic) alphabet. In the second half, lines begin with the letters spelling the name of the author. Even more interesting, each stanza ends with a suffix of two Hebrew letters: tav and aleph, the last and the first letters of the alphabet. The suffix symbolizes the end and the beginning, a recurring cycle, which is about the endless cycle of Torah study which is the delight of Jews everywhere. In many congregations, Akdamut is read just before the Torah scroll is opened to the Ten Commandments on Shavuot in the morning service.*

Before the words of God Supreme  
 Today are read, for this my theme  
 Approbation I will seek  
 These my sentences to speak,  
     Just two or three,  
     While tremblingly  
     On him I meditate:  
     the Pure, who doth bear  
     the world fore'er,  
 His power who can relate?

Were the sky of parchment made  
 A quill each reed, each twig and blade,  
 Could we with ink the oceans fill,  
 Were every man a scribe of skill,  
     The marvelous story  
     Of God's great glory  
 Would still remain untold,  
     For he, Most High,  
     The earth and sky  
 Created alone of old.

Without fatigue or weary hand,  
He spoke the word, breathed command,  
The world and all that therein dwell,  
Field and meadow, fen and fell,  
Mount and sea,  
In six days he  
With life did them inspire;  
The work when ended,  
His glory ascended  
Upon his throne of fire.

Before him myriad angels flash,  
To do his will they run and dash;  
Each day new hosts gleam forth to praise  
The Mighty One, Ancient of Days;  
Six-winged hosts  
Stand at their posts—  
The flaming Seraphim—  
In hushed awe  
Together draw  
To chant their morning hymn.

The angels, together, without delay,  
Call to one another in rapturous lay:  
“Thrice holy he  
Whose majesty  
Fills earth from end to end.”  
The Cherubim soar,  
Like the ocean’s roar,  
On celestial spheres ascend.

To gaze upon the Light on high,  
Which, like the bow in the cloudy sky,  
Is iris-colored, silver-lined;  
While hasting on their task assigned,  
In every tongue  
They utter song  
And bless and praise the Lord,  
Whose secret and source,  
Whose light and force

Can ne'er be fully explored.

The heavenly hosts in awe reply:  
 "His kingdom be blessed fore'er and aye."  
 Their song being hushed, they vanish away;  
 They may ne'er again offer rapturous lay.  
 But Israel,  
 Therein excel—  
 Fixed times they set aside,  
 With praise and prayer,  
 Him one declare,  
 At morn and eventide.

His portion them he made, that they  
 His praise declare by night and day;  
 A Torah, precious more than gold,  
 He bade them study, fast to hold;  
 That he may be near,  
 Their prayer to hear,  
 For always wear will he  
 As diadem fair  
 His people's prayer  
 In his phylactery.

Wherein is told of Israel's fame  
 Who oft God's unity proclaim.  
 'Tis also meet God's praise to sing  
 In presence both of priest and king  
 With tempestuous glee,  
 Like a stormy sea,  
 They surge and ask, "Who, then,  
 Is the friend of thy heart,  
 For whom thou art  
 Cast in the lions' den?"

How fairer wilt thou be to sight,  
 If thou with us in favor unite;  
 Thy favor we shall always seek."  
 But Israel's sons with wisdom speak:  
 "O ye, who are wise

In your own eyes,  
How can your trumpety  
At all compare  
With our great share  
When God proclaims us free.

And shines on us in glorious light,  
While you are wrapped in the gloom of night?”  
His glory then will shine and gleam—  
Almighty God, o’er all supreme!  
His enemies,  
On isles and seas,  
Will suffering endure;  
But he’ll increase  
Abundant peace  
To upright men and pure.

Then perfect joy will bring our Lord,  
The sacred vessels will be restored;  
The exiles, he will gather them  
Into rebuilt Jerusalem;  
Day and night  
shall be his light  
A canopy of splendor;  
A crown of praise  
His people will raise  
To crown their Lord and Defender.

With brilliant clouds he’ll ornament  
Each deserving festive tent;  
The pure, on stools with gold inlaid,  
Before the Lord shall be arrayed;  
Their countenance bright,  
With sevenfold light,  
Will dim heavenly sheen.  
Such beauty rare  
None can declare,  
No prophet’s eye has seen.

The joy and bliss of paradise  
Have not been seen by human eyes,  
There the pure rejoice and dance  
In the light of his countenance,  
And point: "Tis he,  
We patiently  
Have hoped and waited for,  
To set us free  
From captivity  
And guide us as of yore."

You upright who heard the voice of my song,  
May you merit to join this glorious throng;  
In heavenly halls you shall meet them in time,  
If you hearken his words, melodious, sublime.  
Exalted on high,  
Fore'er and aye.  
Our Lord in glory and awe!  
We are his choice,  
Then let us rejoice  
That he blessed and gave us the Law.

—Translated by Joel Marcus  
Sabbath and Festival Prayerbook, 1946  
Rabbinical Assembly and United Synagogue of America

# Revelation and Spirit

The following outline is suggested for group study or individual meditation.

## Shavuot: Harvest, Bread, Revelation, Spirit

Leviticus 23:15-21; Deuteronomy 16:9-11, 16

- How does the harvest aspect of Shavuot fit with the pattern of the festivals?
- The firstfruits at Passover is unleavened, but at Shavuot it is leavened. Can you think of any symbolic meanings for offering God unleavened grain at Passover and two leavened loaves at Shavuot?
- What are some emphases in the Deuteronomy passage that go beyond just a wheat offering and how should they affect our practice of the festival today?
- What are some possible reasons that Leviticus 23:22 is inserted between Shavuot and Rosh HaShanah in the chapter? What are the implications for modern observance of Shavuot?
- Do you think the connection between a bread festival and the giving of Torah at Shavuot is part of the divine purpose (Deut. 8:3)?
- How is it fitting that the Spirit was visibly placed on the disciples on Shavuot after Yeshua's ascension (Acts 2:1-21)?

## Remembering and Re-Enacting Sinai

The Torah commands a positive mitzvah that we make known to our offspring from generation to generation all that transpired there [Mt. Sinai], both visually and audibly. There is a very great purpose to this mitzvah. —Maimonides

Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children— how on the day that you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, the Lord said to me, 'Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so.' —Deuteronomy 4:9-10

- How did Maimonides derive from this Deuteronomy passage that our remembrance must be both visual and audible?
- How does this commandment in Deuteronomy compare to certain New Testament statements about what we have seen and heard?

## Acts 2: Visual and Audible

On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mountain . . . the Lord descended upon it in fire. —Exodus 19:16, 18

And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. —Acts 2:2-3

- What purpose did it serve for God to reveal himself at Sinai visibly and audibly to a large crowd of people?
- Note that the story of the Shavuot of the first disciples fit into the pattern of a public, audible, visible display. What is the reason such a display was needed? What does it do for our faith now?
- How does the fire symbolism compare and contrast between Exodus and Acts? What does it mean?

## Sinai Aftermath

In the aftermath of Sinai, Israel received a covenant and a revelation to follow. After many starts and stops, Israel came to realize that studying and living Torah was a way of life. Torah claims the totality of our being and our community. It is not mere religion or something to do on the Sabbath. It is about loving God and neighbor and joining in Tikkun Olam (repair of the world).

## Aftermath of the Disciples' First Shavuot Together

Just as Sinai led to a lifestyle called Judaism, so the great Shavuot of Acts 2 led to more than just a religious service. Theologian Scot McKnight sums up well the meaning of Acts 2:42-47:

“Here we find a society marked by:

- \* Restoration with God in prayer and miracles
- \* Connection to Jesus through the apostolic teaching and leadership
- \* Elimination of injustices and impoverishment and hunger by caring for one another
- \* Engaging the culture around them with the gospel.
- \* Serving instead of seeking power.”

—From an article on [blog.beliefnet.com/jesuscreed](http://blog.beliefnet.com/jesuscreed), May 20, 2009.

## Living, Being, and Doing

### Read excerpt from S.B. Unsdorfer on page 9

Sinai and the first Shavuot of the disciples are about who we are as individuals and as a community. God is our bread, our revelation, and our Spirit-empowerment. Our part is to say, as Israel did, “We will do and we will listen” (Exodus 24:7).