



**SHAVUOT  
2021**

 Aryevut

**TOPICS  
FOR  
DISCUSSION**



Shavuot marks the receiving of the Torah by Moshe (Moses) on Har Sinai (Mount Sinai) and is commemorated by all-night Torah study called a Tikkun Leil Shavuot. While children don't often stay up all night, they are encouraged to participate by staying up past their usual bedtimes to study Jewish topics or Torah and/or learn during the daytime over Shavuot. This holiday highlights the Jewish value of learning for its own sake, a critical and important value, especially today. We learn Torah not for grades, not for some future career, not to make one's parents happy, but for the simple pleasure of learning and growing from the experience.

This booklet was designed to help those at home over Shavuot, due to COVID-19 and the Coronavirus pandemic, have relevant and timely materials to learn and discuss with their children and/or students. Although the target audience is students, this packet can be a resource and tool that can be used to engage all audiences in meaningful learning, dialogue and reflection, including adults.

The topics were selected for their relevance, utility and their connection with Areyvut's work. While designed for Shavuot, this resource can be used by parents and educators throughout the year.

I would like to thank Judith Kuper Jaffe and Rena Ray for their help and efforts in bringing this to fruition.

I encourage you to share this with family, friends and colleagues and to please share your feedback with us at [info@areyvut.org](mailto:info@areyvut.org).

Wishing you and yours a Chag Sameach and a safe, healthy, enjoyable and memorable holiday.

**Daniel Rothner**  
Founder & Director

# SHAVUOT

Shavuot combines two major religious ideals. Foremost, it celebrates the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai seven weeks after Pesach when the Jews were freed from slavery in Egypt. Second, Shavuot reminds us that we were once farmers, dependent upon land. Shavuot celebrates the first grain harvest of early summer. As one of the Shalosh Regalim, the three pilgrimage festivals of ancient Israel, Jews were commanded to come to Jerusalem and bring gifts of the first fruits (bikkurim) of their harvest.

Shavuot ritual focuses on the community as well as individual practice.

Shavuot focuses on food insecurity and our elders when we read Megillat Ruth.

Shavuot focuses on Israel, our home and the promised land, as we wander in the desert.

Primarily among individual customs include Torah study and eating dairy products. The reasons provided include not knowing the laws of Kashrut before the Torah was gifted and the verse in the Torah that says Israel is the “Land flowing with milk and honey.”

We have special readings for the holiday including medieval poems (piyyutim) and the Book of Ruth. A number of reasons are given for the inclusion of the latter. Among them are that the book takes place at the time of the barley harvest, that Ruth’s assumption of Naomi’s religion reflects the Israelites’ acceptance of the Torah at Sinai, and that King David, who is alleged to have died at this time of year according to rabbinic tradition, is mentioned at the end of Ruth.

Another tradition is to participate in a Tikkun Leil Shavuot, an all-night study session marking the holiday.

And finally, Shavuot is one of the holidays on which both Hallel, the Psalms of Praise, is recited and Yizkor, the memorial service, is observed.

## TOPICS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS:

1. For the most part, we are no longer farmers. How does eating locally sourced fruits and vegetables impact our personal lives? Judaism? Our community?
2. In some communities, fresh and grown food is not available. How does Shavuot influence our thoughts to action?
3. Let’s drill down on the names of Shavuot: Weeks, The Season of Gifting the Torah, the Festival of Crops, and the Festival of Harvest.
4.
  - a. What does counting communicate about the approaching of this festival?
  - b. If you have an aero garden (an indoor hydroponic planter), can you relate to the counting with such excitement?
  - c. Are we celebrating the Gifting the Torah or Giving the Torah?
  - d. What is the difference between the Festival of Crops and the Festival of Harvest?
5. Often, eating dairy and not meat, suggests mourning or deprivation, in Jewish thought. How does eating dairy evoke celebration on Shavuot.
6. Which Midrash interpretation resonates with you? We eat dairy because the Torah says that Israel is flowing with milk and honey or that we are reminded that ancient Jews were not familiar with the laws of kashrut since they just received the Torah?

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7. There are five Megillot. Two are named for women. What does that teach us?
  8. How does the story of Ruth translate to 2021? What themes in Ruth should we discuss?

## **FAMILY ACTIVITIES**



1. To prepare for the holiday cut photographs of dairy products from the newspaper or a magazine and glue stick them onto a paper to make a Shavuot menu. Discuss what is dairy.
2. Discuss why we traditionally eat dairy products on this holiday.
3. Discuss locally grown vegetables and the seasons various fruits and vegetables grow.
4. Discuss the story of Ruth and Naomi. Create puppets and put on a show, imagining what their conversations might be like.
5. If you could develop your own course of study, what would you want to learn?

# FEEDING THE POOR

Hunger is a universal problem that plagues all aspects of our society. Every city, suburb and school, has a population in which at least one (if not more) person is experiencing hunger.

The Torah and Jewish tradition are explicit in commanding that we actively feed the hungry. The Talmud explains that each Jewish community must establish a public fund to provide food for the hungry, and our sages explain that feeding the hungry is one of our most important responsibilities on earth: "When you are asked in the world to come, 'What was your work?' and you answer: 'I fed the hungry,' you will be told: 'This is the gate of the Lord, enter into it, you who have fed the hungry'" Midrash to Psalm 118:17.

*And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I the LORD am your God. Leviticus 23: 22*

*When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the corners of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am Hashem your God. Leviticus: 19: 9-10*

*When you beat down the fruit of your olive trees, do not go over them again; that shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. Deuteronomy 24: 20-22*

*Set aside in full the tenth part of your yield -- in the third year, the year of the tithe -- and have given it to the Levite, the stranger, orphan, and the widow, that they may eat their fill in your settlements, you shall declare before Adonai your God: "I have cleared out the consecrated portion from the house; and I have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the orphan and the widow, just as You commanded me; I have neither transgressed nor neglected any of Your commandments. Deuteronomy, 13-12:26*

## TOPICS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS:

1. What do all the above texts command us to do?
2. Why do some of these commandments end with God's reminder to us that we were slaves in the land of Egypt?
3. Now that most of us do not live in agricultural settings, how can we apply these laws to our own gathering of resources?
4. How is the system of leaving the corners and the gleanings and the fallen food for the poor different than donating food? What is the contemporary equivalent to leaving the corners and the gleanings and the fallen food? What practices or values from these laws could we integrate into our modern lives and societies?
5. What are the two required actions presented here? What is the difference between the two actions?

*If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; If she is thirsty, give her water to drink.*  
21:25 Proverbs

### TOPICS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS:

1. Why should we help our enemies?
2. Are there ever instances when we should disregard this verse?
3. What is the significance of “bread and water?” (as opposed to generic “food and drink”)

*Only this was the sin of your sister Sodom: arrogance! She and her daughters had plenty of bread and untroubled tranquility, yet she did not support the poor and the needy. In their haughtiness, they committed abomination before Me; and so I removed them, as you saw.*  
Ezekiel, 50-49:16

### TOPICS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS:

1. Why are these sins classified as arrogant?
2. What does this text teach us about how we should distribute our resources among everyone?
3. Thinking globally, in what ways are wealthy nations supporting the poor and the needy? In what ways are they not?
4. What is the significance of “bread and water?” (as opposed to generic “food and drink”)

### FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. Collect travel size toiletries, bag them and donate to a local shelter.
2. Decorate canvas tote bags and donate to a food pantry.



# SHALOM BAYIT/FAMILY FEUDS/ PEACE IN THE HOME

Shalom Bayit/Family Harmony and literally Peace in the Home is the Jewish religious concept of domestic harmony and good relations between husband, wife, children and family. A lot has been written and discussed to uphold peace and harmony within the home.

*Rava said: It is obvious to me that there is a fixed list of priorities. When a person is poor and must choose between purchasing oil to light a Shabbat lamp for his home or purchasing oil to light a Hanukkah lamp, the Shabbat lamp for his home takes precedence. That is due to peace in his home; without the light of that lamp, his family would be sitting and eating their meal in the dark. Similarly, if there is a conflict between acquiring oil to light a lamp for his home and wine for the sanctification [kiddush] of Shabbat day, the lamp for his home takes precedence due to peace in his home. Shabbat 23b.*

*Hillel says, Be of the disciples of Aharon, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving the creatures and bringing them closer to Torah. Pirkei Avot. 3:12*

## TOPICS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS:

1. What do we prioritize in our life?
2. How do we prioritize things in our life?
3. What is a contemporary dilemma that parallels this situation?
4. What is the difference between loving peace and pursuing peace?
5. What other values might be in conflict with peace?
6. What do we fight about and why?
7. What is the Rabbi teaching us about peace and calm in the family?

## FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. Set and clear the table without being asked by your grownups.
2. Thank your grownups for being supportive of you.



# RESPECTING AND CARING FOR THE ELDERLY

How to care for one's elderly parents and the elderly in our midst is not new. Jewish sources mandate that children tend to their parents' physical and psychological needs and actively take care of the senior citizens in society.

*Abram went forth as the LORD had commanded him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. What support systems were in place to help Abram make this move at such an advanced age? Genesis, 4:12*

*In the presence of the elderly, you shall rise and you shall respect an elder; you shall have fear of your God, I am Hashem. Leviticus, 32:19*

*Elisha ben Abuya says: One who learns as a child is compared to what? To ink written on new parchment. And one who learns as an elder is compared to what? To ink written on scraped parchment. Rabbi Yose bar Yehuda, man of Kfar HaBavli, says: One who learns from young ones is compared to what? To one who eats unripe grapes and drinks wine from its press. And one who learns from elders is compared to what? To one who eats ripe grapes and drinks aged wine. Rebbi says: Do not look at the jug but rather at what is in it. For there are new jugs full of old, and old that do not have even new within them. Pirkei Avot 20:4*

*We should stand up before a very old man even if he is not a scholar. Even a scholar who is young should rise before a very old man. He is not obliged, however, to rise to his full height but as much as is required to show him respect. Even a non-Jewish old man should be shown respect in words and be given a hand to support him, for it is written: "You shall stand up in the presence of the aged," which implies every old man. Mishneh Torah, Torah Study, Chapter 6*

*Do not cast me off in old age; when my strength fails, do not forsake me! What examples can you think of in Jewish text or in your own life of people casting off the old aged? Psalms, 9:71*

*Rabbi Nachman of Breslov Gauge a country's prosperity by its treatment of its aged.*

## TOPICS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS:

1. How would you gauge your country's prosperity based on the way it treats the elderly? What about Israel?
2. What do these texts teach us about the importance of the elderly in Jewish tradition?
3. What changes can you make in the way you treat your elders?
4. As a Jew why do think it is important to treat all elders with dignity and respect?
5. Can you think of a Jewish source or teaching that illustrates this concept?
6. What is the Rabbi teaching us about peace and calm in the family?

## FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. Decorate birthday cards and send them to a senior residence for distribution.
2. Cut feel-good magazine pictures and put them in a plastic sheet in a binder for a memory residence.



# COMMUNITY

It is no accident that the Jewish people call themselves “Bnai Yisrael” or “the people of Israel” and not “the religion of Israel.” The defining characteristic of Jews has been a sense of Peoplehood. Accordingly, the central experience of Jewish history, the only event that demands an annual retelling is the exodus from Egypt.

As a direct result, this focus on Peoplehood is translated into the importance of community. Wherever Jews have lived, they have built synagogues, established communal organizations and created systems of communal governance.

One Talmudic text offers a working definition of the concept of community in Jewish life:

*A talmid haham (Torah scholar) is not allowed to live in a city that does not have these 10 things: a beit din (law court) that metes out punishments; a tzedakah fund that is collected by two people and distributed by three; a synagogue; a bath house (mikveh); a bathroom; a doctor; a craftsperson; a blood-letter; (some versions add: a butcher); and a teacher of children. Sanhedrin 17b*

*Hillel says: Do not separate yourself from the community. Pirkei Avot, 4:2*

## TOPICS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS:

1. What is “community”?
2. Who defines community?
3. What are the benefits of belonging to a community?
4. What are the sacrifices of belonging to a community?
5. What might Hillel’s advice say about the role of interpersonal relationships?
6. What is “the” community? Is it all Jews? A subset of Jews? Your neighborhood? Your town? All people?
7. Is there even such a thing as “the” Jewish community? Who is part of it? Who is not? Who determines these boundaries in the first place?
8. What constitutes “separating”? Why is it ill advised? Why is it important?
9. After surviving COVID-19, how do you feel about community? How has it changed for the better?
10. What defines the Jewish people? Nationality? Ethnicity? Ethical behavior? Religious commitments? Shared norms and values? Food? Shared history?
11. What are sometimes when the Jewish community has been cohesive? What makes those times unique?
12. What breaks a community apart? How do we prevent it?
13. How many communities can an individual belong to?
14. What happens when a community holds a set of beliefs and assumptions that we no longer hold?
15. Discuss how to “Do not separate yourself from the congregation” but rather share in their troubles.

*In the Torah we learn, "When one person sins God will be wrathful with the whole community." (Numbers 16:22) Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai taught a parable: People were on a ship. One of them took a drill and started drilling underneath them. The others said, "What are you sitting and doing?!" "What do you care. Is this not underneath my area that I am drilling?!" They said, "But the water will rise and flood us all on this ship."*

## TOPICS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS:

1. What is the pshat (plain meaning of the story)?
2. What is the connection to the story and the verse from Numbers? What is the connection to the discussion about community vs individual? How do you feel the same or differently after the pandemic vis a vis this concept?
3. Is "sin" the only framework for understanding the story? What might be others?
4. How might we understand our individual role in society based on the parable? Is this a correct view? How is this played out today?
5. Who is in your boat? In other words, if our actions affect others, to whom are you obligated? About whom do you need to be concerned? Can this story be understood in terms of "loyalty" and "disloyalty"?
6. On Yom Kippur afternoon we read the story of Jonah. Jonah is commanded by God to go to Nineveh to preach repentance, but he tries to flee by boarding a boat for Tarshish. When the boat is threatened by a storm, Jonah tells the other sailors to throw him overboard, explaining that it is because of him that the storm has come. They do so, and the sea immediately calms. Is there a connection between these two stories?

## FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. Contribute and support a community tzedakah fund.
2. Think of ways to actively contribute to unity in your commUNITY and start to implement those ideas as a family.



# ISRAEL, THE PROMISE

Israel, Israel, Israel. The Jews and Israel. Does text guide and impact our thinking about Israel and our promise of Israel? Let's look closer.

(1) *The LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you.*

(2) *I will make of you a great nation, And I will bless you; I will make your name great, And you shall be a blessing.*

(3) *I will bless those who bless you And curse him that curses you; And all the families of the earth Shall bless themselves by you."*

(4) *Abram went forth as the LORD had commanded him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran.*

(5) *Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the wealth that they had amassed, and the persons that they had acquired in Haran; and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in the land of Canaan,*

(6) *Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, at the terebinth of Moreh. The Canaanites were then in the land.*

(7) *The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "I will assign this land to your offspring." And he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him.*

*Genesis, 12:1-7*

## TOPICS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS:

1. What did God tell Abraham to do?
2. Where did Abraham arrive?
3. What did God promise?
4. How does this text guide our connection to Israel?

(10) *Jacob left Beer-sheba, and set out for Haran.*

(11) *He came upon a certain place and stopped there for the night, for the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of that place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place.*

(12) *He had a dream; a stairway was set on the ground and its top reached to the sky, and angels of God were going up and down on it.*

(13) *And the LORD was standing beside him and He said, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac: the ground on which you are lying I will assign to you and to your offspring.*

(14) *Your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you and your descendants.*

(15) *Remember, I am with you: I will protect you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."*

(16) *Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is present in this place, and I did not know it!"*

(17) *Shaken, he said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of God, and that is the gateway to heaven."*

(18) Early in the morning, Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on the top of it.

(19) He named that site Bethel; but previously the name of the city had been Luz.

(20) Jacob then made a vow, saying, "If God remains with me, if He protects me on this journey that I am making, and gives me bread to eat and clothing to wear,

(21) and if I return safe to my father's house—the LORD shall be my God. (22) And this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, shall be God's abode; and of all that You give me, I will set aside a tithe for You."

Genesis 28:10-22

## TOPICS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS:

1. What was Jacob's dream?
2. What did God promise Jacob?
3. How does this text guide our connection to Israel?

(1) Now Moses, tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, drove the flock into the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

(2) An angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire out of a bush. He gazed, and there was a bush all aflame, yet the bush was not consumed.

(3) Moses said, "I must turn aside to look at this marvelous sight; why doesn't the bush burn up?"

(4) When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to look, God called to him out of the bush: "Moses! Moses!" He answered, "Here I am."

(5) And He said, "Do not come closer. Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground.

(6) I am," He said, "the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

(7) And the LORD continued, "I have marked well the plight of My people in Egypt and have heeded their outcry because of their taskmasters; yes, I am mindful of their sufferings.

(8) I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians and to bring them out of that land to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey, the region of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

(9) Now the cry of the Israelites has reached Me; moreover, I have seen how the Egyptians oppress them.

(10) Come, therefore, I will send you to Pharaoh, and you shall free My people, the Israelites, from Egypt."

(11) But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt?" (12) And He said, "I will be with you; that shall be your sign that it was I who sent you. And when you have freed the people from Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain."

Exodus 3:1-12

## TOPICS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS:

1. What did Moses see?
2. What did God say to Moses?
3. How does this text guide our connection to Israel?

(16) *“Go and assemble the elders of Israel and say to them: the LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has appeared to me and said, ‘I have taken note of you and of what is being done to you in Egypt,*

*(17) and I have declared: I will take you out of the misery of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, to a land flowing with milk and honey.’*

*(18) They will listen to you; then you shall go with the elders of Israel to the king of Egypt and you shall say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, manifested Himself to us. Now therefore, let us go a distance of three days into the wilderness to sacrifice to the LORD our God.’*

*Exodus 3:16-18*

### **TOPICS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS:**

1. What are elders?
2. What did God tell Moses to gather the elders and say?
3. How does this text guide our connection to Israel?

*(1) After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses’ attendant:*

*(2) “My servant Moses is dead. Prepare to cross the Jordan, together with all this people, into the land that I am giving to the Israelites.*

*(3) Every spot on which your foot treads I give to you, as I promised Moses.*

*(4) Your territory shall extend from the wilderness and the Lebanon to the Great River, the River Euphrates [on the east]—the whole Hittite country—and up to the Mediterranean Sea on the west.*

*(5) No one shall be able to resist you as long as you live. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you.*

*(6) “Be strong and resolute, for you shall apportion to this people the land that I swore to their fathers to assign to them.*

*(7) But you must be very strong and resolute to observe faithfully all the Teaching that My servant Moses enjoined upon you. Do not deviate from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.*

*Joshua 1:1-7*

### **TOPICS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS:**

1. What did God promise Joshua?
2. What did God tell Joshua he must do?
3. How does this text guide our connection to Israel?

*(8) But you, O mountains of Israel, shall yield your produce and bear your fruit for My people Israel, for their return is near. (9) For I will care for you: I will turn to you, and you shall be tilled and sown. (10) I will settle a large population on you, the whole House of Israel; the towns shall be resettled, and the ruined sites rebuilt. (11) I will multiply men and beasts upon you, and they shall increase and be fertile, and I will resettle you as you were formerly, and will make you more prosperous than you were at first. And you shall know that I am the LORD. (12) I will lead men—My people Israel—to you, and they shall possess you. You shall be their heritage, and you shall not again cause them to be bereaved. Ezekiel 36:8-12*

*(22) Say to the House of Israel: Thus said the Lord GOD: Not for your sake will I act, O House of Israel, but for My holy name, which you have caused to be profaned among the nations to which you have come. (23) I will sanctify My great name which has been profaned among the nations—among whom you have caused it to be profaned. And the nations shall know that I am the LORD—declares the Lord GOD—when I manifest My holiness before their eyes through you. (24) I will take you from among the nations and gather you from all the countries, and I will bring you back to your own land. (25) I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean: I will cleanse you from all your uncleanness and from all your fetishes. (26) And I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit into you: I will remove the heart of stone from your body and give you a heart of flesh; (27) and I will put My spirit into you. Thus I will cause you to follow My laws and faithfully to observe My rules. (28) Then you shall dwell in the land which I gave to your fathers, and you shall be My people and I will be your God. Ezekiel 36:22-28*

## **TOPICS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS:**

1. Who did God promise Ezekiel?
2. According to the text, why is God promising the land at this point? What is the situation? Why is the promise necessary?
3. Was anything done to deserve this promise?
4. Are there any conditions?
5. Are there other promises made in this text?
6. How does this text guide our connection to Israel?
7. How do all these texts guide your connection to the modern State of Israel?

## **FAMILY ACTIVITIES**

1. Write cards to support Israeli soldiers.
2. Have Israeli food or listen to Israeli music to strengthen your connection to Israel.

