



# Doing Shavuot

“Then celebrate the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God...”(Deuteronomy 16:10).

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Scripture gives the festival of Shavuot three distinct names in relation to its agricultural setting: “Feast of Harvest,” “Feast of Weeks,” and “Feast of First Fruits.” Though the festival is celebrated in this agricultural setting, the greater significance of Shavuot is as a celebration of God’s gift of the Torah to the Israelites. He made its revelation for the following generations as real as the harvest around them.

During the festival of Shavuot four basic customs are observed:

## **All-Night Study of Torah**

What is celebrated in Shavuot is not merely the receiving of Torah; what is commemorated is the gift, the Divine action of presenting the Israelites the instruction, the Torah, for the first time. Ancient traditions affirm that on the day God gave the Torah to the Israelites many of them were asleep. In order for this slumbering response not to take place again the people are called to spend the entire night studying Torah during the festival.

## **Eating Dairy Products**

It is said that the Torah was given on Shabbat. Since the Israelites had not yet come to know the Kosher laws, and knowing that on Shabbat they could not slaughter animals, all they could eat on that day was dairy products. Until this day Jews honor the humble attitude in

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which the Israelites received the Torah by eating dairy products just as they did in the past.

## **Reading the Book of Ruth**

The book of Ruth is read on the second day of the festival. Since the book of Ruth was written in the setting of the harvest, its reading is in harmony with the agricultural theme of the festival. Furthermore, according to tradition, Shavuot commemorates the birth and passing of King David, and it is the book of Ruth that best depicts the story of King David’s ancestry.

## **Adorning the Home**

During Shavuot, Jewish homes are decorated with flowers, greenery, and fruits. Not only is this a reminder of the theme of the harvest that surrounds the festival, but the Midrash claims that on the day Torah was given, Mount Sinai blossomed with flowers in anticipation of the event. So in memory of the grandeur of that day, the homes are also adorned.