
SHAVUOT II

The Ten Commandments, Preparing for Shavuot, Megillat Ruth & Shavuot Customs

This second class on Shavuot focuses on the Ten Commandments, preparing for receiving the Torah on Shavuot, Megillat Ruth, and the Shavuot customs of all-night Torah study and eating dairy meals.

In this class we will examine the following questions:

- ~ Why were the Ten Commandments given at Har Sinai?
- ~ Why is preparation pivotal in maximizing the Shavuot experience and how is this accomplished?
- ~ What was outstanding about Ruth that we read in Megillat Ruth?
- ~ Why do we stay up learning Torah the night of Shavuot, eat dairy foods, and decorate the synagogue with flowers?

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SECTION I. THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

PART A. WHAT ARE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS?

1. Shemot (Exodus) 20:2-14 – The Ten Commandments.

1. I am the Lord your God who took you out from the land of Egypt.

2. You shall not recognize the gods of others.

3. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

4. Remember the Sabbath day to make it holy.

5. Honor your father and your mother.

6. You shall not murder.

7. You shall not commit adultery.

8. You shall not steal.

9. You shall not commit perjury.

10. You shall not covet.

אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבְּיַת עַבְדִּים:

לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל פְּנֵי:

לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת שֵׁם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוֹן:

זְכוֹר אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ:

כְּבֹד אֶת אָבִיךָ וְאֶת אִמְךָ

לֹא תִרְצַח

לֹא תִנְאֻף

לֹא תִגְנוֹב

לֹא תַעֲנֶה בְּרַעַךְ עַד שִׁקְרָ:

לֹא תַחְמוֹד

PART B. WHY DID GOD GIVE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS ON MOUNT SINAI?

On the one hand, the Ten Commandments encapsulate core Jewish values. On the other hand, Judaism does not overemphasize these mitzvot relative to the other mitzvot in the Torah.

1. Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch, Shemot 20:14 – The Ten Commandments prepared the Jewish people for the remainder of the Torah to be transmitted.

... The “Ten Commandments” have in no way any greater holiness or greater importance than any other commandment in the Torah. They are neither the whole Law nor are they holier laws than all the rest. God clearly and expressly proclaimed them as being merely a preparatory introduction to the whole following, real giving of the Law, “I come to you,” God has said, “So that the people may hear that I speak to you and have belief in you (Moshe/Moses) forever” (Exodus 19:9).

Therefore, the revelation on Sinai is expressly stated to 1) prepare the people for the rest of the Torah which was to be transmitted to them by Moshe and 2) to prove to them beyond all possibility of doubt, by their own experience, that “God does speak to Man” (as it says later), so that they would receive all the following Torah that Moses was to bring to them, with unswerving belief and trust as “the word of God.”

2. **Ibid. Shemot 20:13 – The themes of the first five of the Ten Commandments.**

The first five commandments of **אנכי** and **לא יהיה לך** proclaim the acknowledgment of God as the One Who is responsible for our fate and the guide of all our acts, in their positive and negative signification respectively; in **לא תשא** this knowledge and acknowledgement is set as the whole basis our individual and social life; in **זכר** respect to this idea is ensured by the ever-recurring act of cessation of work; and in **כבד את אביך ואת אמך** its continual transmission through the ages, ensured by the influence of the home.

3. **Ibid. – The themes of the second five of the Ten Commandments.**

The following five commandments proclaim the result of this knowledge and acknowledgment in our social life. If God is the One Who is solely responsible for our fate in life and is to be the Guide of all our actions, then every one of our fellow-men must be considered as standing equally under His care, and every one of our actions towards Him comes under His observation. Every person at our side is placed where he is by God's Direction and, equally with yourself, has all human rights granted by Him, so that all his possessions, his life, his wife, his freedom, his happiness, his honor and his property must all be considered as sacred to him. You shall not take his life, nor break up his marriage, nor rob him of his freedom, nor smirch his honor and his happiness by false evidence, more, thou shall not even allow yourself to covet anything which makes the home of your fellow, and that includes everything which he can call his own!

The Ten Commandments were removed from the daily prayers out of concern that they could be misperceived as being more important than the rest of the Torah.

4. **Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Berachot 12a – The Ten Commandments are not read at Shacharit (morning prayers) ...**

[In the morning service in the Temple] they read the Ten Commandments, the Shema [along with the other prayers]. Rav Yehudah said that the people outside of the Temple requested to recite the Ten Commandments, but the practice had already been discontinued on account of the arguments of the heretics.

וקורין עשרת הדברות שמע ... אמר רב יהודה אמר
שמואל: אף בגבולין בקשו לקרות כן, אלא שכבר
בטלום מפני תרעומת המינין.

5. **Rashi, ibid. – ... in case people might think that the Ten Commandments are more important than the other mitzvot.**

[The Ten Commandments were not included in the prayers] so that the heretics would not tell Jews unfamiliar with the tradition that the other parts of the Torah are not true. The heretics argued that the only parts that would be recited in the prayers were the Ten Commandments, which God said and the Jews heard from His mouth at Sinai.

שלא יאמרו לעמי הארץ: אין שאר תורה אמת, ותדעו
שאין קורין אלא מה שאמר הקדוש-ברוך-הוא ושמעו
מפיו בסיני.

PART C. THE TEN COMMANDMENTS CONTAIN ALL THE MITZVOT

The concepts within the Ten Commandments can be extended to include the 613 commandments.

1. **Bamidbar (Numbers) Rabbah 13:16 – There are 613 letters in the Ten Commandments corresponding to the 613 mitzvot, and another seven letters corresponding to the seven days of Creation.**

You find that there are 613 letters from “I am” [at the beginning of the Ten Commandments] to “to your fellow” [at the end], which correspond to the 613 mitzvot. And the seven extra letters [“to your fellow”] correspond to the seven days of Creation. This teaches you that the entire world was only created in the merit of Torah.

את מוצא תרי"ג אותיות יש מן אנכי עד אשר לרעד,
כנגד תרי"ג מצוות, וז' יתירות כנגד ז' ימי בראשית,
ללמדך שכל העולם לא נברא אלא בזכות התורה.

2. **Rashi, Shemot 24:12 – The 613 mitzvot are subcategories of the Ten Commandments.**

All the 613 mitzvot are included within the Ten Commandments.

כל שש מאות ושלוש עשרה מצוות בכלל עשרת
הדברות הן.

3. **Sefas Emes, Yisro, s.v. Mitzvos Zechiras Matan Torah – Just as there were ten general statements by God that brought every detail into being, so the Ten Commandments contain the details of all the other mitzvot.**

The Ten Commandments contain the entire Torah and the mitzvot. They correspond to the “Ten Statements” God expressed when he created the world. Just as in Creation, all that came into being, in general and in detail, were contained in these Ten Statements, similarly all the Torah and mitzvot that are fulfilled by the Jewish people are contained in the Ten Commandments.

דעשרת הדיברות הם כלל כל התורה ומצוות. והם
מכוונים מול עשרה מאמרות. וכמו דכל מעשה
בראשית. וכל מה שמתהווה בעולם בכלל ובפרט היה
נכלל בעשרה מאמרות. כמו כן כל התורה ומצוות
שנעשו מכל בני ישראל בכלל ובפרט. הכל נכלל
בעשרת הדיברות.

SECTION II. PREPARING TO RECEIVE THE TORAH ON SHAVUOT

PART A. THE FRAMEWORK OF SEFIRAT HA'OMER AND MATAN TORAH

Matan Torah (the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai) transformed the essence of the Jewish people. This event not only required preparation by the Jews who left Egypt, but also each successive year, when the Torah is re-accepted anew on Shavuot, each Jew needs to prepare himself. The framework to effectively prepare to re-accept the Torah is grounded in Counting the Omer between Passover and Shavuot and the Jewish nation's actions prior to Matan Torah.

1. **Sefer HaChinuch Mitzvah 306 – The period from the Exodus of Egypt until Shavuot is the time we count the Omer in preparation for receiving the Torah.**

[The acceptance of the Torah] is the entire foundation of Israel and because of it we were redeemed and achieved all the greatness that we

כי היא כל עיקרן של ישראל ובעבורה נגאלו ועלו לכל
הגדולה שעלו אליה, נצטוינו למנות ממחרת יום טוב

achieved. For this reason we were commanded to count from the day after [the first day of] Pesach until the day that the Torah was given, to show our great desire for that awesome day which our hearts yearn for, like a servant yearns for shade. We count constantly – when will that day come that we yearn for, the day that we left slavery. Counting shows a person that all his desire and longing is to reach that time.

של פסח עד יום נתינת התורה, להראות בנפשנו החפץ הגדול אל היום הנכבד הנכסף ללבנו, כעבד ישאף צל, וימנה תמיד מתי יבוא העת הנכסף אליו שיצא לחירות, כי המנין מראה לאדם כי כל ישעו וכל חפצו להגיע אל הזמן ההוא.

2. **Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz, Sichos Mussar, p. 149 – Our preparation for Shavuot is based on the actions of the Jewish people immediately prior to Matan Torah.**

The Torah writes, “They travelled from Rephidim and encamped in the desert, and the Jewish people encamped there opposite the mountain” (Shemot 19:2). The Ohr HaChaim writes that these three phrases allude to the preparation necessary to accept the Torah.

“ויסעו מרפידיים... ויחנו במדבר ויחן שם ישראל נגד ההר”, וכותב האורח חיים הקדוש שכונת הכתוב ללמדנו שלשה ענינים שהם עיקרי ההכנה לקבלת התורה.

There are three principal areas of preparation: in Torah study, in refining our character, and in strengthening interpersonal relationships to create Jewish unity.

PART B. STRENGTHENING TORAH STUDY

After God brought the Jewish people out of Egypt, they were attacked by the nation of Amalek at a location called Rephidim. The Hebrew root of the term *rephidim*, means “soft” or “lax;” the Torah is hinting that the Jews became lax towards Torah study and thereby became vulnerable to attack by Amalek. The phrase “They travelled from Rephidim” represents the Jewish people distancing themselves from this laxness and rededicating themselves to Torah study.

1. **Ohr HaChaim, Shemot 19:2 – Prepare by increasing Torah study.**

“They journeyed from Rephidim” ... The first preparation to receive the Torah is strengthening one’s involvement in Torah study ...

“ויסעו מרפידיים... ההכנה הראשונה לקבלת התורה היא התגברות והתעצמות בעסק התורה...”

2. **Rabbi Aharon Kotler, Mishnas Rabbi Aharon, Vol. III, p. 13 – Each day of counting the Omer we develop specific attributes to enhance our Torah study.**

The days of counting the Omer are days of preparation for the giving of the Torah. Since acquiring Torah depends on the forty-eight ways that the Torah is acquired (Pirkei Avot/Ethics of the Fathers, Ch. 6), it is like all other things which can only be acquired through the appropriate mechanism, as Rav Chaim elaborated.

ימי הספירה הם ימי ההכנה למתן תורה. וכיון שקנין התורה תלוי במ”ח דברים שהתורה נקנית בהם (אבות פ”ו) הרי הוא כשאר דברים הנקנים רק בקנינים המועילים להם, וכמו שהאריך בזה הגר”ח זצוק”ל, וא”כ מובן שמדרכי ההכנה להתאמן ממ”ח דברים אלה. [והמ”ט יום הם נגד מ”ט שערי בינה וכנגד מ”ט

Therefore, it is clear that the way to prepare is through these forty-eight ways. [The forty-ninth day corresponds to the forty-nine gates of understanding and also to the forty-nine faces of the Torah, as explained elsewhere]. The forty-eight days correspond to the forty-eight ways that the Torah is acquired. The forty-ninth day is the day of completion for purity and preparation for receiving the Torah...

The reason that this preparation is connected to the Omer is to entrench and implant within us the recognition that everything comes from God, which is the meaning of the Omer, the offering of the first crops.

פנים שבתורה כמבואר במק"א]. והמ"ח ימים הם כנגד מ"ח הדברים שהתורה נקנית בהם, ויום המ"ט הוא יום שלם לקדושה בהכנה לקבלת התורה....

והא דהכנה זו למתן תורה נתלית בעומר, היינו להשריש ולנטוע את ההכרה כי הכל מהשי"ת, שזהו ענין העומר, הקרבת הראשית.

PART C. REFINING OUR CHARACTER

1. Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz, *Sichos Mussar*, p. 150 – The second aspect of preparation based on the *Ohr HaChaim*: become humble and willing to learn Torah from everyone.

The second component of preparation for Shavuot is alluded to in the verse, "Encamping in the desert," symbolic of refining our character, becoming like the desert [recognizing that our stature is ultimately a gift from God]. As the Talmud teaches: when a person makes himself into a desert, i.e. removing the trait of haughtiness, and recognizing that one can learn from everyone around him, then he gains a special ability to study and understand Torah, which will then be given to him as a gift (Nedarim 55).

הכנה שנייה לקבלת התורה, כותב האוה"ח, נרמז בכתוב "ויחנו במדבר" והיא תיקון המידות, וביחוד מידת הגאווה, והוא עפ"י מה שאחז"ל (גדרים נ"ה) "כיון שעושה אדם את עצמו כמדבר שהוא מופקר לכל-תורה ניתנה לו במתנה, שנא' "וממדבר מתנה".

2. Rabbi Gedaliah Schorr, *Ohr Gedalyahu*, *Moadim* p. 150 – We grow by working on the particular character traits relative to each day of the *Sefirah*.

The days of Sefirat Ha'Omer are a time to rectify character attributes. The first week is to rectify the attribute of *chesed*: to fix [the attribute of] love that it should be appropriate; the love of God and the love of friends. The second week is for the attribute of strength: to fix the attribute of fear [of God]. And similarly with all the weeks.

ימי הספירה הוא זמן לתיקון המדות, שבוע ראשונה לתקן מדת החסד, לתקן האהבה שיהי' כראוי, אהבה להשי"ת ואהבת חבירים, שבוע שני' מדת גבורה, לתקן מדת היראה, וכן כל השבועות.

PART D. CREATING JEWISH UNITY

1. Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz, Sichos Mussar, p. 152 – The third aspect of preparation based on the Ohr HaChaim : create unity by doing acts of kindness for one's fellow.

The third component of preparation for Shavuot is “The Jewish people encamped there opposite the mountain.” This represents the unification of individuals with a sincere, full heart ... Corresponding to this the Torah writes, “*Vayachan Yisroel*” (Israel camped) in the singular to demonstrate that the Jewish nation was now unified like one person [with one heart] and as such they deserved to receive the Torah.

For each person assisted his neighbor in finding a good encampment and in providing for his physical needs. This was the third aspect of their preparation for receiving the Torah.

והכנה שלישית לקבלת התורה, “ויחנו שם ישראל נגד ההר”, וכ’ האוה”ח ז”ל “וענין ג’, יעוד חכמים בהתחברות בלב שלם ותמים... וכנגד זה אמר “ויחן ישראל” לשון יחיד, שנעשו כולן יחד כאיש אחד [בלב אחד], והן עתה ראויים הם לקבלת התורה”,

כי כל אחד עסק בהכנת מקום טוב לחבירו, זה היה כל עסקם בחניה ובצרכיה, והיא היתה הכנתם לקבלת התורה.

2. Midrash Tanchuma Yashan, Yisro 9 – We can receive the Torah – whose ways are peaceful and pleasant – if we can embody these qualities.

“Her [the Torah’s] ways are ways of pleasantness.” God wanted to give the Torah to the Jews as soon as they left Egypt. But they were arguing with each other and continually saying, “Let us appoint a new leader and return to Egypt” ... When they came to Rephidim they were all equal and became united ... God said, “The entire Torah is peace. To whom should I give it? To a nation that loves peace.” This is the meaning of the end of the verse, “And all her paths are peace.”

דרכיה דרכי נועם וגו'. ביקש הקב"ה ליתן תורה לישראל בשעה שיצאו ממצרים, והיו חולקין ז על זה והיו אומרים בכל שעה נתנה ראש ונשובה מצרימה... כשבאו לרפידים הושוו כולם ונעשו אגודה אחת... אמר הקב"ה התורה כולה שלום, ולמי אתננה לאומה שאוהבת שלום, הוי כל נתיבותיה שלום (משלי ג:י"ז).

SECTION III. MEGILLAT RUTH

PART A. WHY DO WE READ MEGILLAT RUTH ON SHAVUOT?

1. Rabbi Yehoshua Pffefer – Judaism requires dedication.

The conversion of Ruth to the Jewish faith was a great act of self-sacrifice. Instead of returning to the physical luxury and status of her Moabite royalty, she clung steadfastly to her Jewish mother-in-law, determined to find her place “beneath the wings of the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence).” One of the reasons that Ruth is read on the festival of Shavuot is to demonstrate that Judaism requires sincere dedication.

Ruth is also read on the festival of Shavuot because it marks the anniversary of King David’s birth. Because of her dedication and the special character traits she displayed, Ruth was Divinely ordained to mother the royal lineage of Israel.

2. Talmud Bavli, Bava Batra 14b

Shmuel wrote his book (Shmuel/Samuel), Shoftim and Ruth.

שמואל כתב ספרו ושופטים ורות

3. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 490

The custom is to read the Book of Ruth on Shavuot.

ונוהגין לומר רות בשבועות.

PART B. RUTH IS THE PARADIGM OF ONE EMBRACING JUDAISM

1. Rashi, Ruth 1:16 – We learn laws of conversion from Ruth.

“Do not prevent me. Do not argue against me. For wherever you go I will go.” From here our Sages said that someone who comes to convert should be told some of the punishments so that if he wants to change his mind he can. From the words of Ruth you learn what Naomi said to her.

אל תפגע בי. אל תפצרי בי. כי אל אשר תלכי אלך. מכאן אמרו רבותינו ז"ל (יבמות מז:): גר שבא להתגייר מודיעים לו מקצת עונשים שאם בא לחזור בו יחזור. שמתוך דברים של רות אתה למד מה שאמרה לה נעמי.

2. Targum, Ruth 1:16-17 – Ruth's acceptance of Jewish law (part of the conversion procedure).

Ruth said, “Do not entreat me further to leave you, for I wish to convert to Judaism.” Naomi told her, “We are commanded to keep the Sabbaths and Festival Days, on which we may not travel more than two thousand *amot* beyond the town.” Ruth replied, “Wherever you go I will go.” Naomi said, “We are commanded not to lodge together with the nations.” Ruth replied, “Where you lodge I will lodge.”

ואמרת רות לא תקניטי בי למשבקיך למיתב מן בתרך ארום תאיבא אנא לאתגיירא אמרת נעמי אתפקדנא למטר שביא ויומי טבא בגין דלא להלכה בר מתרין אלפין אמין אמרת רות לכל מן די את אזילא איזל אמרת נעמי אתפקדנא דלא למבת כחדא עם עממיא אמרת רוב לכל אתר די תביתי אבית

Naomi said, “We are commanded to guard six hundred and thirteen mitzvot.” Ruth replied, “That which your nation guards, I too shall guard; it is as though it has always been my nation.” Naomi said, “We are commanded not to worship other gods.” Ruth replied, “Your God is my God.” Naomi said, “We have four capital punishments...” Ruth replied, “Where you die I will die ... And do not continue to speak with me; God do so to me, and more also, for only death will come between me and you!”

אמרת נעמי אתפקדנא למנטר שית מאה ותלת עסר פקודיא אמרת רות מה דנטרין עמיך איהא נטרא אנא כאילו הוו עמי מן קדמת דנא אמרת נעמי אתפקדנא דלא למפלח פולחנא נוכראא אמרת רות אלהך הוא אלהי אמרת נעמי אית לנא ארבע דיני מותר לחייביא ... אמרת רות לכל מה דתמותי אמות ... ולא תוסיפי עוד למללא כדנן יעביד ה' לי וכדנן יוסיף עלי ארום מותא יהא מפריש ביני ובינך.

3. Midrash Mishlei (Proverbs) 31 – Woman of Valor.

“Many women have achieved valor, but you have surpassed them all” (Mishei 31:29). This refers to Ruth who entered under the wings of the *Shechinah*.

רבות בנות עשוו חיל ואת עליית על כולנה. זו רות המואביה, שנכנסה תחת כנפי השכינה.

PART C. LEGITIMIZING KING DAVID'S LINEAGE

The Torah tells us that it is forbidden for a convert from Moab to become part of the Jewish people.

1. Devarim (Deuteronomy) 23:4 – Amonite and Moabite men may not convert to Judaism.

An Amonite or Moabite may not come into the congregation of God.

לא-יבא עמוני ומואבי בקהל יהוה: גם דור עשירי, לא-
יבא להם בקהל יהוה עד-עולם

Since David was a descendant of Ruth, who was a Moabite convert, he should not have been fit to become king. Until they discovered the law that the prohibition only applies to male Moabite converts, but not female Moabite converts.

2. Talmud Bavli, Yevamot 77a-b – King David was descended from a female Moabite (Ruth) who was allowed to convert to Judaism.

Doeg the Edomi then said to him [Shaul HaMelech], "Before you ask whether he [David] is fit to be king or not, find out whether he is permitted to be part of the Jewish community or not!" "What is the reason?" "Because he is descended from Ruth the Moabite..." Doeg raised all these objections to them and they remained silent. He wanted to make a proclamation against him [David] ...

But [Amasa] girded his sword like a Yishmaeli and exclaimed, "Whoever will not obey the following halachah will be stabbed with the sword; I have this tradition from the *Beit Din* (court) of Samuel the Ramati: An Ammoni but not an Ammonite [female Amoni]; A Moavi, but not a Moabite [female Moavi]!" ... Samuel and his Beit Din were still living.

א"ל דואג האדומי עד שאתה משאיל עליו אם הגון הוא למלכות אם לאו שאל עליו אם ראוי לבא בקהל אם לאו מ"ט דקאתי מרות המואביה ... אקשי להו דואג כל הני קושייתא אישתיקו בעי לאכרוזי עליה מיד ...

חגר חרבו כישמעאל ואמר כל מי שאינו שומע הלכה זו ידקר בחרב כך מקובלני מבית דינו של שמואל הרמתי עמוני ולא עמונית מואבי ולא מואבית.... שאני הכא דהא שמואל ובית דינו קיים.

3. Shaarei Teshuvah, Orach Chaim 494: 2 – King David was born and died on Shavuot. It is appropriate to read of his lineage on this day.

The custom is to read the Book of Ruth on Shavuot. My grandfather wrote in Bechor Shor (p. 121) that the reason is because King David died on *Atzeret* (Shavuot), and God completes the years of the righteous [so that they die on their birthday, and in this way live out their full number of years]. Certainly, then, King David was born on this day. The Book of Ruth was written to legitimize David's lineage.

נוהגים לומר רות בשבועות ואא"ז בכ"ש דף קכ"א הטעם שלפי שדוד המלך ע"ה מת בעצרת והקב"ה ממלא שנותיהם כו' ובודאי בעצרת נולד ומגילת רות נכתב לייחס דוד.

SECTION IV. SHAVUOT CUSTOMS

PART A. STUDYING ON THE NIGHT OF SHAVUOT

1. **Shir HaShirim (Song of Songs) Rabbah 1:12:2 – On the day of Matan Torah the Jews were sleeping.**

God came first [to Mount Sinai] as the verse states, “On the third day, in the morning.” It also says, “On the third morning God descended before the eyes of the nation.” The Jews were sleeping all night, because the sleep of *Atzeret* is very sweet and the night is short. Rabbi Yuden said that even the fleas did not bite them. God came and found them sleeping. He began to wake them with fanfare, as the verse says, “On the third day, in the morning, there were sounds and thunder.” Moshe woke up the people and brought them out before the King of kings, the Holy One, Blessed is He.

הקב"ה הקדים דכתיב (שם) ויהי ביום השלישי בהיות
הבקר וכתיב (שם) כי ביום השלישי ירד ה' לעיני כל
העם ישנו להם ישראל כל אותו הלילה לפי ששינה
של עצרת עריבה והלילה קצרה אמר ר' יודן אפילו
פורטענא לא עקץ במ. בא הקדוש ברוך הוא ומוצאן
ישנים התחיל מעמיד עליהם בקלאנין הה"ד ויהי
ביום השלישי בהיות הבקר ויהי קולות וברקים והיה
מושה מעורר לישראל ומוציאן לאפנתו של מלך מלכי
המלכים הקב"ה.

2. **Magen Avraham, Orach Chaim 494 – To rectify the mistake of the generation who received the Torah, we stay up all night on Shavuot studying the Torah.**

The Zohar says that the early pious ones would stay awake all night on Shavuot and learn Torah. Nowadays our custom is for most learned people to do so. Perhaps the reason is based on the fact that the Israelites slept all night long and God had to wake them when He wanted to give them the Torah, as it says in the Midrash, and therefore we must repair this.

איתא בזוהר שחסידים הראשונים היו נעורים כל
הלילה ועוסקים בתור' וכבר נהגו רוב הלומדים לעשות
כן ואפשר לתת טעם ע"פ פשוטו לפי שישראל היו
ישנים כל הלילה והוצרך הקב"ה להעיר אותם כדאיתא
במדרש לכן אנו צריכים לתקן זה.

3. **Rabbi Yitzchak Berkowitz, Jerusalem Kollel – Showing our dedication to Torah study.**

On Shavuot, there is a special reason to stay up all night learning Torah. Even if one would argue that you can learn more hours during Shavuot by keeping to a regular schedule, the goal here is different. We are showing our uncompromised, extraordinary dedication to the study of Torah on the day on which the Torah was given to the Jewish people.

4. **Mishnah Brurah 494:1 – Staying up all night on Shavuot affords one protection from harm during the year.**

In the Shulchan Aruch Ha'Ari it says: You should know that anyone who does not sleep at all on the night of Shavuot but stays awake and learns Torah is guaranteed that he will survive the year and no harm will befall him.

ואיתא בשו"ע האר"י ז"ל דע שכל מי שבלילה לא ישן
כלל ועיקר והיה עוסק בתורה מובטח לו שישלים שנתו
ולא יארע לו שום נזק.

PART B. EATING DAIRY FOODS

1. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 494 – Reminder of the offering of the two loaves of bread.

The custom is to eat dairy foods on the first day of Shavuot. It seems to me that the reason for this is similar to that of the two cooked dishes that we eat on Pesach as a reminder of the Pesach and Chagigah sacrifices. So too, on Shavuot we eat dairy followed by meat, and we must have two separate loaves of bread on the table, which symbolically represents the Altar. In this way we have a reminder of the two loaves of bread that were offered on Shavuot, the day of *bikurim*.

נוהגין בכל מקום לאכל מאכלי חלב ביום ראשון של שבועות. ונראה לי הטעם, שהוא כמו השני תבשילין שלוקחים בליל פסח, זכר לפסח וזכר לחגיגה, כן אוכלים מאכל חלב ואחר כך מאכל בשר, וצריכין להביא עמהם ב' לחם על השלחן שהוא במקום המזבח, ויש בזה זכרון לב' הלחם שהיו מקריבין ביום הבכורים.

2. Mishnah Brurah 494:14 – Each loaf is eaten at a separate meal, one dairy and one meat.

“Just like the two cooked dishes ... so we eat...” In other words, just as on Pesach we have a reminder of the Pesach sacrifice, so too on Shavuot we have to make a remembrance of the two loaves of bread that were brought in the Temple. Therefore, we eat dairy foods and afterwards meat foods. Each one requires separate bread to accompany it, because it is forbidden to eat from the same loaf of bread with both milk and meat, and in this way we remember the two loaves from the Temple.

כמו השני תבשילין וכו' כן אוכלים וכו' – ר"ל כשם שבפסח עושין זכר לקרבן כן אנו צריכין לעשות בשבועות זכר לשתי הלחם שהיו מביאין וע"כ אוכלים מאכלי חלב ואח"כ מאכל בשר וצריכין להביא עמהם שתי לחמים דאסור לאכול בשר וחלב מלחם אחד ויש בזה זכרון לשתי הלחם:

3. Ibid. 494: 12 – Reminder of how the Jewish people kept kosher after *Matan Torah*.

The Israelites stood at Mount Sinai and received the Torah (even though they only heard the Ten Commandments, these contained within them all the other parts of the Torah, as explained by Rav Saadiah Gaon). Afterwards, they returned to their homes but were not able to eat meat products immediately because that requires preparation: *Shechitah* with a knife which is sharp and checked; removal of the sciatic nerve, forbidden fats and blood; soaking and salting; and cooking in new pots, because all the existing pots had been used in the preceding twenty-four hours for non-kosher food and were therefore forbidden. As such, the Jews chose to eat dairy at that time. We therefore eat dairy in remembrance of this.

כי בעת שעמדו על הר סיני וקבלו התורה [כי בעשרת הדברות נתגלה להם עי"ז כל חלקי התורה כמו שכתב רב סעדיה גאון שבעשרת הדברות כלולה כל התורה] וירדו מן ההר לביתם לא מצאו מה לאכול תיכף כ"א מאכלי חלב כי לבשר צריך הכנה רבה לשחוט בסכין בדוק כאשר צוה ה' ולנקר חוטי החלב והדם ולהדיח ולמלוח ולבשל בכלים חדשים כי הכלים שהיו להם מקודם שבישלו בהם באותו מעל"ע נאסרו להם ע"כ בחרו להם לפי שעה מאכלי חלב ואנו עושין זכר לזה:

4. Ibid. 494: 13 – Torah is compared to honey and milk.

Some people also have the custom to eat honey with milk because the Torah is likened to honey

גם נוהגין בקצת מקומות לאכול דבש וחלב מפני התורה שנמשלה לדבש וחלב כמש"כ דבש וחלב תחת

and milk, as the verse states: “Honey and milk are under his tongue” (Shir HaShirim 4:11).

לשונך וגו':

PART C. DECORATING THE SYNAGOGUE WITH FLOWERS AND TREES

1. **Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 494 – The decorative plants and flowers are inspired by the happiness of the giving of the Torah.**

Our custom is to decorate the synagogues and houses with plants and flowers on Shavuot as a reminder of the happiness of the giving of the Torah.

ונוהגין לשטח עשבים בשבעות בבית הכנסת והבתים,
זכר לשמחת מתן תורה.

2. **Mishnah Brurah 494:10 – The decorations allude to the fact the Mt. Sinai miraculously sprouted with vegetation at the giving of the Torah.**

“A reminder of the happiness of the giving of the Torah.” Because there were plants around Mount Sinai, as the verse states: “The sheep and cattle must not graze...”

זכר לשמחת מתן תורה – שהיו שם עשבים סביב הר
סיני כדכתיב הצאן והבקר אל ירעו וגו'

3. **Magen Avraham, Orach Chaim 494: 5 – The decorations are to remind us that Shavuot is when we are judged for the fruit of the trees.**

The custom is to put trees in the synagogues and houses. It seems to me that the reason for this is that on *Atzeret* we are judged for the fruit of the trees, and we should pray for them.

נוהגין להעמיד אילנות בבה"כ ובבתים ונ"ל הטעם
שיזכירו שבעצרת נידונין על פירות האילן ויתפללו
עליהם: