

## RABBI ZEV'S REFLECTIONS

### Shavuot- What are its meanings and significance

Shavuot, meaning “weeks” in Hebrew, is a one of the “Shelosh Regalim”- 3 Pilgrimage festivals and marks two intertwined themes: the culmination of the seven-week Counting of the Omer and the anniversary of receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai. Shavuot is fifty days



after the second night of Passover and is both an agricultural and spiritual holiday. In ancient Israel, it was celebrated as the Festival of the First Fruits (Bikkurim), when farmers brought offerings of the early grain harvest, especially wheat (omer) to the Temple

in Jerusalem. Today, Shavuot is observed primarily for its religious significance, commemorating the initial moment when the Jewish people received God’s law.

Preparation for Shavuot begins with the Counting of the Omer, a period of forty-nine days observed from Passover to Shavuot. This daily ritual invites personal reflection and anticipation, echoing the journey from physical liberation in Egypt to spiritual redemption at Sinai. It can be seen as one’s own spiritual journey and growth. Traditionally, each night, a blessing is recited as the number of days is counted, symbolizing growth, readiness and willingness to eagerly receive the Torah.

Part of our spiritual preparation is by engaging in study sessions, introspection, and acts of kindness, viewing the Omer as an opportunity for self-improvement; culminating in erev Shavuot is dedicated to the custom of Tikkun Leil Shavuot, an all-night Torah study, and other Judaic studies, originally inspired by mystical traditions. This practice expresses the eagerness and reverence with which we accepted the Torah. It is essentially a celebration of the covenant between God and the Jewish people. Another tradition is eating dairy on Shavuot, such as cheesecake, blintzes, and kugels.

Why? explanations range from symbolism of the “milk and honey” promised in the land of Israel, to the purity

(likened to nourishing milk), and practical reasons such as dietary laws that were introduced with the Torah.

The tradition of having the synagogue decorated with plants, flowers, and branches, recalls Mount Sinai, believed to have bloomed with vegetation on the day of the Torah’s revelation, and celebrates Shavuot’s agricultural roots.

The Book of Ruth is read in synagogue during Shavuot. Ruth’s story highlights themes of loyalty, conversion, and harvest, mirroring the holiday’s spiritual and agrarian messages. Ruth’s acceptance of Judaism is seen as equivalent to the Jewish people accepting the Torah. Ruth is often studied as part of the Tikkun Leil Shavuot as well.

Today, Shavuot’s significance extends well beyond its origins. The holiday encourages us to value learning, community, and gratitude, principles that resonate in a fast-paced, often fragmented world. The tradition of Torah study fosters intellectual curiosity and lifelong education, reminding us to seek wisdom and ethical guidance in all aspects of life.

Sharing dairy meals and decorating with greenery strengthen community bonds and celebrate the renewal of the earth, echoing contemporary values of sustainability and togetherness. The story of Ruth stresses the power of kindness, inclusion, and personal commitment, themes that are especially relevant in an increasingly diverse society.

Shavuot inspires both Jews and non-Jews to reflect on the importance of tradition, the meaning of freedom, and the sense of purpose that comes from engaging with one’s heritage. Its message of renewal, gratitude, and responsibility remains vital, offering a touchstone for personal growth and common connection in today’s world.

May this Shavuot be exceedingly meaningful to you.