

SHAVUOT (PENTECOST) חג שבועות

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The Shavuot Holiday, which takes place 49 days after Pesach (on the 50th day), has actually a number of different names. The fact that various names are attributed to this Holiday indicates that the celebration has various reasons. Shavuot is one of the Three Pilgrimage Holidays (Shlosa Regalim שלושה רגלים): **Sukkot, Pesach, Shavuot**. For the purpose of these celebrations the Children of Israel went to the Temple up to Jerusalem. The term “Shlosa Regalim” means that three times a year the Israelites went by foot to Jerusalem to the Temple Mount.

The Hebrew word “**Chag**” means Holiday or a feast.

The 8 most well-known names of the Holiday are: **Chag Shavuot** (the Holiday of the Weeks), **Chag Shvuot** (the Holiday of the Oaths), **Chag HaBikurim** (the Holiday of the First Fruits), **Azeret** (Gathering, rally), **Chag HaChamishim** (the Holiday of the Fifty Days), **Yom Hakhel** (the Day of the Convention, the Day of the Gathering), **Chag Matan Torah** (the Holiday of the Giving of the Torah), **Chag HaKatsir** (the Holiday of the Harvest).

Before we will go into the explanation of each holiday background one more remark will be helpful for the general understanding. The Hebrew name **Shavuot** has the spelling which integrates more the one meaning. First of all, the spelling means “weeks”. It stands for the date the Holiday takes place, namely 7 weeks after Pesach. The same letters in Hebrew can be pronounced as **Shvuot**. Then these same letters mean due to the difference of pronunciations, “oaths”. In the spelling of the word Shavuot there are also the three letters integrated, which read as a separate word **“Sheva”**, which means seven.



The first letter of the word Shavuot (shin ש) is at the same time the first letter of one of the names of God in the Bible, namely “**Shadai** שדי”. The last letter of the name Shavuot is the last letter of the Hebrew Alphabet (Tav ת) and is at the same time the first letter of the word “**Torah** תורה”. It indicates that already in the name Shavuot (weeks) it tells that at the end of the 7 weeks the Torah was given.

CHAG HASHAVUOT (FEAST OF THE WEEKS)

The Holiday which is celebrated 7 weeks after the first day of Pesach, is called **Chag HaShavuot**. It is the only holiday in the Torah which is not defined as a certain date of a certain month. Due to the **Hebrew lunar calendar** the three months between Pesach and Shavuot (Nisan, Iyar and Sivan) may vary in their number of days from year to year. Therefore, Shavuot may be on the 5th, the 6th or the 7th of the month of Sivan. The name Shavuot is derived from the book of **Deuteronomy, chap. 16, verses 9 – 10**. In verse 10 it is explicitly called “the **Feast of Weeks**”. The sages explained to us that the reason for this unique way of determining when the holiday takes place, is to **establish a daily correlation between Pesach as the Holiday of Liberation (Chag HaCherut חג החירות) and the Holiday of the Giving of the Torah (Chag Matan Torah חג מתן תורה)**.

Furthermore, we learn from the above mentioned verse 11 that all layers & social groups should celebrate this feast in the spirit of a communal equality. “And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite who is in your town, and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your midst, in the place where the Lord your God chooses to establish His name.” (NASB)

The preceding verse 10 calls for your “freewill offering”. Everyone should try to be generous as good as he can.

CHAG HASHVUOT (FEAST OF THE OATHS)

This name is based on the book of **Exodus. In chap. 24, verse 3** which says: כל-הדברים אשר-דבר יהוה, נעשה. “Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do!” (NASB) In **verse 7** we read:

כל אשר-דבר יהוה נעשה ונשמע.

“Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, “All that the Lord has spoken we **will do**, and we will be **obedient!**” Actually, the Hebrew word **נשמע** (Venishma), which is translated in most Bible versions as “obedient” means only simply “we will hear”. The translation as “obedient” avoids dealing with the questions resulting from the unusual order of actions: First the Children of Israel said they “will do”, and only then they said that they “will hear”. The sages explained that the people of Israel meant to express that they would “**do**” all the Mitzvot (commandments) which they had already

received (like the Ten Commandments). Then they would hear and listen to further future commandments that may follow later on. They indirectly pledged their readiness to be obedient, but in the original text in Hebrew it is open to interpretations...



These statements are considered the oaths which the children of Israel took before the LORD. That is the basis for the name of the holiday as “Chag HaShvuot” – The Holiday of the Oaths.

In verse 8 Moses confirmed the mutual covenant and said: “Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.”

After these mutual declarations, Moses went up on the mountain and stayed there 40 days and 40 nights. We know that after God gave him the Two Tablets of the Ten Commandments¹, God told Moses that the people of Israel down the hill had sinned. Exodus 32, vers 7: “Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves.” (ESV) The LORD referred to what Moses later saw as the dancing around the Golden Calf. Even so God was furious and actually offered to annihilate the people, Moses managed to calm down God by reminding him of what the nations might say, if God exterminated the nation he had liberated from Egypt. By consenting to Moses’ begging and by mercifully forgiving, God actually confirmed his previous promises to the 3 Fathers.

Referring to all these a. m. oaths and promises from the side of God and of the Israelites the Holiday is named as the Feast of the Oaths: Chag HaShvuot.

Chag Matan Thora (The Festival of the Giving of the Torah)

The name “Chag Matan Torah” is not quoted from the Torah (the Five Books of Moses). Nevertheless, this name is one of the most well-known names of this feast. The important Rabbis of the Talmud Era based this name on passages from the Bible. In the Book of Exodus in chap. 19, verse 9 God told Moses already that he would announce his message to the people of Israel. In Exodus chap. 24, verses 4 – 8 the event of signing the covenant between God and Israel is described. Also in the Book of Deuteronomy, chap. 4, verses 9 – 13 the event of the giving of the Ten Commandments [Footnote 1 below] is recalled by Moses. In Deuteronomy chap. 5, verses 6 – 21 the Ten Commandments are quoted again. (The first time the Ten Commandments were quoted was in the Book of Exodus, chap. 20.) In Deuteronomy, chap. 5, verses 22, 23 the Torah tells again of the giving of the Commandments.

So, the Rabbis of the Talmud had sufficient Torah sources to justify the naming of the Holiday as “Chag Matan Torah”.

Chag HaKatsir (The Holiday of the Harvest)

A central aspect of the Shavuot Holiday is the agricultural context of the harvest season. During the Bible time and well into the post biblical Mishna and Talmud Era the vast majority of the Jewish population of the land of Israel was directly dependent on the agricultural harvest. The wheat and barley harvest



¹ The Ten Commandments as they are called in English contain actually 14 commandments. In Hebrew the Torah refers to the announcement by God at Mount Sinai with the words “Aseret haDevarim”. Please pay attention that in Hebrew the word “Devarim” does not mean commandments. Devarim (or Dibrot, same word but in feminine form) means “outspoken statements”, or “the Spoken”. One may understand the Ten Commandments as the Ten Spoken (statements). We find this formulation three times in the original Hebrew Torah: In Exodus, chapter 34, verse 28, in Deuteronomy, chapter 4, verse 12 (in English, NASB, it is verse 13), and in Deuteronomy, chapter 10, verse 4. The post biblical Rabbis modified the Hebrew words “Aseret haDevarim” to a more common Hebrew “Aseret HaDibrot”. (In Hebrew “Devarim” is masculine, Dibrot is the feminine form.)

Concerning the Ten Commandments, or as we now more correctly call them “Aseret HaDevarim” we may remind, that they were actually communicated in the Torah five times: The first time was the oral (acoustic) announcement at Mount Sinai, when the whole people of Israel was present. Then Moses brought down the first Two Tablets of stone, which he had to destroy when he saw the children of Israel dancing around the Golden Calf. Later Moses went up again and brought the second Two Tablets of stone with the Ten Devarim. Since we have in the Book of Exodus in chapter 20 the text of the Ten Devarim and in Deuteronomy, chapter 5 we have again the Ten Devarim, we have all together five times of the Ten Devarim being communicated. We also know that there are a number of text differences between their formulations in Exodus, chapter 20 compared with Deuteronomy, chapter 5.

which took place in the land of Israel in the month of Sivan was representative for the agricultural harvest in general. In the Book of **Exodus in chap. 34, in verse 22** we read “Celebrate the festival of Weeks with the first fruits of the wheat harvest and the festival of ingathering at the turn of the year.” Therefore, the Holiday of Shavuot is also called the **Festival of the Harvest, Chag HaKatsir**.



Jom HaBikkurim (Day of the First Fruits)

The name of the Holiday as “**Yom HaBikurim**” is based on the explicit text in the Book of **Deuteronomy, chapter 26, verses 1 – 4**. There it says “Take some of the Firstfruits of all that you produced from the soil of the land. The LORD your God is giving you and put them in a basket...” (NASB)

This “**Mitzvah**” (Commandment) refers only to the **Seven Species (The 7 Minim)** (שבעת המינים) of the Land of Israel. In **Deuteronomy,**

chapter 8, verses 7 – 8 we read “For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills. A land of **wheat** and **barley**, of **wine** and **fig trees** and **pomegranates**, a land of **olive oil** and **honey**.” Honey stands for **dates**, the fruit of the **palm tree**. The description of the dates as honey results from the phenomenon which the Children of Israel saw when they observed the palm trees when the dates were so ripe that the fluid juice was dripping from the trees. **The colour of the juice of the dates resembles the colour of honey.** It is also as sweet as honey.) Therefor it says in the Book of **Deuteronomy, chapter 6 verse 3** and **chapter 31, verse 20** that the **Land of Israel is: “a land flowing with milk and honey”**.



Chag Azeret (The feast of the ingathering of the people)

The word “**Azeret**”² [Footnote 2 below] is one of the names for the event of the ingathering of the people of Israel. In the Torah, we read of the instruction for such an **Azeret** on the 7th day of **Chag HaMatzot** – The Holiday of the Unleavened Bread (nowadays the whole week is called **Pesach**, even thou actually in the Torah only the first day is called Pesach). The other Holiday at the end of which the Azeret is convened at the Kotel (Wailing Wall) is **Sukkot (Tabernacles)**.



Based on these two Torah instructions the post biblical Rabbis extrapolated that also during the third pilgrimage Holiday, namely Shavuot, also the ingathering called Azeret should take place. Another argument for naming the Holiday Azeret was that similarly to the other two pilgrimage Festivals also in Shavuot all the people came to the Temple, so it resembled the situation facing Mount Sinai, when the whole people of Israel was present.

Chag HaChamischim (The Festival of the Fifty)

During the time of the second temple it was customary to call the Chag Shavuot **Chag HaChamishim** because it took place in the 50th day after Pesach, after the 7 weeks of the Omer counting since Pesach were completed. This name is based on the book of **Leviticus (Vayikra), chapter 23, verses 15 – 17**. In verse 16 we read “You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh sabbath. Then you shall present a new grain offering to the LORD.”

The name Chag HaChamishim was also used by the seventy Rabbis who translated the Torah to what is called the **Septuaginta**. (This translation into Greek was made in the years 250 – 100 b.c.e.)

The number 50 has also a special meaning as the year of **Jubilee**. The Jubilee year is the 50th year after seven times of the **Shemita** year. The Shemita year is the seventh year during which the land of Israel has to rest. So no agricultural production is permitted on the soil within the Land of Israel.

Jom Hakhel (The day of convening the nation)

The special name **Hakhel** for the Shavuot Holiday is based on **Deuteronomy, chapter 4, verse 10**. This special convening of the people of Israel should remind

² See in the **Talmud “Massechet (treatise) Rosh HaShana”** (New Year), chapter 1, verse 2.

of the special unifying ingathering at the Mount of Sinai, when Israel received as one united nation the Ten Commandments. That occasion was the only case in the Torah in which the text speaks for all the people of Israel in singular form: “**Wa yichan** sham Israel neged haHar נגד ההר שם ישראל” (Exodus 19, 2). “When they set out from Rephidim, they came to the wilderness of Sinai... And there Israel camped in front of the mountain”.



Foto: Zvi Katsir, Kibbuz Netzer Sereni, Alon.

THE NUMBER SEVEN IS OF UNIQUE IMPORTANCE SINCE THE CREATION

Rabbi **Zvi David Hoffmann** has shown, that the Jewish holidays of **Rosh HaShanah** (the New Year) and **Yom Kippur** (the Day of Atonement) are directly related to the unique significance of the number seven in the Torah. The 7th day of the week, the **Shabbat** (Saturday) reminds of the week of the Creation by God. The **Shemita** year, the 7th year, is the year of rest for the ground in the Land of Israel. Rosh HaShana is the beginning of each year as well as, therefore, the basis for the calculation of the 7th year, the **Shemita** year. The Shemita year reminds that the land belongs to the LORD. Furthermore after 7 times Shemita year (7 x 7) comes the **Yovel (Jubilee)** year which is the 50th year. The Jubilee year is crucial in the laws settling the state of real estate ownership of land pieces in the land of Israel. The idea is to remind the ownership of God. In the Jubilee year people who lost their land due to debts can get their property back under certain conditions.

The number 7 is also of special importance concerning other major Jewish holidays from the Torah: **Sukkot** (Tabernacles) lasts for 7 days. It is one of the three major pilgrimage holidays, in which the Israelites went to the Temple in Jerusalem to celebrate. Since Jerusalem is ca. 860-meter-high in the mountain, the

pilgrimage was perceived and called as **holidays of ascendance**, geographically and spiritually. The **Pesach** holiday also lasts 7 days. It takes place in the month of Nissan. The month of Nissan is considered in the Torah as one of the four dates which are each called a new year. (Explanations follow below under the specific Holidays.) The first day of the holiday is the actual Pesach holiday. It is followed by the week called in the Torah “**Chag Ha Matzoth**” (the **Feast of Unleavened Bread**). Nowadays people call all the 7 days of Pesach and Chag HaMatzoth with the one name of “Pesach Holiday”. Seven weeks after Pesach the Shavuot Holiday (Pentecost) takes place. The 7 weeks counted from Pesach to Shavuot undergo a daily special counting called “**Sefirat HaOmer**” (the counting of the Omer). The Omer is a biblical measure of a barley quantity which is relevant for a sacrifice (it is ca. 3,64 liters). The idea is to establish a daily correlation between the Holiday of Liberation (from the slavery in Egypt) and the Giving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai.

The holidays **Rosh HaShana**, **Yom Kipur** and **Sukkot** take place in the month of **Tishrei**, which is **the 7th month of the year**. The year (for counting the reign of kings) begins biblically in the month of Nissan. The pilgrimage holiday Sukkot takes place in the 7th month after Pesach. (Note: Pesach is in Nissan, which is one of the four Jewish dates called a New Year.)

In Jerusalem, there are 7 holidays defined as non-working holidays: **2 days in Pesach** (at the beginning and at the end), **1 day in Shavuot**, **1 day of Rosh Ha Shana** (1 day was during the Temple time and only in the city of Jerusalem. We know of the Rosh Ha Shana being celebrated of 2 days outside of Jerusalem. Today also in Jerusalem Rosh Ha Shana is celebrated for 2 days.) **1 day on Yom Kipur**, **1 day Sukkot** and **1 day on Shemini Azereth** at the end of Sukkot.

Total: 7 days of Holidays from the Torah.

PRAYERS AND TRADITIONS DURING THE SHAVUOT-FEAST

READING THE SCROLL OF RUTH – A FAMOUS TRADITION OF THE SHAVUOT FEAST.

One of the characteristic traditions of the Shavuot Holiday is the reading and learning of the Scroll of Ruth from the Bible. There are a number of reasons for this custom:

* The date of the **6th of the month of Sivan** in the Hebrew calendar, when the Holiday Shavuot (usually³) takes place, is at the same time **the birthday of King David and the day he died**. King David is a descendant of Ruth. This is a good reason to study the family tree and the special message for the future which is correlated with this unique family.

Ruth said to Naomi **“Your God is my God”**. This statement became world famous. Ever since, this statement is considered as the declaration by Ruth which de facto made her convert into Judaism. Since Shavuot is the **Holiday of the Giving of the Torah**, there is a special idea which connects the **Scroll of Ruth** and the **Torah**. The rabbinic teachings of the Mishna and Talmud (the **Oral Torah**) explained that **all the souls of the people of Israel of all generations including the souls of all converts into Judaism to come, were spiritually present at Mount Sinai during the monumental event when God announced the Ten Commandments** (The Ten Devarim).



Therefore, Chag Shavuot being also Chag Matan Torah, is an excellent invitation to read and study the scroll of Ruth as well as the Ten Commandments. It is an important occasion for demonstrating the equality of converts with all the people of Israel.

The events described in the Scroll of Ruth took place during the time of the harvest of the field. Chag Shavuot is also called **Chag HaKatsir**. The reading and learning of the circumstances of the Story of Ruth provide a special illumination of that biblical time.

* Another interesting reason for reading the Scroll of Ruth during the Chag Matan Torah,

the Holiday of the Giving of the Torah, is directly rooted in the numbers of the Torah Laws. Rabbinical teachings explain that Ruth, being originally a gentile, already was under the seven Noachide Laws. At Mount Sinai the Jewish tradition counts 606 Jewish Mitzvot given to Israel. Together 606 and the Seven Noachide Laws make the total of 613 Mitzvot (מצוות / laws) of the whole Torah. Hence there is a relevant connection between the Scroll of Ruth and Chag Matan Torah.

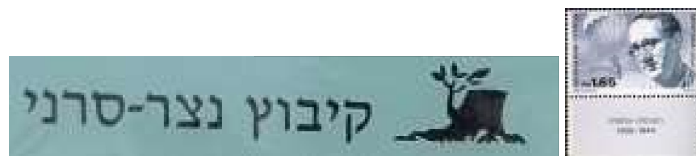
* The unique story of Ruth in the Scroll of Ruth is a touching illustration of the biblical Hebrew terms **“Chessed חסד”** (grace, mercy) and **“Zedaka צדקה”** (charity, justice). Reading and learning the message of the Scroll of Ruth suits perfectly the central ideas of Chag Matan Torah. In the Scroll of Ruth we read about the charity done by Boaz and how this Zedaka reached Ruth. Ruth herself personifies the implementation of “Zedaka” in life. When Ruth stood loyal by the widow Naomi and collected the rest of the harvest in the corner of the field also for her old mother in law, Ruth did that without expecting a material reward for it. Ruth was not only unexpectedly rewarded with a noble husband, Boaz, but became the mother of a family out of which the people of Israel were later blessed with **King David**, and the wonderful Psalms he wrote with a divine inspiration. Ruth and David are also traditionally the tree out of which a **“Netzer”**⁴ will come out in future. In the Book of **Isaiah, chapter 11, verse 1 – 2** we read **“There a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse (Yishai), a branch from his roots will bear fruit. The spirit of the LORD will rest on him.”**



* A further special reason for reading the Scroll of Ruth during the Holiday of the Giving of the Torah is that in the Scroll of Ruth we learn the immense

³ Due to the lunar Hebrew calendar, in which the number of days of the months may vary from year to year, **the Shavuot Holiday may sometimes begin on the 5th or the 6th or the 7th of Sivan**.

⁴ In Israel, a kibbutz founded by 18 Shoah-survivors in 1948 was named with this symbolic term of **Isaiah: Kibbutz Netzer Sereni**. The name also commemorates **Enzo Sereni**, a Jewish paratrooper of the Jewish Brigade of the British forces fighting Nazi-Germany. **Sereni** jumped over former Yugoslavia to try to rescue Jews from the **Holocaust**. But he was caught, transported to the notorious **Dachau** Concentration Camp near Munich where he was executed on Nov. 18th, 1944.



The logo of the kibbutz illustrates the idea of Isaiah with a sketch of a stem of a tree out of which a new branch, a shoot springs with 7 green leaves. The motto of the kibbutz is **“From Shoah to Resurrection”**. The kibbutz counts today some 600 people. **Ari Lipinski**, the author of this essay about Shavuot, was a member of **kibbutz Netzer Sereni**. www.arilipinski.com/kibbutz

importance of carefully paying attention to the exact and accurate reading of the Torah text. Here is the essence of the lesson:

In the Torah we read in **Deuteronomy, chapter 23, verse 4** in the Hebrew original

לא יבוא עמוני ומואבי בקהל השם

“Lo yavo Amoni uMoavi biKahal HaSHEM”.

In English, we read (in the NASB) in **Deuteronomy, chapter 23, verse 3** “No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the LORD”. The specialty of the Hebrew formulation lies in the fact, that from the Hebrew grammar point of view the word “**Moavi מואבי**” refers unmistakenly only to a man, since it is unequivocally masculine form. Based on this sentence of the Torah Boaz went to the gathering of Rabbis of his city to ask for the permission for his wending with Ruth in spite of the fact that she was a Moabite. He argued, and the Rabbis and all the citizens unanimously agreed, that the Torah restriction in **Deuteronomy, chapter 23, verse 4** (in Hebrew) **spoke only of Moabite men**. Therefore, the restriction did **not** apply on Moabite women (Moabite). For such a restriction relating to female Moabite the word in the Torah would have one more Hebrew letter (He ה) making the word **Moaviah מואבית**. Which would undoubtedly be a female Moabite.

Thanks to this wonderful example of accurate reading Boaz and the Rabbis and his fellow citizen reached the correct interpretation of the Torah text. Thanks to these circumstances **Boaz could marry Ruth** and Israel were later blessed with having **King David**.

The Yiskor ייִסקור Memorial Prayer

After the Torah reading and the reading of the **Haftarah**⁵ during the morning ceremony of the Shavuot Holiday in the Synagogue. For the Torah reading in orthodox Synagogues at least a **Minyan**, a gathering of at least 10 grown up men (who are over 13 years of age) is required. **After the reading of the Haftarah a special prayer in memoriam of the souls of relatives who passed away or were murdered in the Shoah takes place.** It is called the **Yiskor Prayer**. Before this prayer begins, all children and persons whose parents are still alive, are requested to leave the Synagogue for the short while of the prayer. It is customary in the context of the prayer for the souls of these relatives to commit to donate after the holiday for

Zedaka (a charitable purpose). Many people who do not regularly go to the synagogue, do attend this Yiskor Prayer.

The special **Yiskor Prayer** takes place during the three pilgrimage holidays: on Shmini Azeret (ending the Sukkot Holiday, Tabernacles), on the 7 day of **Chag haMazot** (usually called **Pesach** even though actually only the first day is called Pesach in the Torah in the book of Exodus), and at the **Shavuot Holiday**, which takes place 50 days after Pesach.

Why is it customary in Shavuot to eat no meat and focus on dairy products?

One of the most well-known traditions of the Shavuot Holiday is that all meals are without meat. Practically people eat only milk products. Fish is considered neutral. Therefore, it can be integrated in the Shavuot menu.

The original reason for this custom is related to the sin of the **Golden Calf**. Since the Shavuot Holiday celebrates the oral announcement of the **Ten Commandments**, the event of the sin of the Golden Calf is correlated to it. In order to “distract” God from immediately remembering the Golden Calf at the time of this Holiday neither Calf meat nor any kind of meat is included in the festive meals.

A further reason for avoiding any kind of meat in the Shavuot Holiday, which is also the Matan Torah Holiday, is to prevent the People of Israel from risking any mistake or any misunderstanding during the preparations of the holiday meals. For this purpose meat is completely avoided. In this way one may not commit any sin of falsely handling the requirements derived from the explicit Torah command “Do not cook a young goat in its mother’s milk.” (**Exodus, 23, 19 – NIV**).

In modern Israel, the custom of avoiding meat food and focusing on milk products for all Holiday meals of the Shavuot Holiday became a marketing hype of sales of an incredible variety of milk products. Some humorists go as far as to ask whether the milk producers had good contacts with the rabbis defining the restrictions...☺

⁵ The **Haftara** is a reading on Shabbat and Holidays of a **portion from the Prophets that correlates to the current weekly Torah portion**. Today the **Haftarah** is read after the reading of the weekly Torah portion. The tradition tells us that this custom started during the persecutions by the Greek **Antiochus IV Epiphanes**, who prohibited the reading from the Torah. Reading

similar texts from the Prophets was a way to circumvent the royal decree. Reading from the Torah was “punished” with death penalty. The family of **Mattathias the Hasmonean** and his son **Judas (Yehuda) Maccabee** revolted (167-160 B.C.E.) to abolish the religious restrictions. They re-established the Temple in 164 B.C.E. which is the root of the **Hanukkah Holiday**.

Every exaggeration is mostly improper. One should remember that during the 40 years when the children of Israel went through the Sinai desert they did not have this dilemma because they were blessed with the daily **Manna** provided to them by the Lord. The actual task to strictly separate between meat and milk products started to become relevant only after the Israelites entered the Promised Land of Israel under Joshua (1273 B.C.E.).

Tikkun Leil Shavuot **(“The Reparation Night of Shavuot”)**

Shavuot (Pentecost) is as we know at the same time the celebration called **Chag Matan Torah**, reminding of the Announcement of the **Ten Commandments** at Mount Sinai. In the Torah in the book of **Exodus, chap. 19**, we read that Moses had to wake up the Israelites in the morning prior to the gigantic event of the Announcement of the Ten Commandments. Since this shows a scandalous lack of passionate excitement prior to this historical event, the people of Israel ever since are trying to make up for it. **This was in sharp contrast to Abraham, who woke up early** and eager to quickly fulfil the instructions of God leading to the **Binding of Isaac** on Mount Moriah. It became a central custom and tradition of the Matan Torah Holiday to spend the whole night at the beginning of the Holiday by reading and learning the Torah and the whole Bible until dawn. By this the people of Israel try not only to compensate for the inappropriate long sleep at that famous morning at Mount Sinai, but also to make sure that one is awake at sunrise.

The Hebrew name **“Tikkun Leil Shavuot”** indicates that the Israelites are aware of the mistake and are actively making an effort to avoid repeating the mistake and **to add the sense of atonement and repentance through additional Bible study.**

For the purpose of the night long study **special books were compiled.** In these books are elements / passages from all chapters of the Torah. (The five books of Moses). Special chapters like the Story of the Creation (Bereshit) and the Ten Commandments are quoted at full length. Then all books of the Bible are represented by famous paragraphs from them. From some books complete chapters are quoted. For example: The extraordinary and figurative description of the heavenly palace and the Throne of God written by Ezekiel.

Due to the fact that the date of the Shavuot Holiday is both **the birthday of King David as well as the day he died**, the full text of the **Scroll of Rut** is read during the Shavuot night study. By this a tribute is paid both to David and to Rut and also everyone is reminded of the divine mercy of giving the Torah to Israel and the merciful behaviour of Rut toward Naomi and of Boaz

towards Rut. This reading of the Scroll of Rut is a vivid reminder of the special idea of Jewish belief that **all souls of the people of Israel of all generations as well as of all those persons who convert to Judaism ever since, were present at Mount Sinai when the Ten Commandments were announced.**

During the first hours, the persons present read each a chapter or a passage so that all are active (and do not fall asleep...) and no explanations and discussions take place at this stage. The idea is first of all to make sure that the group will manage to loudly read the elements from the whole Bible. Including the full text of the Scroll of Rut. This custom has a very special social aspect involved: by letting everyone just read, practically all participants are equal. The scholars and the more knowledgeable Bible students are not dominating the conversation. It is important as a motivation for everyone to join without hesitation because of minor experience in Bible studies.

The social integrative aspect becomes even more relevant in modern Israel, because many new immigrants came who sometimes have less experience in group Bible studies. It is very nice to observe how tolerant the group is, when a new immigrant – so called Ole Chadash – (for example from Russia or from Ethiopia) is reading a bit slower the unique and rare biblical words which are not usually used in the everyday (“Newspaper”) Hebrew language.

Only if and when the whole compilation of the representative texts of all Bible books and the complete Scroll of Rut are read, then content discussions may take place. Of course, the Rabbi and / or the participants may clarify short questions in between as long as the flow of the reading is not substantially delayed. Many Synagogues arrange for the long night of the **“Tikkun”** a big table around which the group gathered can sit like at the family table. Some families or groups of friends organize the same even not inside a synagogue. Food (of course no meat ...) and drinks are provided free of charge. The culinary aspect has two main purposes: 1. To make sure that all remain awake.... and 2. Here again a social aspect serves to remind of the spirit of Zedaka (charity and justice) which is a central message of the scroll of Rut. So, all poor people know that they may join the table and eat and drink as much as they choose. In this night it is irrelevant whether they are permanent Synagogue visitors. Everyone is equal at the Bible learning table and has equal access to food and drinks and can equally read from the Bible. This reading does not require the special melody knowledge, as is required by the Torah reading in the morning Torah readings on Mondays, Thursdays and Sabbaths. Often at the beginning of such an evening some Rabbis may even skip mentioning who donated the food.