

## Hands, Hearts, Minds, and Souls: An All-School Shavuot Program

*Rain Zohav*

### Enduring Understandings:

1. Torah is always being given.
2. As then, so now: we bring gifts of fruit to those who need.
3. Agriculture is alive and well on the modern day kibbutz, let's celebrate Shavuot as our ancestors did, but with a few modern twists.

### Essential Questions:

1. How is Torah being "given" today?
2. Are rules necessary?
3. Are all rules in the Torah possible to carry out today?
4. Are all rules good?
5. What rules would you add to Torah?
6. How do you think people feel who have not enough food?
7. What do you think it was like to "see the thunder and hear the lightning"?
8. Why would Mount Sinai burst into flowers when the Ten Commandments were given?
9. How is Torah like a marriage contract between the Jewish people and G-d?

### Evidence of Understanding:

1. Participants will be able to articulate how they can use these activities in their schools and classrooms.

**T**his article is based on a workshop was presented at NewCAJE 8 and was designed for education directors and teachers of grades K-8. As participants moved through a choice of stations, they were engaged in experiencing the idea of "Matan Torah," the giving of Torah at Shavuot, as well as Shavuot as one of the Pilgrimage Festivals of ancient Israel. Stations included experiences with hands-on tzedakah projects, age-appropriate art projects, in-depth discussion, text study focused on the Ten Commandments, stories, customs from around the world, and more! Participants came away with many ideas for their individual classroom and learned how to organize an all-school event.

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### Introduction to the workshop:

■ Before the day: you will need to find people to run the stations. These can be your teachers, in which case, parents and other volunteers can take the classes through the stations. Alternately, parents can run the stations and teachers take the classes around. Do which ever will work best in your setting.

■ Send a letter home asking that the students wear white and bring in offerings of fruit, both common varieties such as apples and oranges and some that people may have not yet eaten in this season, such as cherries, blueberries, etc. My congregation enjoyed bringing in extra "treats," such as chocolate covered raisins since all the fruit is to be donated to a local homeless shelter.

■ You will need markers, poster board, construction paper, tissue paper, scissors, flower stickers, baskets for fruit, greenery that can be used for garlands, wire ties to secure the garlands, handouts, Tanachim (Bibles), possibly plain white sheet material for robes (if

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you chose to add that element -- old sheets work fine!) hole punches, and twine.

The stations are arranged by grade and taught emphasizing either the concept of Matan Torah (Giving of the Torah) or the idea of Shavuot as a Pilgrimage Festival:

Matan Torah: The children should go to the age-appropriate stations:

## *Station 1: Pre- K – 1st grade*

■ **Content:** Share that on Shavuot we celebrate when the Torah was given. The Torah tells us something pretty interesting. It says in Exodus 20: 15, “And the people saw the thunder” and some people think they also “heard” the lightning. Ask: “What do you think that would be like?” There is also a Midrash that Mount Sinai suddenly blossomed with flowers in anticipation of the giving of the Torah .

■ **Activity:** Supply a large piece of poster board to each small group and ask them to draw with markers what it might have looked like to “see thunder and hear lightning” and what the mountain might have looked like all covered with flowers. For the youngest classes, you can draw an outline of a mountain, cut out a coloring book picture of Moses (easily found online), and buy flower stickers for them to use.

## *Station #2: Pre-K – K*

■ **Content:** Read the story book “No Rules for Michael” by Sylvia A. Rouss. Discuss as you go along: What do you think is going to happen? Is “sharing” a good rule? etc. Ask then to share one rule they think is good and one rule that they do not like.

■ **Activity:** Handout an outline of the two tablets of the Ten Commandments (again, easily found online -- use a child-friendly version), explaining that these rules were given by God. Discuss: Do they think these are “good rules,” why or why not? Are they easy to do? Have students decorate the handouts.

## *Station #3: 1st grade – 5th*

■ **Content:** Explain that on Shavuot we celebrate the receiving of the Torah and read the Ten Commandments. Read an appropriate version of the Ten Commandments.

■ **Discussion:** What do they think of these rules? Do they make sense? Are they easy or hard to follow?

■ **Activity:** Read the book “The 11th Commandment: Wisdom from our Children, by the Children of America,” published by Jewish Lights Publishing. For younger children, you can have them hold up a hand with every one with which they agree. Ask: “What commandments would you add?”

## *Station #4: 6th – 8th graders*

■ **Content:** Have on hand copies of the Ten Commandments from Exodus 20: 1 – 14. You may want to edit them a bit for brevity and clarity. Also have on hand Leviticus 19:9-18. Have students read through both silently.

■ **Discussion:** Which are the same? Which are different? Why do they think there are added commandments? What commandments would they add today?

## *Station # 5 – 6th – 8th graders*

■ **Content:** Have the students look at the Encyclopedia Judaica article called Commandments. If you like, you can have them look some of them up in the context of the Torah where they are found.

■ **Discussion:** Which of the 613 commandments can be done today and which cannot or, perhaps, should not be done. Ask them to discuss which commandments are meaningful to them. If you are not doing Station #4, then ask them if there are commandments they would add today.

## *Station # 6: 6th- 8th grades*

■ **Content:** Read this Midrash: “Rabbi Yochanan said: When God’s voice came forth at Mount Sinai, it divided itself into 70 human languages, so that the whole world might understand it. All at Mount Sinai, young and old, women, children, and infants according to their ability to understand. Moses too, understood only according to his capacity, as it is said (Exodus 19:19), ‘Moses spoke and God answered him with a voice.’ With a voice that Moses could hear.” (Midrash Exodus Rabbah 5:9)

■ **Discussion:** Why do you think there is a Midrash that says the Torah is for everyone? Is this a new understanding for you? What do you think the phrase: “with a voice that Moses could hear” means? Could it mean that he could not hear everything? Do you think we humans gain in understanding as the centuries pass? If yes, what are some examples? (possibly LGBT rights, for example)

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## Shavuot as one of the Pilgrimage Festivals

### *Station # 7: All ages -- Pilgrimage and Papercutting*

- Background and content of papercutting in Judaism: It had been a custom among Chassidic Jews, Sephardic Jews, and Mizrahi Jews to decorate the Ark and the sanctuary with greenery for Shavuot in commemoration of the Midrash that Mount Sinai burst into bloom when the Ten Commandments were given. But the Vilna Gaon forbade the custom, thinking it was too much like the Christian custom of decorating with flowers at Pentacost ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish\\_paper\\_cutting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_paper_cutting)). But it is hard to keep a people's joy and creativity down, so the Jews of Lithuania began to make papercuts of flowers to use as decoration on Shavuot.
- Activity: Have on hand construction paper and children's scissors for the younger children and tissue paper and adult scissors for 6th – 8th graders. The explanation should be simple for the younger students: This is one custom for Shavuot. The older students will appreciate the background. The papercuts are done by folding the paper, much like "snowflakes." Shadur, Yehudit (Summer 1986). "How Yehudit Shadur Makes a Paper-Cut". BR (Bible Review).

### *Station # 8: All ages -- Pilgrimage and decorated fruit baskets*

- According to some, this custom is in memory of a custom described in the Mishnah (Bikkurim 3:3). When the first fruits were brought up to Jerusalem, the horns of the oxen were adorned with olive wreaths and the baskets of first fruits were also decorated (see Bloch, p. 248; Goodman, p. 86; Zinger, p. 107; Sperber, p. 119). In modern day Israel, tractors are decorated with flowers and all the agricultural branches of the kibbutz bring "offerings" in a long tractor parade. If you search Google images for "Shavuot on Kibbutz," you will find many images. See Appendix A below on creating a nice fruit basket and a nice card. All the fruit that the students and possibly congregational members brought in should be arranged in decorated baskets, along with cards, to go to your designated shelter or organization.

### *Station # 9: Pilgrimage and Garlands*

- Have older students help with this as they usually do not want to wear a garland, but often the younger students like the idea. Wrap greenery around the heads of any students who are willing. Secure with wire ties. Older students can also carry the greenery into the all-purpose hall for the grand finale.

### *Station 10: Pilgrimage and White Robes:*

- For those students who forgot to wear white, you can make simple robes by folding a piece of plain white cloth from old sheets and cutting a hole for the head. Then secure a piece of twine around their waists.
- Grand finale: All students enter the social hall, bringing their baskets of fruit, their list of Commandments, their posters of Mount Sinai, etc. They share with the parents. Possibly your rabbi can read the Ten Commandments from the Torah, which is especially nice to do under a "Chuppah" made of a tallit or two as is the Sephardic custom. The rabbi may want to explain a bit about how the Torah is considered a "ketubah" between the people of Israel and God.

End with a dairy potluck. If you have parents who are interested in diversity, give them recipes for Sephardic borekas, bulemas (stretched-filled pastries), and panezikos (challah rolls). Here is a link to a site with many options from around the Jewish world: <http://mochajuden.com/?p=4272>

Information about Syrian pastries can be found here:

<https://kosherscene.wordpress.com/category/syrian-recipes/>  
<http://www.thekosherfoodies.com/sambusak/>

Why do we eat dairy on Shavuot??? Next time...

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## Appendix A: Station 8 Handout

### How to Make a Nice Fruit Basket

1. Pick out a basket.
2. Put a small amount of shredded paper in the bottom of your basket.
3. Put some of the harder fruit such as apples and oranges in next.
4. Then find some of the goodies that are hard or are in hard containers and add some.
5. Lastly, put in some soft fruit such as plums or cherries and some soft goodies, if there are any.
6. Make a card for your basket. Some baskets may need to be wrapped in cellophane. Ask an adult to help you decide and to do this.