

JEWISH GRANDPARENTS NETWORK

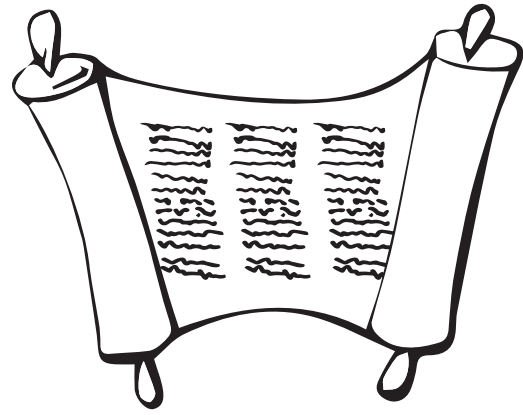
# Shavuot Discovery Kit

**For Grandparents  
and Their Families**

By Jonathan Shmidt Chapman



Welcome to your Shavuot Discovery Kit. This interactive guide is designed especially for grandparents and grandchildren (ages 3 to 8) to use together — either in person or at a distance. The kit offers ideas and activities to bring the holiday of Shavuot to life through dramatic play, imagination, and hands-on discovery. You can do all of the activities in order or choose those that are most appropriate for your family and for the ages of your grandchildren.



The Shavuot Discovery Kit is divided into three sections, each focused on a different aspect of the holiday:

- 1 Celebrate Shavuot — Customs and Rituals:** Learn about some of the customs of Shavuot — staying up late to study Torah, honoring the grain harvest time and spring's arrival, and eating dairy foods.
- 2 Gather 'Round the Mountain — Bringing the Story of Shavuot to Life:** Explore the Shavuot story and the receiving of the Torah at Mount Sinai through participatory play.
- 3 Torah in Our Time — Connecting Shavuot to Our Lives Today:** Draw connections between Torah values and the Ten Commandments to our lives today, including *kavod* (respect) and *hakarat hatov* (recognizing the good, or gratitude).

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We'd love to hear about your experience using this kit. Send your stories and feedback to [info@jewishgrandparentsnetwork.org](mailto:info@jewishgrandparentsnetwork.org).

# 1 Celebrate Shavuot — Customs and Rituals

## Background to Shavuot

**Shavuot** (Hebrew for “weeks”) is a significant holiday in Jewish tradition and culture even though it is not as well-known as some of the other major holidays. Celebrated seven weeks after Passover, Shavuot commemorates the story of the Israelites receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai (including the centerpiece of the Ten Commandments). Many Jewish communities ritually count the days between Passover and Shavuot (called counting the Omer) in anticipation. Shavuot also honors the ancient tradition of making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to bring an offering of the first fruits of the harvest to the Temple.

The rituals of Shavuot connect us to the moment of receiving the Torah, as we stay up late into the night studying and learning, recalling the night the Israelites camped at the base of Mount Sinai. The holiday (sometimes called the Festival of First Fruits) also offers an invitation to recognize the arrival of the spring season, enjoying the taste



of the first fruits as we remember the grain harvest rituals in the time of the Temple. Many people are familiar with the tradition of eating dairy treats on Shavuot, which will likely be a favorite activity shared with grandchildren!

### Grandparents can prepare for Shavuot by considering these questions:

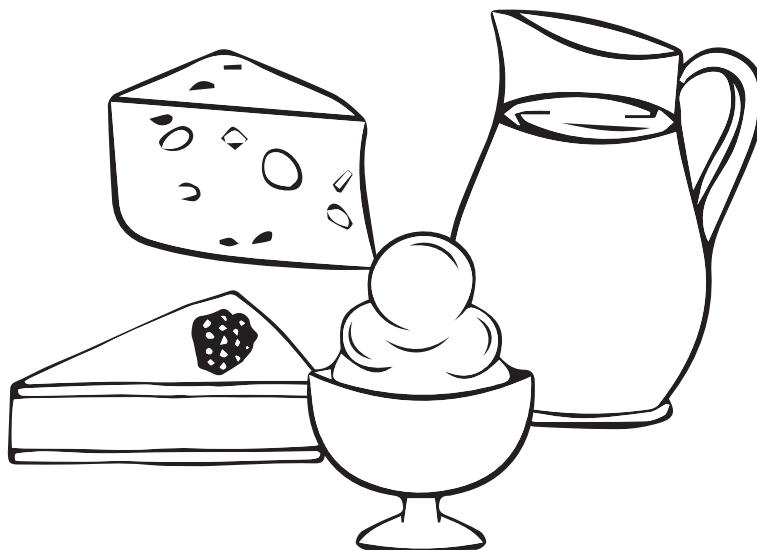
- We traditionally count down the days between Passover and Shavuot in anticipation. What events or occasions are you most looking forward to this year?
- What would you and your grandchildren like to understand better about Shavuot?

### Help grandchildren get ready for Shavuot by using these prompts:

- Shavuot celebrates the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people. The Torah has lots of stories about siblings and families that we can learn from. If you could write a story about your family, what would you say?
- If you could stay up all night, what would you do with the extra time?

## We celebrate Shavuot through a variety of customs and rituals:

- **Studying Torah through the Night:** Our tradition teaches that the Israelites overslept the night before receiving the Ten Commandments as they camped at the base of Mount Sinai. It is customary to stay up all night on the eve of Shavuot studying and learning Torah together to make up for the mistake the Israelites made and to show our own excitement for receiving the Torah. One of the texts we typically study is the Book of Ruth — the most famous Jew by choice and a symbol of deep commitment to Jewish tradition.
- **Eating Dairy Foods and Treats:** On Shavuot, many people enjoy dairy foods like cheesecake, blintzes, and ice cream. This is a reminder of the sweetness of the Torah, as well as the way the Torah talks about the Land of Israel as “a land flowing with milk and honey.”
- **Commemorating the Grain Harvest Festival:** Shavuot is one of three pilgrimage holidays, when the Jewish people traveled to Jerusalem in the time of the ancient Temple. The grain harvest time is in early summer in Israel, when the people brought first fruits as an offering. It is customary to enjoy fresh fruit as part of the holiday celebration to commemorate the ancient tradition of bringing the first fruits of the season to the Temple on Shavuot.



**Here are some activities to help you explore the customs of Shavuot with your grandchild:**

## **Shavuot Story Sleepover**

### **Materials:**

Blankets, pillows, chairs

### **Instructions:**

1. Together, create a tent out of blankets, pillows, chairs, and any other objects you want to use from around the house. Imagine that you have set up camp around Mount Sinai.
2. You can put on music and have a dance party around your campsite or pretend to walk around as if you are wandering through the desert.
3. Read bedtime stories by flashlight inside the tent. You can choose a few favorite books together or focus on stories that highlight the values found in the Torah. [Here](#) are some suggestions.
4. You can stay up late reading together in the tradition of Shavuot or enjoy some music, for example, [Debbie Friedman's "The 613 Commandments"](#) and Ellen Allard's ["There Are Ten."](#)



For grandparents at a distance, use FaceTime or Zoom to have a late-night call and read or tell a story. You can make your own cozy tents in each of your own homes and read by flashlight at a distance.

## **Dairy Delight**

Make a dairy treat to enjoy together, either together in person or at a distance (with help from a parent or grownup).

Here are a few easy recipe ideas:

- [Cheese toast with fruit](#)
- [Two-ingredient rugelach](#)
- [Easy cheese blintzes](#)
- Some Sephardic Jewish communities make a seven-layered bread called siete cielos (seven heavens), representing Mount Sinai. Here is [one recipe](#).



If you don't want to fuss in the kitchen, have an ice-cream party instead. Buy a few flavors of ice cream and several topping choices. Lay them out as a sundae bar. Use chocolate ice cream with colorful sprinkles to look like Mount Sinai. Have a contest with other grandparents and grandchildren to see who can [build the most creative ice-cream mountain!](#)

## Signs of Spring Scavenger Hunt


### Materials:

Signs of Spring Scavenger Hunt Template, camera

### Instructions:

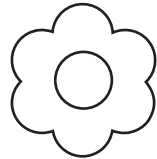
1. Print out the Signs of Spring Scavenger Hunt Template on page 7.
2. Together, take a walk on a nice day to look for signs of spring. Search for the items on the template. Alternatively, you can design your own spring-themed scavenger hunt, challenging each other to find certain items around the backyard or in a park.
3. When you find one of the items, check it off the list and take a photo of it.
4. When you get back home, look through your pictures to share your adventure.



 For grandparents at a distance, you can each go on your own spring journey and collect items you find along the way. Then over Facetime or Zoom, share with each other what you found.

## Signs of Spring Scavenger Hunt Template

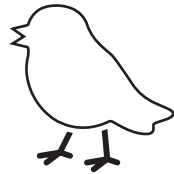
Take a springtime walk and find as many of these items as you can along the way.



Flower



Bug / Ant



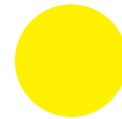
Bird



Squirrel



Soil



Something yellow



Tree



Something purple



Cloud



Add your own

## 2 Gather 'Round the Mountain — Bringing the Story to Life

The following is an adaptation of the Shavuot story for young children. You can learn more about the history of Shavuot and the origins of the holiday [here](#).

Read or tell your grandchild the story of Shavuot whether you are together in person or at a distance. Your grandchild may like to draw the story while you tell it or afterward.

This story begins right after the Passover story ends. If you'd like to read that story before this one, you can find an age-appropriate version in the [Passover Discovery Kit](#).

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**After many years** working in the hot sun for Pharaoh, the Israelites were finally free! Moses led them into the wilderness. They walked, and they walked, and they walked. After seven weeks of nonstop traveling, the Israelites finally stopped to set up camp at the base of a very big mountain. "This is Mount Sinai," Moses told the Israelites. "We will camp here for the night. Be up and ready early in the morning, because here we will receive a very important gift."

The people were very tired from traveling through the wilderness, and that night they fell into a deep sleep. They slept so soundly that they weren't up and ready in the morning for the big moment as Moses had instructed. They jumped out of bed when they heard a very loud blast from the loudest shofar ever sounded. They looked outside their tents in amazement. Mount Sinai began to rumble and shake, clouds swirled overhead, and lightning lit up the sky. Suddenly they heard a voice coming from the top of the mountain. "This must be the voice of God," they thought. The people were awestruck. The voice shared the Ten Commandments with them — a list of rules and values that would help them become a community.





The Israelites excitedly waited for Moses to return from the top of the mountain. And waited. And waited. After what felt like a very long time, they got nervous that Moses wasn't coming back. "Who will lead us? What will we do on our own?" The Israelites worried they wouldn't have a leader anymore. They gathered up their gold and shiny objects, melted them down, and built a statue in the shape of a cow. "This golden calf will be our new leader!" they shouted.

They were so busy dancing and celebrating around their golden statue that they didn't see Moses coming back down the mountain. Moses was holding the Ten Commandments, written on two beautiful stone tablets. "This was your gift, but you couldn't be patient," Moses said, and he threw the tablets to the ground. They broke into many pieces. "We're sorry we didn't believe you were coming back," the Israelites said.

Moses went back up the mountain, and the Israelites waited patiently this time. Moses brought a new set of tablets, along with other laws and values of the Torah. The Israelites realized the Torah would help them grow into a kind, loving, and caring community. The Israelites packed up their things, closed up their tents, and left Mount Sinai to continue their journey into the wilderness — carrying their precious new gift with them.

**Questions to ask about the story:**

- How do you think the Israelites felt when they received their important gift — the Torah — at Mount Sinai?
- When was a time you had trouble waiting patiently for something to happen? Why is it sometimes hard to be patient?

## Shavuot Shadow Storytelling

Bring the Shavuot story to life using shadow puppetry and your imagination.

### Materials:

Shadow Puppets Template (see page 11); black construction paper; scissors; tape; popsicle sticks or straws; LED flashlight (the light on a phone will work)

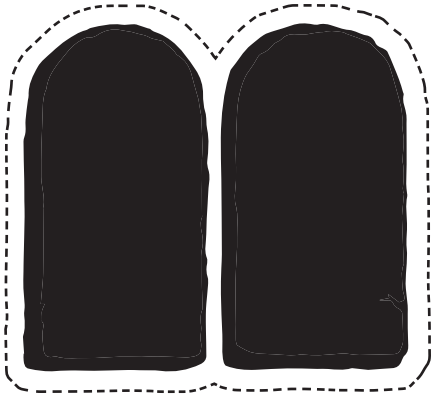
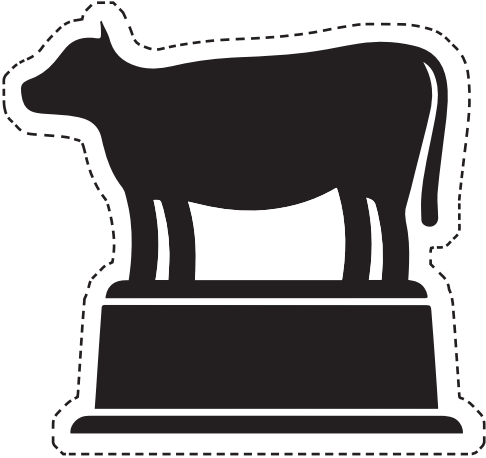
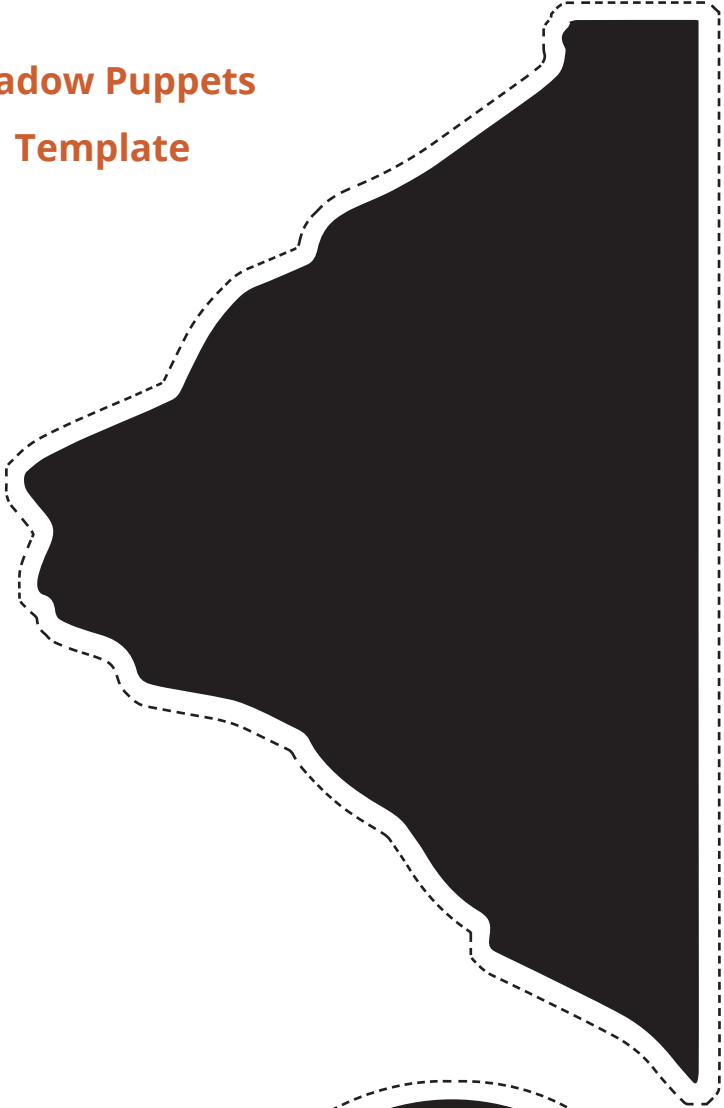
### Instructions:

1. Print out a copy of the shadow puppets on page 11 and cut out the shapes. Then trace the shapes onto black construction paper and cut them out.
2. Attach the black construction paper shapes with tape to popsicle sticks or straws.
3. Find a white wall in your home and turn down the lights in the room. Shine an LED flashlight behind the shadow puppet, casting a shadow against the wall. Experiment with moving the puppet closer and farther away from the light to change the size of the shadow.
4. Decide who will play each shadow character. If you choose, the grandparent can read the story aloud again while the grandchild enacts it with the puppets. Or perhaps a sibling would like to be the narrator.
5. Now bring parts of the story to life using the puppets:
  - Moses climbs the mountain and disappears into a cloud on the top.
  - The clouds swirl overhead, and the mountain shakes.
  - The Israelites dance with the golden calf.
  - Moses returns with the Ten Commandments.
6. Experiment with adding sound effects and music to help bring the story to life. Try making the sound of thunder by banging on a drum or the table or use different pieces of music to underscore the drama of your show.
7. Once you have practiced, invite other family members or friends to watch your puppet show.



For grandparents at a distance, use FaceTime or Zoom in creative ways. See how the puppets get bigger when you go closer to the camera and smaller when you move them away. You can also play with having Moses climb from one Zoom box to the other by having one person move their puppet out of the frame just as the other moves into frame!

Shadow Puppets  
Template



## 3

## Torah in Our Time — Connecting Shavuot to Our Lives Today

On Shavuot, the Israelites received the Ten Commandments, a list of laws and values for how to live our lives with kindness and love for each other. They include the ideas of *kavod* (respect) for our parents and *hakarat hatov* (recognizing the good), being grateful for what we have.

**Here are some activities to explore and share these themes and ways we can embody the values of the Torah with grandchildren:**

### The Ten “Grand-Mandments”

What are the ten rules, ideas, actions, or principles that are most important to you and your grandchild when you are together, either in person or on a video call? Create a set of Ten “Grand-Mandments” that are a reminder of the ways you like to be together with each other. Write them as commands. For example, you might include “Make each other laugh” or “Speak respectfully to one another.” You can create this with your grandchild as a way to learn what you each find most important about being together. Write, draw, and decorate your Ten Grand-Mandments.

If you’d like to create a Ten Commandments craft to go along with your Ten Grand-Mandments, check out the origami project [here](#).

### Happy with What I Have: Making a Gratitude Pillow

#### Materials:

Paper; white pillowcase; laundry marker; craft supplies

#### Instructions:

1. Have a conversation with your grandchild about the concept of gratitude. Ask: When did you last say thank you? What are the things you are most thankful for?
2. You can use laundry markers and a simple plain white pillowcase to create a Gratitude Pillow. Draw the things you are grateful for in a picture. Practice your drawing on a piece of paper first. Now, draw them on a pillowcase using a permanent laundry marker. This way, you will have a reminder of what you are grateful for when you go to bed and when you wake up.



3. Alternatively, create any type of craft you can display that will help you remember what you are grateful for when you wake up each morning. You can use craft supplies to draw a picture, make a collage, or design a poster. Put it in a picture frame or hang it near your bed.

## Shavuot Family Storytelling

The Torah offers a written way for us to remember our story as a Jewish people and pass it on to future generations. Together, explore this idea of memory and tradition by sharing your own family stories.

### Instructions:

Choose an old photo that represents a family story that you share with your grandchild. Then, ask your grandchild to look through a photo album that features them, and have them tell you a story about a memory from the photograph they choose. You can also do this using objects that inspire a memory from a family trip or a keepsake from the past.

Here are some tips for [telling great family stories](#).

### For older children:

Shavuot usually falls around the time of Memorial Day in the United States. Both holidays help us remember generations that came before us, paving the way for the people we are today. On Shavuot, we remember the Israelites receiving the Torah, which marks the moment that we became the Jewish people. On Memorial Day, we commemorate the sacrifice of fallen soldiers, who fought for our right to be free. In different ways, both holidays demonstrate our identity and remind us of the ways our ancestors shape who we are today.

Use family pictures and storytelling to remember an important family ancestor. Share a story about what they did in their lifetime and think about how their actions impact your life and who you are.

