Introduction to Shavuot

Shavuot (*Yom HaBikurim* in the *Torah)* celebrates and commemorates the giving of the *Ten Commandments* to the Israelites at Mt. Sinai.
Beginning with the second night of *Passover*, the Israelites who left Egypt underwent 49 days of spiritual improvement and purification until they were ready to receive the *Torah* from God (*Shavuot* ends this 49-day "*omer*" period). We can undergo a similar process of spiritual development each year during these 49 days (how to do that is beyond the scope of this website). According to our tradition, the Israelites in Egypt had sunk to the 49th level of spiritual impurity (*tum'a*). The Israelites had to raise themselves in 49 daily stages to be worthy of receiving the *Torah*. Several books and siddurs portray the 49 days of the *omer* as corresponding to the Seven *Sefirot* embedded in the seven weeks. This awareness can help us work on and maximize the power inherent in each day of the *omer* to fix that particular *sefira* in ourselves. We thus relive this transition from slavery to freedom and the service of God each year as we try to perfect our *midot* (personal characteristics) to again be worthy of receiving the *Torah* on *Shavuot*.

Symbolism of the *Shavuot* Offering
In the *Temple* in Jerusalem, the only communal sacrifice of leavened bread was on *Shavuot*.
Leavening in dough is compared to arrogance in humans (people puff themselves up to look more important than they actually are). During *Passover* we destroy, and refrain from eating, leaven--just as we try to destroy/remove arrogance from our personalities. After *Passover*, we continue to work on our personal traits (*midot*) until we reach *Shavuot*, when we celebrate receiving the *Torah*. At *Shavuot*, we Jews have a right to feel important, since we are spiritually elevated by virtue of having been given the *Torah*.

***Shavuot*: Universal Customs**
The universal custom is to eat at least one *dairy* food during *Shavuot*.
Possible reason At the time the Israelites received the *Torah*, they did not have any *kosher* meat (they had not been required to eat *kosher* until then) and so the only food they were permitted to eat was *dairy* food.
Another universal custom is to stay awake all night (if possible) studying *Torah*.

***Shavuot*: Symbols**
Unlike other *Jewish festivals*, *Shavuot* has no concrete symbols and no specific unique commandments/*mitzvot*, other than sacrifices that were brought in the *Temple* in Jerusalem.

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