

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO SHAVUOT


IMMERSE IN A MIKVEH

Just as the Jewish people immersed themselves prior to receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai, so the custom of immersing in a mikveh on Shavuot is a powerful way to prepare for the holiness of the day (especially if one can immerse with the appearance of the "morning star," in the darkness before the dawn). The mikveh of Shavuot possesses extraordinary qualities: it is the source of the purification from all the *mikvaot* we may use during the year. It is also the mikveh of the "Fiftieth Gate" – the all-inclusive level, representing the highest gate of *teshuvah* and return to our Source. The spiritual light that radiates on Shavuot is an extremely high and subtle illumination of Divine wisdom. When we are in a pure state, we can more fully sense and receive this light.

RENEW YOURSELF

Shavuot is a time of new growth and vitality. Despite everything you have thought about yourself until now, look at yourself exactly the way you long to be. Then, begin your life anew, as if you had done absolutely nothing until now. Forget about your greatest successes as well as your worst failures. Put your educational degrees and qualifications aside. Just as the Jewish people threw off all extraneous wisdoms before they received the Torah, throw off your preconceived notions about life and yourself. And then be ready to do the same thing tomorrow! Shavuot teaches us that in truth, nature does not exist apart from God. Every day and every moment is completely new, and full of infinite possibility.

LOOK HIGHER AND YEARN FOR GOD

After forty-nine days of counting the *Omer*, Shavuot is the culmination – the Fiftieth Gate of "Return" (*teshuvah*). It is the gate of God's "return" to us, out of pure love and desire. For the past seven weeks, each successive day held a higher level of *teshuvah* and yearning for the impending encounter with God on Shavuot. This is the day when we first received the Torah at Mount Sinai – an experience which we spiritually relive every year. Our efforts to return to God are crowned on the last day with God's own "return" to us. Prepare for Shavuot: Look a little higher than usual, think about the big picture, and sense the yearning in the air... "Return to Me, and I will return to you" (*Malachi* 3:7). 

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