



# Multiple Ways to Reach the Mountain

Dr. Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences suggests that learners approach content through a variety of modalities. Gardner asserts that the realization of different approaches to learning should empower learners to explore the world through multiple avenues. Use the following activities to celebrate Shavuot in a variety of ways.



## Logical / Mathematical

**It Really Is about the Destination**—Before *B'nei Yisrael* were at *Har Sinai*, they were encamped at Rephidim. Calculate how far it is

between the two places. How far is the distance measured in number of football fields? Calculate how long it might take for one person to walk between the two places. Traveling with a group often takes a longer time, how long do you think it may have taken the Israelites to travel?

**There Were How Many?!**—When *B'nei Yisrael* left Egypt, it was estimated that “there were about 600,000 men on foot, not including children.” (Exodus 12:37). How many people would you estimate were there in total? While, it might seem impossible to gather this many people around *Har Sinai*, how many people do you think could be gathered around the mountain and be able to hear Moses without amplification?

**Terrific Tens**—In honor of the Ten Commandments, collect other groups of ten things. Try ten toys, ten balls, ten action figures, etc. Compare the items. What is similar about them? How are they different?

**Feel Like a Number**—Beyond the Ten Commandments, there are many numbers associated with *B'nei Yisrael* receiving the Torah and traveling through the desert: 3 days preparing to receive the Torah, 5 books of Torah, 10 commandments, 40 years of wandering in the desert, 54 *parshiot* (Torah portions), 613 mitzvot. Go on a scavenger hunt through the Torah to find more numbers. What numbers keep repeating? Which numbers are related? Which can be divided evenly into each other?

## The Themes and Texts of Shavuot

The Biblical version of Shavuot focuses on the agricultural nature of the holiday. The Jewish people were to take their *Bikkurim* (first fruits) to Jerusalem, where they would offer the *Bikkurim* at the *Beit Hamikdash* (The Temple). The Rabbinic version of Shavuot focuses on the holiday as the anniversary of God giving the Torah to *B'nei Yisrael* (the Israelites) at *Har Sinai* (Mount Sinai). With these two foci, there are several texts that are particularly associated with Shavuot and its theme of commandment and commitment:

- *Shemot* 19:1 – 20:23 (the giving of the Ten Commandments)
- *Devarim* 26:1 – 10 (the bringing of the *Bikkurim*)
- *Megillat Ruth*



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## Verbal / Linguistic

**Call It Out**—The Hebrew word לְקַרֵּא (*likro*) is usually translated simply as “to read.” However, it can also mean “to call out” or “to read out loud.” Thus, קְרִיאַת הַתּוֹרָה (*kriat haTorah*) requires that the Torah be read out loud to the congregation. For Shavuot, learn an interesting text but, instead of reading the text out of a book, listen to the text being read by someone else. Take the opportunity to read a text to someone else as well.

**Engage in Repartee**—The action and dialogue in the first chapter of *Megillat Ruth* is very dramatic. With a friend, read the parts of Ruth and Naomi as you think they could have been spoken.

**Team Ruth All the Way**—Write fan fiction about the first chapter of the book of Ruth. Answer one of these questions or another one you may have: Why did Ruth and Orpah want to leave the only home they had ever known? What happened to Orpah after Ruth and Naomi left?

**Who Can Retell?**—According to Moses’ retelling of events, Moses stood between God and the people in order to convey God’s words (*Devarim* 5:5). Imagine Moses relating the 10 Commandments to *B’nei Yisrael* at *Har Sinai*. Announce the Ten Commandments in the way that you imagine Moses did. Then, do your own dramatic reading. Try doing it in different styles: spoken word, Shakespearian English, etc. Or read the Ten Commandments in the way that you think your favorite actor would if they were playing Moses in a movie.

**La Decalogue**—The Ten Commandments have been translated into many languages. Read them out loud in one or more of those languages. Try [French](#), [Spanish](#), [Yiddish](#), and even [Xhosa](#). See if anyone can translate your words into English or back into Hebrew.



## Visual / Spatial

**Picture This**—Use a [painting](#) (or other visual representation) of a biblical scene and interpret the narrative through the visual representation. As you interpret, ask yourself the questions: What do you see? What do you think it represents?

**Stone Cold Tablets**—The Ten Commandments are often depicted as being etched into two arched, connected tablets. Envision another way that the Ten Commandments might have been presented and create your own visual representation in the media of your choice.

**What a Cut-up**—Paper cutting is an artform that was [closely connected to Shavuot](#) among Ashkenazic communities in Eastern Europe. The paper cuts would be hung to beautify homes for the holiday. Do your own [paper cuts](#) in preparation for Shavuot and hang them in your home. Remember that grown-up supervision is advised.

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## Musical / Rhythmic

**This Is God Speaking**—Imagine how God’s voice sounded to Moses as God spoke to him on *Har Sinai*. What was the pitch of God’s voice? How quickly or slowly did God speak? Did Moses hear God’s voice clearly, or was it muffled? Describe what you think Moses heard and/or try to emulate the sound

**There Were 613 Commandments**—Sing a song about the 613 *mitzvot* (commandments). Not sure where to start? Learn Debbie Friedman’s song, [613 Commandments](#).

**Bring the Noise**—As *B’nei Yisrael* (the Israelites) prepared to receive the Torah at *Har Sinai*, there was loud thunder and a *shofar* blasting (*Shemot* 19:16, 19). In preparation for celebrating *matan Torah* (the receiving of the Torah) on Shavuot, consider what it sounded like to receive the Torah and recreate the scene. What did it sound like with the thunder blasting and the shofar blowing?



## Body / Kinesthetic

**Stand in the Place Where You Learn**—In many traditional places of learning, people would (and still do) use a *shtender*, a dais at which one could place a book and learn with a chavruta, a learning partner. Stand while you learn and sit too. Compare how you learn better, standing or sitting.

**I Want to Study Torah All Night**—Many people have the tradition of staying up all night studying on Shavuot night. Compare how learn when you’re tired versus when you’ve had a good night’s sleep.

**Not the Mayflower’s Pilgrims**—The *Shalosh Regalim* (the three pilgrimage holidays: *Pesah*, Shavuot, and Sukkot) required the Jewish people to make the trip to Jerusalem. For Shavuot, place goodies representing *bikkurim* around the building, so people can gather them and make their way to a central location where they can enjoy a Shavuot celebration. Can’t place goodies around the building? Create a skit in which people gather the goodies and then celebrate.

**You Shall Not Take out Stuffing**—Gather your stuffed animals at the bottom of the stairs. Stand at the top and read them the Ten Commandments. Bonus points for dressing in the style of Moses while delivering the commandments.



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## Naturalistic

**Say Cheese!**—Shavuot is not just about learning; it is also associated with eating dairy items, cheesecake and blintzes being particularly popular. Find a good recipe (maybe one that Bubbie used to make) and bake your own. Maybe try different types of cheese and compare their flavors, textures, etc.

**Dude! Awesome!**—Standing at the foot of *Har Sinai*, *B'nei Yisrael* felt awe and wonder. Find a place in nature that fills you with awe. Bonus points if it is near a mountain.



## Interpersonal

**Partnership Learning**—Learn a text with a *chavruta* (learning partner; the word “*chavruta*” comes from the same root as the Hebrew word for “friend”). Read to each other. Explain the text to each other. Challenge each other to understand the different aspects of the text.

**Family Time**—Several of the Ten Commandments focus on interactions with other people, with special attention paid to honoring one’s parents. *Megillat Ruth* also has a strong theme of commitment to one’s family. On Shavuot, focus on your family relationships. How will you better embody the *mitzvah of kibbud av v'em* (respecting one’s parents)? What will you do to make the most of time spent with your family?

**Build the World Community**—The entire community was present at *Har Sinai* for the giving of the Torah. However, today the Jewish people is scattered all over the world. Get ready for Shavuot by strengthening your connection with Jews from around the world by engaging in *chavruta* study via Skype, Zoom, Facetime, etc. Pick a Shavuot-related text to learn together.

**Outsider/Insider**—Ruth, born a Moabite, was an outsider when she first journeyed with Naomi, her mother-in-law, back to Naomi’s homeland; but she became an integral part of her new community. Do something to welcome newcomers to your community and help them to find their own place.





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## Intrapersonal

**Get That Shabbat Feeling**—Among the Ten Commandments is the *mitzvah* to observe Shabbat. Commit to one thing you can do for yourself to rest or take a break. Bonus points for finding a way to shut off screens.

**Prepare Your Soul**—*B'nei Yisrael* purify themselves in preparation for God to appear on *Har Sinai* (*Devarim* 20: 9 – 16). In preparation for Shavuot, Make your own spiritual preparation plan. Focus on what you can do to purify your inner self.

**Torah Everyday**—It has been suggested that, although God gave the Torah to *B'nei Yisrael* at *Har Sinai*, each individual has the opportunity to receive the Torah every day. In preparation for the holiday, focus on one thing from the Torah that you will accept on yourself. Record your thoughts on how accepting different aspects of the Torah affects you.



## Existential

**Better and Better**—One of the themes of Shavuot is covenant and commitment. What commitments can you make today to improve your life? Pick one and start making a plan to implement that improvement.

**In the First Place...**—In the Torah, God instructs *B'nei Yisrael* to bring their *Bikkurim* to the Temple beginning on Shavuot. Consider how offering the first of your earnings to others can be a meaningful experience. Explore ways that you can give of your own resources to help the community or to serve others.