



SAMMY SPIDER'S FIRST SHAVUOT

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Sammy Spider lowers himself down on a strand of webbing to get a closer look at the Shapiro family's preparations for Shavuot, a holiday celebrating the time when God gave the Torah to Moses.

JEWISH CONCEPTS

Shavuot – The Festival of Weeks

Shavuot (“Weeks,” in Hebrew) falls just seven weeks after Passover. The reasons for its commemoration are two-fold: first, the ancient, early summer grain festival; and second, the transformative giving and receiving of the Torah and the covenant this established between God and Israel.

The time from Passover to *Shavuot* is marked by the counting of the Omer – an *omer* being a unit of dry measure, signifying the amount of grain given in thanks to God at the ancient Temple. The counting is a link and reminder that the Israelites’ freedom, begun on Passover, was incomplete until the people accepted the Torah at Mt. Sinai on *Shavuot*.

As Sammy Spider learns, eating dairy products is customary on *Shavuot*. Many reasons are possible for this, one being that it is due to the springtime abundance of dairy products. In any case, it is traditional to eat milk products on *Shavuot*. In addition to the blintzes that appeal to Sammy, cheesecake and fruit soups are also routinely eaten. Keep in mind that small hands can help prepare and serve these delicacies while your little ones learn gratitude for food the family shares.

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

The Story of Ruth

It is customary on *Shavuot* to have special readings from The Book of Ruth. Ruth’s taking on the religion of her mother-in-law mirrors the Israelites’ acceptance of the Torah. In addition, like *Shavuot*, the narrative takes place during the early summer harvest.

The story of Ruth conveys sweet family love and a beautiful reminder of the openness of Judaism. Ruth, left a widow in a land not her own, chooses to remain with her Israelite mother-in-law, Naomi, rather than return to her birth family. Ruth is considered the first convert, or Jew-by-choice. Given today’s diverse family structures and with conversion increasingly common, we remember Ruth, great-grandmother to David, King of Israel.