

Holy Fire

"The Festival of Shavu'ot arrived, and the believers all gathered together in one place. Suddenly there came a sound from the sky like a roar of a violent wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then they saw what looked like tongues of fire, which separated and came to rest on each one of them. They were all filled with the Ruach HaKodesh and began to talk in different languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak." Acts 2:1-4

by Sandra Warmoth
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Fifty days from the Levitical Festival of First Fruits/Bikkurim -- the day Yahu'Shua (Jesus) rose from the dead -- the Church experienced Pentecost. Pentecost is Greek for "fifty," and in Hebrew this Levitical Feast is referred to as Shavu'ot, which means "weeks," or Chag ha'Katzir, translated, "Festival of the Harvest" because the Holiday marks the beginning of the spring wheat harvest. Shavu'ot falls within the Babylonian month of Sivan and is one of three Pilgrim Festivals mandated in Devarim/Deuteronomy 16:16. These Festivals are to be observed from generation to generation, in accordance with Vayyiqra/Leviticus 23.

The 50 days is resultant from an Omer count. The Divine Instruction in Vayyiqra/Leviticus 23:15-16 is to count off seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath, and then the sheaf of the wave offering is to be brought before the L-rd at the Holy Temple. Thus, 50 days are counted, up to the day after the seventh Sabbath. This counting, called the Omer count, brings us to Shavu'ot.

There are differing opinions within the camp of Judaism as to whether to begin the Omer count from the

day after the Passover Sabbath or the day after the regular Sabbath falling within the Passover Holiday.

Jewish tradition teaches that the Omer count began the day after the Passover Sabbath during the time of the Temple. Most Jews today begin the count from this time. A sheaf of the first grain of the barley crop was brought before the L-rd as a wave offering, in accordance with Vayyiqra/Leviticus 23:10. Once the ceremony was completed, the Omer count began.

JEWISH CELEBRATION OF THE CHAG

Upon the completion of the 50 day count, Shavu'ot would officially arrive. During the Festival, pilgrims and their little ones made their way to Jerusalem (Yerushalayim in Hebrew) bearing baskets of the first fruits from their fields and orchards to present as freewill offerings. They would bring their first fruits to the Temple courtyard and express their thanks to G-d for His Provision, and then present themselves before the priest. After recounting a brief description of the Exodus story, in accordance with Devarim/Deuteronomy 26:5-10, which the pilgrims recited in the presence of the priest, they would set their baskets of first fruits down and bow before the L-rd in reverence. The priest then waved the baskets before the L-rd. The new wheat crop was harvested during this time, as well, and the first fruits from this spring wheat were brought to the Holy Temple. From this new grain, the priests would hand-process the wheat into fine flour, carefully weigh out two-tenths of an ephah of the sifted flour, about four quarts-worth -- one-ephah for each loaf, and then prepare two large

loaves of leavened bread specially shaped into a rectangular form with four horns resembling those of the Altar. After baking them, the loaves were presented before the L-rd along with animal sacrifices and drink offerings. As the priests made their way to the Altar with this communal offering, a procession of Levites would elevate the Spiritual atmosphere of all those in attendance by sounding their trumpets and playing their flutes. The priests would then present the wave offering before the L-rd. This grand service concluded with the priests gathering in the Chamber of the Hearth to partake of the two Shavu'ot loaves and the accompanying peace offering, while the pilgrims and their children rejoiced before the L-rd throughout Yerushalayim.

According to Jewish tradition, the observance of Shavu'ot in the month of Sivan marks the day that G-d Sealed His Covenant with His Chosen People at Mount Sinai when He Presented them with the Ten Commandments, the Divine Instruction on holy living that the Children of Israel were to uphold as a Standard before the nations. Torah, G-d's Law, is referred to as me'orasah, speaking of the betrothal between G-d and His Beloved Israel. The Israelites encamped in the wilderness of Sinai in preparation for receiving the Torah, and through a Divine Act, G-d Reaffirmed and then Sealed His Covenant Relationship with Am Yisra'el, the People of Israel.

In preparation for Shavu'ot today, Jewish homes and synagogues are decorated with branches, leaves, and fragrant flowers, and roses are placed on the Torah Scrolls, redolent of the greenery on Mount Sinai during the Giving of the Torah. The Sephardic communities customarily read the "Azharot," or exhortations, a liturgical poem listing the 613 Commandments in rhyme. The 613 Commandments cover both vertical -- man to G-d -- and horizontal -- man to man -- rules for holy living. The Ashkenazi community recites the liturgical Aramaic poem "Akdamus." This mellifluous poem, based on the Ten Commandments, is usually chanted before the Torah reading. The poem extols our Creator, Whose Divine Presence Shelters Am Yisra'el in Yerushalayim, and it speaks of the goyyim, or nations, persecuting His Elect, but Am Yisra'el steadfastly adhere to their faith and are thus rewarded in the Kingdom of G-d. The man who authored this poem, Rav Meir ben Rav Yitzchak, had a son who was slain during the pogroms of the First Crusade in 1096.

During this dark period, thousands of Jews were slaughtered by clanging symbols of Christendom, and many others suffered under forced baptisms by this apostate church body. The author himself was forced into a debate with priests, and bravely upheld his Judaic faith, refusing to embrace the fire-brand Christianity that was being thrust down the throats of our hapless Jewish brethren. The poem has been a source of strength for the Jewish People throughout the countless ages that they have suffered at the hands of their enemies.

Special Scriptural readings in the synagogues include Shemot/Exodus 19-20, which is the account of the Giving of the Ten Commandments; Bemidbar/Numbers 28:26-31, Directives for observing Shavu'ot, and Yehezqel/Ezekiel 1 & 3, describing the Ezekiel's Prophetic vision of G-d's Throne. Ezekiel's vision describes hearing G-d's Voice, much in keeping with the Voice that was heard when the People of Israel received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. Also, other readings include Tehillim/Psalms 113-118, referred to as the Hallel, or the Psalms of Praise to the L-rd.

Diaspora Jews, those Jewish brethren who are still stranded in the Exile among the nations, observe a second day of Shavu'ot in accordance with the ancient custom of the sighting of the New Moon. It is very interesting that the Book of Rut/Ruth is included in the synagogue readings on this day. The Book of Rut/Ruth is the appropriate picture of the grafted-in Church helping Israel in Her time of need.

A LESSON FOR THE CHURCH FROM THE BOOK OF RUTH

Christians would do well to read the Book of Rut/Ruth during the Festival. As Christians reflect upon its meaning, it would be most fitting for us to repent of the many sins Christendom has committed against the Chosen People in the Name of Jesus over the centuries. In fact, even today, with unprecedented access to the Holy Bible and historical records, extra-Biblical replacement and anti-Semitic teachings stubbornly cling to the Church Body, which has yet to purge itself of worldly assimilation and paganism. Indeed, when considering the historic relations between G-d's two Vessels, the Jewish People and the Church, the mantle that many professing Christians have passed down throughout millennia has been: "Come to Jesus and get

REDIRECTING THE CHURCH TO HADEREK

paganized. Don't come to Jesus and get persecuted. Come to Jesus and get both paganized and persecuted." Talmideem/disciples, we should be appalled at this tragic reality, for it goes against all of the excellent and noble teachings that Rabboni Yahu'Shua handed down to our Apostles!

Out of genuine repentance should arise a fresh commitment to doing all within our grasp to change this sad state of affairs for the better by our collectively walking more closely in the footsteps of HaMoshiach/The Messiah, Who came to serve our Jewish brethren. Let us not think of ourselves more highly than we ought, Christian soldiers: Being an ambassador for Christ is not about forcing Christianity down the throats of our Jewish brethren and peddling a fire and brimstone salvation message to these precious ones who have been Hand-Selected by the Holy One of Israel in Whom we serve and by Whose Grace we stand.

If we aspire to become Ambassadors of Christ, then let us do so in action and in Truth, remembering that the wisdomless words of a tongue are as a fire, a world of untamed evil that itself will be set afire by She'ol/the grave or hell (Ya'akov/James 3:5-6; Mishle/Proverbs 12:18; 18:21). Let us mirror the irreproachable manner in which Yahu'Shua lived. Let us take care to properly handle the Word of Truth by applying ourselves to really understanding the altogether correct teachings that the Wonderful Counselor imparted to us. Let us ponder the mitzvot hagadol, the great deeds, which The Humble Servant so lovingly performed in His pure and holy effort to strengthen, encourage and elevate our Jewish brethren. Remember, Christians, Yahu'Shua said His disciples would do things even greater than He has done, so let us aspire to this extraordinary goal by shedding all that hinders and taints His Living Testimony.

May The Holy One of Israel forgive the Church, and expeditiously Redirect Her to Her Calling to love (1 Corinthians 13); be a comfort to (Yesha'Yahu/Isaiah 40:1-3 & 2 Corinthians 1:3-4); a servant to (Romans 15:8); a material blessing to (Romans 15:27), and a Spiritual and physical strength for (Rut/Ruth 1:11-17) G-d's Elect, and may today's Christians uphold this high Calling as Am Yisra'el again faces persecution; this time at the hands of Her Muslim tormentors and those spineless nations that appease their wickedness.

The Church has strayed to unfruitful pasture and it needs to return to HaDerek -- The Way -- to be reconnected with its Biblical foundation. This begins by weaning ourselves off the milk of G-d's Word and feasting on the meat of His Word, as we are admonished to do in Ivreem/Hebrews 5:12-14. A good time to set our collective feet back on HaDerek is through celebrating Shavu'ot, or Pentecost. How profitable it would be to have a genuine and lasting revitalization within the Church Body through another revelatory Holy Fire experience such as what our Apostles witnessed in Yerushalayim during this Festival.

To be sure, such an enriching journey for the Christian pilgrim would yield an abundance of good fruit. This Rite of Passage should start with Firstfruits, for the conclusion of this important Festival kicks off the Omer count for the Church. As the Festival draws to a close, the counting gets underway, which occurs on the day after the regular Sabbath falling within the Passover Holiday, rather than the day after the Passover Sabbath. In this way, Christians count off the 50 days from Firstfruits and arrive at the proper day for Pentecost in accordance with the Continuing Testament, or New Testament. Thus, Firstfruits facilitates the Omer count, which keeps Christians on target as we count off the days in anticipation of the Festival of Pentecost. With the Festival of Firstfruits as our marker for the Omer count to another Biblical Festival, we begin to see the Wisdom of G-d and how He Intertwines His Feasts to reveal to mankind His awesome Plan of Redemption.

What more does the Festival of Firstfruits hold for the Church? Firstfruits is the very Day to commemorate our Risen Savior. The Festival should be considered a High Holiday for the Church, because honoring Yahu'Shua and remembering His ultimate Sacrifice is totally in keeping with the entire Passover Holiday Period: Beginning with Yahu'Shua's Last Seder, the so-called Last Supper, this Suffering Servant willingly laid His Life down for mankind to become for us the ultimate Passover Lamb. As we apply Yahu'Shua's Blood to the door posts of our hearts, our sins are Atoned for and we are Redeemed. Through His sinless Life and afflictions, He became our Unleavened Bread of Life -- a Broken Vessel holding the infinite, eternal life. Through His Resurrection, He became

for us the Firstfruits from among the dead, so the death penalty for our sins has been swallowed up in victory, which enables us to inherit the Kingdom of G-d. And in the same manner that the priests waved the first grain of the barely crop as a first fruit of the harvest before G-d in anticipation of a bountiful harvest, so, too, through Yahu'Shua, our Wave Offering, we can anticipate a bountiful Harvest at the End of the Age. Let us remember what Rabbi HaGadol/the Great Teacher said before going to the Cross, as recorded in Yochanan/John 12:24: **"I tell you the Truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."**

Builders of Zion provides its own beautiful free downloadable Hagaddah for talmideem, students, interested exploring and observing the beautiful Passover Holiday.

Once a student of the Bible embraces Passover, Easter becomes a pale substitute. Only Firstfruits could correctly guide the Church to the Day of Pentecost. Easter cannot do this. Easter follows the Gregorian calendar, rather than the Jewish calendar. It is an altogether pagan festival that was instituted by the Roman Emperor, General Constantine, at the Nicean Councils. Easter pays tribute to the Teutonic fertility goddess of spring, Eastre; hence, the bunny and eggs: fertility symbols. Constantine replaced the rich Pesach Holiday -- Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits -- with Easter as a means of blurring the distinction between the competing religions within his realm of influence: Christendom, Mithraism, and Sol Invictus. Constantine was a worshipper of Sol Invictus, the Roman state-supported Sun god. Rav Sha'ul of Tarsus, the Apostle Paul, taught the Church Body in Romans 11:16 that if the root is holy, so are the branches. If the root is unholy, then, so are the branches, for what fellowship can light have with darkness (2 Corinthians 6:14)?

Church: Take back what the enemy has stolen!

THE LAW: THE FABRIC THAT DEFINES OUR ACTIONS AND GIRDS OUR FAITH

Paul teaches in Ephesians 2:19 that Christians are fellow citizens with the Am Yisra'el. Thus, when G-d Speaks to His Jews, He is also Speaking to the Church Body, which, according to Romans 11:17-18, is grafted

into -- not replacing -- the commonwealth of Israel.

Paul further teaches us in Romans 3:31 that the Church should uphold G-d's Law, which Devarim/Deuteronomy 30:11-17 tells us is not beyond our reach. Paul's seemingly negative references to the Law were simply his stressing that we should not think that by it we are saved, for we are saved by G-d's Grace through His Provision of Yahu'Shua, our Mediator, in accordance with Shemot/Exodus 20:18-19 and Devarim/Deuteronomy 18:15-16. Paul was very clear that we should never allow our faith to nullify G-d's Law (Romans 3:31), neither should we use our faith as a license to sin (Romans 6: 1-2) for the righteous requirements of the Law must be fully upheld (Tehillim/Psalm 119:160, Yehezqel/Ezekiel 37:24, Romans 8:3-8).

Although Paul's letters to the Church regarding the Law have been a subject of much debate, we must not lose sight of Apostle Peter's warning in 2 Kefa/2 Peter 3:16 regarding Paul's letters: **"...His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction."** Daveed Melek/King David admonishes us to search our hearts (Tehillim/Psalm 4:4): As we bask in our Grace, are we causing other brethren to stumble (2 Corinthians 8:21)? If we look beyond ourselves and perceive the overall scheme of things, the answer is in the affirmative.

To assert that the Law dropped out of existence upon Yahu'Shua's ministry here on earth is to ignore such Prophetic Passages as Zekharya/Zechariah 14:16, which tells us that the nations will be celebrating Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles, and Yesha'Yahu/Isaiah 66:23, which states that all mankind will come to bow down before the L-rd from one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, and Matte'Yahu/Matthew 26:27-29, which records Yahu'Shua holding up the Third Cup, the Cup of Redemption, during His Last Seder, and stating that He will not partake of this fruit of the vine again until He drinks of it anew with us in His Father's Kingdom. There simply was no hiccup in the Law as a result of Yahu'Shua going to the Cross.

Paul's message regarding the Law echoed the teaching found in Matte'Yahu/Matthew 5:17-20 by the very head of the Church most worthy of honor, Yahu'Shua: **"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or**

the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until Heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these Commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these Commands will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, you will certainly not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Since Yahu'Shua, the authority over the Church Body, teaches us to uphold G-d's Law, then all the more should Christians be eager to uphold it and embrace these beautiful Festivals.

As we are faithful to observe; indeed to celebrate, The Levitical Festivals, we begin to discover the meat of G-d's Word in a multi-faceted manner. It is then that the Passages in the Tenach/Holy Bible spring to life, and we begin to see the missions and teachings of Yahu'Shua and other righteous servants of G-d in three-dimensional form. Church: If you want to know, you must walk it out, and if you walk it out, taking the entire Word of G-d into account, not just the Continuing Testament, then you will be heeding the admonishment recorded in 2 Timothy 2:15: “Do your best to present yourself to G-d as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the Word of Truth.”

REKINDLING THE HOLY FIRE

From the day of Firstfruits, Christians count off seven perfect Sabbaths in accordance with Vayyiqra/Leviticus 23:15-16, and arrive at Pentecost. The Church's observance of Pentecost is typically a few days after mainstream Jewish observance of the Holiday due to the timing of the Omer count.

Pentecost marks the day the Holy Spirit (Ruach HaKodesh in Hebrew) sealed Yahu'Shua's Covenant with the Church through the baptism of a Holy Fire descending upon HaMoshiach's chosen Apostles and those disciples and others accompanying them as they were gathered in Yerushalayim for Shavu'ot.



Christians should celebrate Pentecost by waving before the L-rd two loaves of bread baked with yeast, in accordance with Vayyiqra/Leviticus 23:17. It is a day when we should assemble, whether at church, a synagogue, or at home with a prayer group. This is a High Sabbath in which we are to rest and reflect upon the Providence of our Merciful G-d. The Church should read Acts, Chapters 1-2, the account of Yahu'Shua's ascension into Heaven and of the Holy Spirit coming during Pentecost. Other complementary readings can include Tehillim/Psalms 2:6-12; 80:14-17; 89:35-37 and 110:1-4, which all foretell the events of Yahu'Shua's Resurrection and everlasting reign. A beautiful discussion regarding the significance of the Holy Spirit to the Church Body is recorded in 1 Corinthians 2:6-16.

FESTIVAL FOODS

Pentecost, or Shavu'ot, is traditionally a dairy Festival, the dairy meal recalling Shir haShirim/Song of Songs 4:11, which alludes to attaining the knowledge of Torah, G-d's Law, which energizes our spirits as milk and honey energize our bodies.

In honor of every precious Jewish brother and sister who have died or suffered under the hand of Christendom, I am including a dairy recipe that David M. Gitlitz and Linda Kay Davidson record in their Jewish cookbook entitled “A Drizzle of Honey -- The Lives and Recipes of Spain's Secret Jews.” This documentary-style book contains recipes that were included in actual Inquisition testimonies to expose crypto Jews, “converso” residents in the Iberian Peninsula and its colonies. The Spanish Inquisition traivaled from 1478 through 1834 in a royal quest to unite Spain through the embedment of Roman Catholic orthodoxy in Spanish controlled territories and the purging of its “non-believing” inhabitants. The recipes in this book were used as evidence to build cases for heresy against Jews who converted from Judaism to Catholicism under compulsion, yet still endeavored to clandestinely keep their traditions, uphold G-d's Law, and observe His Festivals. Christians interested in keeping G-d's Festivals are encouraged to purchase this award-winning book and incorporate its recipes into their Festival fare. In this way, Holiday meals become an illustrative tool to teach Christian guests about Christendom's dark history, for the recipes within this book provide a snapshot of what has typically been swept under the Church carpet.



A Drizzle of Honey

The Lives and Recipes of Spain's Secret Jews
by David M. Gitlitz & Linda Kay Davidson

An excerpt from the opening remarks of the Preface follows:

Beatriz Nunez was arrested by the Spanish Inquisition in the spring of 1485. She and her husband, Fernan Gonzalez Escribano, had converted from Judaism to Christianity a few years earlier, but Beatriz still kept a kosher home. One of their maids, Catalina Sanchez, was a witness for the prosecution. Among the particulars of the family's Jewish practices that she denounced to the Tribunal was a recipe for a Sabbath stew made of lamb and chickpeas and hard-boiled eggs. The Guadalupe Inquisition found Beatriz guilty of being an unrepentant heretic and burned her alive in 1485.

The notorious Inquisitors tortured witnesses that they suspected of misleading the ecclesiastical tribunal. One such witness described in the recipe book was Maria Gonzalez, Pedro de Villarreal's wife. Mrs. Gonzalez was repeatedly subjected to torture in 1513 by her accusers who would place a cloth over her face and pour a constant stream of water from a pitcher over the cloth until she felt like she was drowning. They would then present her to the court to confess that she upheld Jewish customs, and to implicate her friends who also adhered to Judaic teachings. Once the Inquisitors compelled a testimony out of her, they condemned her to burning at the stake, not so much because of her religious activities, but because during her prolonged traumatic experience, she had retracted her confession and withheld "evidence."

Maria Gonzalez's
Eggs and Cheese Casserole with Eggplant:
(serves 4)

- 1 medium eggplant (about 2 pounds)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 4 eggs
- 1/4 teaspoon saffron threads, crushed (optional)

Spice Mixture

- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/4 teaspoon ground caraway seeds
- 1/4 teaspoon ground coriander seeds
- 3/4 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 cup cubed semisoft cheese, such as farmer cheese, cut into 1/2-1-inch cubes
- 1/3 cup chopped fresh parsley

1. Preheat the broiler. Prick the eggplant several times with a fork.

Place the eggplant under the broiler and cook it until the skin is charred and the pulp is soft, turning it several times, about 20 minutes. It is important that the eggplant pulp be very soft. Remove the eggplant from the broiler and when it has cooled, peel it, using a fork and knife.

2. To reduce the liquid, place the pulp in a strainer. Mash the pulp to extract the liquid. Leave for about 30 minutes.
3. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Pour the olive oil into a deep 8-inch-diameter ovenproof casserole. Place the casserole in the oven until the oil is very hot, about 5 minutes. At the end of that time you should be ready to bake the casserole.
4. Meanwhile, separate the eggs. Place the yolks in a medium bowl and beat them until creamy. Set the whites aside to beat later. Add the saffron to the egg yolks, if you're using it.
5. Stir the ingredients for the spice mixture together and add them to the egg yolks. Add the mashed eggplant and combine thoroughly. Add the cheese and parsley and mix.
6. In a medium bowl, whip the 4 egg whites until stiff. Fold them into the eggplant mixture. Take the casserole out of the oven. Pour the mixture into the casserole dish and return it to the oven.
7. Bake 30-35 minutes, or until the casserole is set and golden brown.
8. Serve (see Notes).

Notes

For a larger eggplant, add another egg.

You need not whip the egg yolks and egg whites separately, but it makes the dish lighter.

This casserole is good hot or cold, but the flavors are best if it is served at room temperature.

Variation

Any vegetable can be substituted for the eggplant in this recipe.

What follows are other recipes, not from the Spanish Inquisition, but rich in Jewish tradition. These recipes are specifically for Shavu'ot, and each author has special insights to share. One can easily get lost in these and so many other Jewish cookbooks, as they, too, are historical treasures. In fact, they serve to promote Jewish identity, culture, and unity:



The Jewish Holiday Kitchen

by Joan Nathan, whose Introduction begins as follows:

“Better is a dinner of herbs where love is,
Than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.”

“Better is a dry morsel and quietness therewith,
Than a house full of feasting with strife.”

Proverbs 15:17; 17:1

Rachal (Fish with Sour Cream and Potatoes)
serves 6 M (milchig = dairy meal)

Rachal is a delicious Hungarian fish dish which Jews prepare on the Friday night of Shavuot. The Jews replaced the bacon of the original recipe with butter.

6 medium potatoes
1/4-1/2 pound butter
Salt to taste
3 pounds carp, rockfish, or haddock (1/2 a 6-pound fish with head removed, bones intact, and cut in 6 steaks)
1 tablespoon breadcrumbs
1 tablespoon fresh dill
1 cup sour cream

1. Boil the potatoes in their skins and peel. Slice thin.
2. Butter liberally a baking-serving casserole, such as an oblong gratin dish. Fill the bottom with potato slices. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Continue until all the potatoes are placed in the casserole.
3. Place the fish on top. Sprinkle the fish with about 1 tablespoon paprika, 1 teaspoon salt, breadcrumbs, and dill. Dot with butter. Cover with the sour cream and bake in a 350 degree oven for 1/2 hour, or until fish flakes easily with a fork. (This dish can also include green pepper and tomato slices.)



The Jewish Holiday Cookbook
An International Collection of Recipes and Customs
by Gloria Kaufer Greene, who selected this quote for Shavu'ot:

Shavuot is a wedding anniversary of the Jewish people,
and the Torah is the marriage certificate between Jews and G-d.”
– an ancient rabbi –

Har Geveenah (Mount Sinai Fruit-and-Cheese “Ball”)
Makes 1 large cheese “ball.” D (dairy meal)

King David’s psalms are read on Shavuot, because it is traditionally considered to be the anniversary of both his birth and death. In one of his psalms, Mount Sinai is described as, among other things, har gavnunim or “a mountain of peaks.”

Scholars have interpreted the similarity between the Hebrew word for “peaks” and that for “cheese” (geveenah) as another of the

many reasons why dairy foods should be eaten on Shavuot.

Desserts that are shaped like the “mountain of peaks” – that is, cone-like cakes, cookies, and confections – are also often served on Shavuot. Sometimes they are topped with jam or chopped nuts to represent the dark cloud that is said to have hovered over Mount Sinai at the time when the Tablets of the Law were given. Or, a perfect walnut half may be put on top instead, to symbolize the stone Tablets themselves.

The following appetizer/snack combines the custom of eating cheese with that of eating foods shaped like Mount Sinai. The whimsical Hebrew name translates literally as “mountain of cheese,” and is a play on the words of David’s psalm. The cheese “ball” is molded to resemble a mountain, and its peak is topped with either a prune (for the dark cloud) or a walnut half (for the Tablets). In addition, the cheese mixture includes fruits and nuts indigenous to Israel, which may have been among those offered as bikurim during the ancient Shavuot pilgrimage.

1 3-ounce package cream cheese, softened
2 tablespoons commercial sour cream
About 2 tablespoons sweet or dry red wine
8 ounces Cheddar cheese, finely grated (2 cups packed)
1/2 cup slivered almonds
1/3 cup finely chopped dates
1/3 cup finely chopped dried figs
1/3 cup dark raisins

Coating and Garnish (optional)
Finely chopped blanched or unblanched almonds
1 prune or 1 perfect walnut half

To serve
Crackers or small cocktail bread slices

In a large bowl, beat the cream cheese with the sour cream until light and fluffy; then beat in the 2 tablespoons of wine. Add the remaining cheese mixture ingredients and mix very well. Use a back of a spoon to press the mixture against the sides of the bowl to help it form a cohesive mass. If the cheese mixture seems to be very dry, add more wine.

Form the cheese mixture into a mountain-like cone shape and coat it with the chopped almonds (if used). To represent the dark cloud over Mount Sinai, horizontally set the prune on top of the mountain peak. Or, for the Two Tablets of the Law, stand the perfect walnut half upright in the peak.

Wrap the “cheese mountain” in plastic wrap and chill it for several hours or overnight to allow the flavors to blend and the cheese mixture to firm up. Serve it with crackers or bread.



Olive Trees and Honey
A Treasury of Vegetarian Recipes from Jewish Communities
Around the World

by Gil Marks, who posed this question in the Introduction:

So, what makes a food Jewish?
Jewish food is what has been served for centuries on Jewish tables,
dishes that evoke the spirit of that community
and the generations of Sabbath and holiday dinners
as well as the necessities of everyday fare.
It is tradition.

Persian Beets with Yogurt (Most Laboo)
6 to 8 servings D (dairy meal)

Variations of this simple dish, called shawandar bil leban in Arabic, abound throughout the Middle East. The yogurt's tartness contrasts wonderfully with the sweetness of the beets. Some of the yogurt will take on a pink color. If the yogurt is very watery, drain it in a coffee filter or cheesecloth-lined sieve until thickened.

8 beets (2 pounds total without the greens) stems trimmed to 1 inch
1 to 2 cloves garlic
1/2 teaspoon table salt or 1 teaspoon kosher salt
1/4 chopped fresh mint or 1 red or white onion, thinly sliced (optional)
2 cups plain yogurt

1. Put the beets in a large saucepan and add water to cover. Bring to a boil, cover, reduce the heat to low, and simmer until the beets are fork-tender, about 30 minutes. Let cool to the touch, then trim and peel the beets and cut into 1/4-inch-thick slices or julienne. You should have about 4 cups.

2. Using the tip of a heavy knife or with a mortar and pestle, mash the garlic and salt into a paste. Stir the garlic paste and, if using, the mint into the yogurt. Add the beets. Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour. Alternatively, arrange the beets on a serving platter, spread the yogurt-garlic mixture on top, and sprinkle with the mint.

Variation

Persian Beet and Yogurt Dip (Borani Laboo):

Finely chop or mash the cooked beets before stirring them into the yogurt. Serve with pita bread.



The Book of Jewish Food

by Claudia Roden, whose reflective Introduction begins like this:

Every Cuisine tells a story. Jewish food tells the story of an uprooted, migrating people and their vanished worlds. It lives in people's minds and has been kept alive because of what it evokes and represents. My own world disappeared forty years ago, but it has remained powerful in my imagination. When you are cut off from your past, that past takes a stronger hold on your emotions.

Cheesecake
Serves 10-12

...When I was an art student living with my brothers in a flat in London, our landlady, Janey Trenner (everyone called her Auntie

Janey). would bring us constant gifts of food, which made us feel at home and happy. When my parents were forced to come in a hurry after the Suez crisis, the Trenners told us that we could all stay without paying rent as long as we needed to. Even now when I visit her, and although she is ninety-eight, she forces a hundred goodies on me, even if I tell her that I have just eaten. She has always kept an open house and still makes sure that all those who call are well fed. One of her specialties is a beautiful cheesecake.

For the pastry base

1 1/3 cups (200g) flour
Pinch of salt
1/3 cup (75 g) sugar
4 oz (100 g) unsalted butter, cut in pieces
1 medium egg, lightly beaten

For the filling

1 lb (500g) curd cheese
2/3 cup (150 ml) sour cream or fromage frais
5 eggs, separated
7/8 cup (175 g) superfine sugar
Zest of 1 lemon
Juice of 1/2 lemon
A few drops of vanilla extract

For the pastry base, mix the flour, salt, and sugar in a bowl and rub the butter in with your hands. Mix in the egg and work very briefly until bound into a soft dough, adding a little flour if it is too sticky. Wrap in plastic wrap and leave for 1/2 hour.

Line a greased 10 1/2-inch (26 cm) spring-form pan or flan mold with the pastry by pressing it all over the bottom and a little up the sides with your hand (it is difficult to roll out). Bake it blind in a preheated 350-degree F (108-degree C) oven for 30 minutes. Let it cool before you cover it with the filling, or it will break up.

For the filling, mix the curd cheese with the rest of the filling ingredients except the egg whites and beat until smooth. Beat the egg whites to stiff snowy peaks and fold into the cheese mixture. Pour into the pan or flan mold over the pastry shell. Bake in a preheated 300-degree F (150-degree C) oven for 1 1/2 hours. Let it cool slowly in the oven with the door open.

Variations

Stir 1/2 cup (75 g) black or golden raisins soaked in water, rum, or kirsh into the cheese mixture after the egg whites have been folded in.

Pour 1 cup (250 ml) sour cream over the top after baking.

Finally, I would like to contribute a Challah recipe that was passed around in a church. I have been using it for nearly two decades for Sabbaths and other Festivals, and I have yet to find a better recipe.

I have tweaked it over the years, experimenting with different preparation methods, rise times, honey and

flour. The bread is wildly delicious if made with fresh spring wheat flour and wildflower honey, which is especially appropriate for Shavu'ot.

This recipe is suitable for either hand kneading or for use with a stand mixer. It originally called for two rise times, however, I have discovered that it rises to a lovely braided loaf with only one rise time if using fresh, quality bread flour. The recipe makes two large loaves.



Challah Bread

The dough:

1 cup of warm water
2 1/4 teaspoons of yeast
2 tablespoons of olive oil
2/3 cup of honey
2 eggs
1 teaspoon of salt
up to 5 cups of flour
Raisins (optional)

The egg wash:

1 egg yolk
1 teaspoon of olive oil
1 teaspoon of water

The glaze:

Honey, about 2 tablespoons
Parve margarine (neutral for either meat or dairy meals), 2-3 tablespoons

Place all the dough ingredients, except 1/2 cup of flour and the raisins if using, in a bowl in the order given. Either mix and then knead the dough by hand for about 5 minutes, adding more flour as needed so that the dough is not too sticky, or use a dough hook in your stand mixer (I have a Kitchen Aid) and run it for three minutes on #2 and gradually add the extra flour as necessary. Add raisins during the last minute either way you knead it.

When the dough is smooth and elastic and no longer sticks to the bowl, roll into a ball and cut in half. Roll each half into a ball, and then into a thick log. Cut each log in three equal portions, and then roll out each portion into relatively long strands; not too long, however, or the loaf will lack height. For each loaf, take three strands and form a tight braid. As an alternative, you could braid up to six strands per loaf if you want to.

Place each loaf on a metal baking tray lined with parchment paper. If you use all natural, unbleached parchment paper, lightly grease it with olive oil first or the bread will likely stick once baked.

Let rise for about four hours; perhaps a little longer. The time will vary depending upon the weather and where you live.

Preheat your oven to 325-degrees, or 350-degrees if your oven typically runs colder than normal.

Prepare the egg wash by mixing all of the ingredients listed. Then carefully brush this on the risen loaves.

Place the loaves in the oven and bake for about 20 to 22 minutes.

Meanwhile, prepare the glaze by placing the parve margarine in a small heat-resistant glass bowl, and drizzle the honey on top. Place the bowl on the top of the stove, which should be warm from the oven. Let the glaze mixture melt, but it should remain opaque and rather thick in its consistency, which makes it easier to spread on hot loaves. During the last 2 minutes of the bread baking, test the bread for doneness by tapping it. It should sound hollow. If it doesn't, leave it baking for another minute or so. Once it sounds hollow, brush the glaze over it and bake for another minute; maybe two. It should have a nice golden brown color to it and the smell should drive you crazy.

Note: The Jewish People typically take a small portion of the dough, place it in the oven and bake it as an offering in remembrance of the Temple sacrifices. My household, however, has elected not to implement this tradition because none of the Temple sacrifices have honey added to them. Honey represents worldly delight, and those worshippers bringing sacrifices to the Temple were suppose to be in a humble state of mind as they brought their sacrifices to the L-rd.

CONCLUSION OF THE MATTER

You are now fully equipped to enjoy the Festival of Shavu'ot, and are well on your way to learning how to celebrate the other Biblical Feasts. Remember, Christians, these Festivals are not just Jewish Holidays. They are our Holidays, too, if we but venture beyond the limitations of Church Tradition. There is a wealth of lessons to learn and wonders to experience in the Festivals as we live the Word of G-d. You are welcome to explore the Builders of Zion web-site in the G-d's Reality section for teachings, such as the High Holidays.

Upon taking an honest assessment of where the Church is today, and realizing how short the Body comes to holding up a correct Biblical Standard, any servant of G-d should be pained. Let us begin anew by devoting ourselves to humbly seeking G-d's Truth through His Word, and by implementing this Truth with good deeds backed by faith. Let us shed the Traditions of Man that hinder our collective Witness, and embrace G-d's Festivals and His Law.

I assure you, brethren, the Holy Fire will bring Revitalization if we are faithful to do these things.