

**SHAVUOT with Havdala**  
**Westchester Community for Humanistic Judaism**

**All:** In Pirkei Avot, the Wisdom of the Sages, we read:

***“Al sh’loshah d’varim ha-olam omayd: al ha tora,  
v’al ha avoda, v’al g’milut chasidim.”***

“The beauty of our human existence rests on three pillars: love of learning, dedication to serving others, and acts of kindness and charity.”

**Leader:** On this Shabbat, we celebrate the important holiday of Shavuot (the festival of weeks), falling seven weeks and one day after Passover. This holiday commemorates the offering of the first fruits of the season, and the legend of the receiving of the Torah on Mount Sinai by Moses.

**All:** A midrash says that when Moses received the Torah, the whole mountain of Sinai erupted with a profusion of sweet smelling flowers and greenery. Today, synagogues and homes are traditionally decorated with flowers and greens on Shavuot.

**Leader:** For us, Humanistic Jews, the Torah represents not only biblical narratives, but learning in all its many and varied aspects.

**All:** May we always embrace the sweetness that brings value and beauty to our daily existence: to music, to literature and poetry, to art, to theater, to science - all high priorities in Jewish culture.

**Leader:** On Shavuot, we read the story of Ruth, the foreigner who became the ancestor of David ha-Melekh. It is also traditional to listen to the recitation of the 10 commandments from the book of Exodus.

**All:** May we always welcome the stranger in our midst with love and acceptance. May we regard the ethical values of the Torah as an important Jewish contribution to civilization.

**Leader:** On Shavuot we honor learning with a custom of all-night study. We also eat many types of dairy foods.

**All:** May we always be awake to new ideas, new possibilities and the opening of new doors. And may we honor our connection to Eretz Yisrael, the land of our ancestors, flowing with milk and honey.

**Readings:** “And the elders said (to Naomi), ‘May the woman who is coming into your house be like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built up the House of Israel! Prosper in Ephrathah and perpetuate your name in Bethlehem! And may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah - through the offspring of this young woman....’ So Boaz married Ruth; she became his wife, and he lived with her. And she conceived and bore a son. And the women said to Naomi: ‘He will renew your life and sustain your old age; for he is born of your daughter-in-law who loves you and is better to you than seven sons.’

Naomi took the child and held it to her bosom. She became his foster mother, and the women neighbors gave him a name, saying, ‘A son is born to Naomi!’ They named him Obed; he was the father of Jesse, father of David.”

*(Ruth 4. 11-17, adapted)*

“Do not confine your children to your own learning, for they were born in another time.”

*(Hebrew Proverb)*

We think so because other people **all** think so;  
Or because - or because - after all, we **do** think so;  
Or because we were told so, and think we **must** think so;  
Or because we once thought so, and think we **still** think so;  
Or because having thought so, we think we **will** think so.

*(Henry Sidgwick)*

**Leader:** Today, we will honor the departure of Shabbat by enjoying the sweet scent of these Shavuot flowers as we recite our humanistic interpretation of the 10 commandments: *(All recite commandments \* and pass around flowers)*

1. You shall open your heart to all the possibilities of life.
2. You shall value people over possessions, and meaning over materialism.

3. You shall speak the truth with honesty and respect.
4. You shall take time for joy and wonder.
5. You shall forgive yourself and others.
6. You shall protect and nurture life.
7. You shall be faithful to those you love.
8. You shall be generous of spirit.
9. You shall walk in your neighbor's shoes.
10. You shall cultivate gratitude.

**Leader:** The ***Akdamut*** is a poem, written in the 11th century by Rabbi Meir bar Yitzchak of Worms, Germany. It is a traditional meditation honoring Shavuot found in the liturgy of Ashkenazic synagogues. This is our humanist adaptation:

**All:** Now you, my listeners:

Be strong in your convictions  
As you sit under your canopies,  
And discuss the nature of knowledge  
And the meaning of wisdom.

You will drink from cups of new wine,  
And you will dance with the righteous.  
Happy are those who believe in life,  
Happy are those who never abandon hope.

*\* A Renewed 10 Commandments - UU Congregation of Arlington, VA.  
Scripture reference: The New JPS Translation*

### *Havdala*

*We rejoice in our heritage which has given us the indomitable spirit that has preserved our people and sustained us and brought us forward to the special moment.*

*Asbreinu bi'rushateinu ha'ko'akh shebekhi'anu v'kimanu v'higi'anu la'zman ha'zeh.*

### *Candlelighting*

*The braided strands of the havdala candle circle and embrace, each adding strength to the other, the many stronger than the one. Through the gentle twists and turns, we are drawn to the tranquility of Shabbat, eased into the rush of the coming week. With a single point of light, many can find their way. With wisdom and knowledge we drive fear and ignorance from the shadows. The glowing warmth of the flame reminds us to be compassionate to those around us. The flame is bright reminding us to be "or ha-olam," a light to the world, a seeker of wisdom, a lover of beauty.*

*Barukh ha-or ba-makom hazeh. Vayehi or b'kol ha-olam.*

*Radiant is the light of this place. May it shine throughout the world.*

### *A Cup of Wine*

*As our ancestors have done, we drink this cup of wine to mark the end of Shabbat, affirming our connection to past generations. Ancient wisdom continues to shape our lives, ancient voices are remembered and respected. Yet the flavor of the wine beckons us to the future, to shape our own story, and to sing our own songs.*

*V'yayin yismakh l'vav eynosh. L'khaim!*

*May our days be filled with love, happiness, and peace. "And wine shall gladden the heart." (Psalm 104. 15). To life! (drink wine)*

### *Spices*

*Spices add depth to the ordinary, color to the black and white. Inhaling deeply, we react to the pleasing experience; the aromas of havdala are complex, not everyday. We are an exotic people, having journeyed far in our history. Memory cannot recapture all the footsteps of our heritage, yet these swirling scents transport their richness back to our senses, reaffirming the possibilities of our lives. As we breathe in the aroma of these spices, may we be filled with the sweetness of health and the joy of fulfillment.*

*V'reyakh nikoakh m'khaye n'fashot.*

*And a pleasing fragrance enlivens the soul. (Smell spices)*

*Final Meditation*

*If, here, you have found freedom, take it with you into the world. If you have found comfort, go and share it with others. If you have dreamed dreams, help one another that they may come true! If you have known love, give back love to a bruised and hurting world.*

*(Lauralyn Bellamy)*

*(Douse the candle in the wine and say)*

*Hazak, hazak v'hazek - May we go from strength to strength.*

**Service written by Rabbi Frank Tamburello  
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