



# Celebrating 10 Years of Ten Minutes of Torah

**Shavuot Study Guide—Parashat Bo**

**May 2014**

This year marks the 10th anniversary of **Ten Minutes of Torah**. Each weekday, over 20,000 subscribers receive an e-mail that brings the Jewish world to them. From Torah commentaries written by scholars to recipes for baking challah, *Ten Minutes of Torah* explores the great variety of Jewish life. Join the many readers of **Ten Minutes of Torah** and subscribe now.

What better time is there to celebrate *Ten Minutes of Torah* than on Shavuot! Like many Jewish holidays, Shavuot has its origins as an agricultural festival. The word *shavuot* means “weeks,” and Shavuot refers to the period of seven weeks between Passover and Shavuot. The timing of the festival marked the end of the spring barley harvest and the beginning of the summer wheat harvest. Our ancestors would bring an offering from their harvest to the Temple in Jerusalem.

After the destruction of the Temple such offerings could no longer be made. Over time, this offering was replaced by reading the Ten Commandments and the Book of Ruth. By the time of the destruction of the Second Temple, Shavuot became associated with the Ten Commandments and the festival became known as *Z'man Matan Torateinu*, the “Time of the Giving of the Law.”

One of the most distinctive customs of Shavuot is *Tikkun Leil Shavuot*, an evening-long study session held on the night of Shavuot. *Tikkun* means a “set order” of something and refers to the order in which the texts are read. The custom originated with the mystics of Safed in the 16th century, and today, many Jews stay up all night on Shavuot reading and studying a variety of sacred texts. Traditionally, readings from the Torah and Talmud are included.

Many synagogues hold a *Tikkun Leil Shavuot*. Some host programs that go on all night, culminating in morning services at sunrise. Other congregations gather for a few hours of study. Whether one is planning to attend an all-night session, study for a few hours, join with others, or study on one's own, Shavuot is a wonderful time to encounter sacred text.

We asked several rabbis on the staff of the Union for Reform Judaism to share their own encounters with our text. Each video explores a different text. Some focus on a commandment. Others challenge a difficult passage, while others grapple with age-old questions.

These videos provide interesting responses to our sacred writings whether you are studying with others or watching these videos on your own. This guide offers a couple of questions to accompany the video, spark conversation, and give the reader an opportunity for further reflection.

Rabbi Daniel Freeland, Senior Vice President, Union for Reform Judaism

Text—*Parashat Bo*, Exodus 10:1–13:16

[reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/bo](http://reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/bo)

**Summary:**

- God sends the plagues of locusts and darkness upon Egypt and forewarns Moses about the final plague, the death of every Egyptian firstborn. Pharaoh still does not let the Israelites leave Egypt. (10:1–11:10)
- God commands Moses and Aaron regarding the Passover festival. (12:1–27)
- God enacts the final plague, striking down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt except those of the House of Israel. Pharaoh now allows the Israelites to leave. (12:29–42)
- Speaking to Moses and Aaron, God repeats the commandments about Passover. (12:43–13:16)

**Questions:**

Rabbi Freeland speaks of the mitzvah of the Passover seder and explaining to our children that we observe Passover because of what God did for us. Do we perceive that God has acted in our own lives? How would we explain that to a younger generation?

Rabbi Freeland says, “We write a new Torah every day.” What is the Torah that you write?