

## **Shavuot: Reconnecting to the Land and its Produce: A Confirmation Curriculum**

**By Heather Borshof, Emma Gottlieb & Ariana Silverman<sup>1</sup>**

### DESCRIPTION OF OVERALL CURRICULUM:

This is a Confirmation/Shavuot curriculum consisting of five parts:

- 1) A text study on the Book of Ruth (see Appendix A)
- 2) Planning a dish to prepare for Erev Shavuot following Confirmation/Shavuot services
- 3) A site visit to trace one ingredient of that dish to its source (See Appendix B)
- 4) Further research and a 10 minute presentation to the class (See Appendix C)
- 5) Preparing the dish for Erev Shavuot, along with a visual presentation for the congregation

### PROGRAM GOALS:

- 1) To trace an ingredient from its growth to the table.
- 2) To familiarize and connect the students to the holiday of Shavuot, when they will be confirming their commitment to the Jewish people and to the continuation of Talmud Torah.

Enduring Understanding: In today's modern world, we are disconnected from our food in a way that Ruth was not. In order to make conscious decisions about what we eat, we need to work that much harder to inform ourselves of where our food comes from and the effects that its growth and production have on our environment.

### WHY IS THIS PROJECT PARTICULARLY RELEVANT TO SHAVUOT?

Shavuot celebrates the partnership of human beings with God in giving food to the world. The Mishna describes how this was enacted in 2nd Temple times when Israelites made a pilgrimage to the Temple at Shavuot to offer bikkurim, a portion of the first fruits of their harvest. During the same festival, the high priest would offer two loaves of bread, known as the wave-offering. These loaves of bread symbolized the products of the gifts of God's bounty combined with human labor.

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1 Project for course on Eco-Judaism / Hebrew Union College, NYC, June 2008 (Rabbi Arthur Waskow)

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

### **PART ONE: RUTH TEXT STUDY (see Appendix A)**

At start of the Confirmation curriculum, students will engage in a study of the Book of Ruth aimed at raising their awareness about how disconnected they are from the growth and production of the food they eat every day.

Goal: Enable students to answer questions about Ruth and recognize the importance of food in the text.

Enduring Understanding: The Book of Ruth demonstrates our connection to the land and can raise questions for us about how food is grown, harvested, produced, and consumed.

Part 1: Lead Text Study

Part 2: Present project and review site-visit questions

Ask: How does what we learned in the text study relate to the site-visit questions?

### **WHY DO WE READ THE BOOK OF RUTH ON SHAVUOT?**

One reason we read the book of Ruth on Shavuot is because Shavuot is seen as the yahrtzeit of King David, Ruth's descendent. Another reason, more relevant to this project, is that the story of Ruth is set at the time of the barley harvest, paralleling the time of the harvest that aligns with Shavuot. As well, in choosing to become a member of Naomi's people, Ruth declares her acceptance of Torah in her own unique and profoundly moving way.

### **PART TWO: PLAN A DISH**

Students will be asked to work in small groups to come up with a dairy based dish that they will cook and serve on Erev Shavuot at the celebration of their Confirmation. Students will then choose one primary ingredient from their meal (barley, for example) to focus their studies on.

### **WHY DO WE EAT DAIRY ON SHAVUOT?**

Some people link the custom of eating dairy foods on Shavuot to the verse from Song of Songs, "Honey and milk are under your tongue", suggesting that the sweetness of Torah is symbolized by cooking foods containing milk and honey. Another explanation is that in many areas of the world, spring festivals focus on cheese and other milchig foods. In pastoral societies, milk coincides with the spring season and the birth of new flocks.

### **PART THREE: SITE VISITATION**

Students will be asked to visit a farm or facility where their chosen ingredient is being grown or produced. Students will be given a set of guiding questions to ask while at the site visit. The purpose of the visit is to gain a deeper understanding of where their primary ingredient comes from, how it is produced and distributed, what impact it has on the environment, etc.

### **PART FOUR: FURTHER RESEARCH & PRESENTATION**

Students will be asked to do further research to round out the discoveries made on their site visit and to prepare a 10 minute presentation of their findings for the rest of the class.

### **PART FIVE: MEAL PREPARATION AND PRESENTATION**

Students will cook/bake their meal for the Confirmation celebration and will prepare a visual presentation (poster-board highlighting the main points of their research) for the congregation to read as they are helping themselves to the meal. This will affirm for the students their new role as teachers in the community as they share what they have learned and hopefully inspire others to come to a new awareness about where the food they are eating comes from.

## Appendix A

### The Role of Food in the Book of Ruth: A Text Study

#### CHAPTER 1: FAMINE

Ruth 1:1 “In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land...”

Ruth 1:6 “Naomi heard that the Eternal had taken note of God’s people and given them food.”

- Do you think the famine was caused by God?
- Do you think, as Naomi suggests, that the end of the famine was caused by God?
- What other famines can you think of in the Bible?
- Can you think of famines that occurred in the United States? In the world? Do they cause people to migrate?
- What causes famines today? What can we do to prevent them?
- Have you ever experienced a shortage of food where you live?

#### CHAPTER 2: IN THE FIELDS

Ruth 2:2 Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, ‘I would like to go to the fields and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone who may show me kindness.’”

- What were the difficulties that Ruth faced in order to glean in the fields?
- How did Boaz make it easier for her?
- What difficulties do those who harvest our food face today?

Leviticus 19:9-10 “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I the Eternal am your God.”

Leviticus 23:22 “And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I the Eternal am your God.”

Deuteronomy 24: 19-22 “When you reap the harvest in your field and overlook a sheaf in the field, do not turn back to get it; it shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow -- in order that the Eternal your God may bless you in all your undertakings. 20 When you beat down the fruit of your olive trees, do not go over them again; that shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. 21 When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not pick it over again; that shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. 22 Always remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore do I enjoin you to observe this commandment.”

- How does Ruth qualify to be among the reapers?
- Why does God command that food be left for those who cannot afford it?
- What do we do to meet these biblical commands? Does our food-stamp program meet the requirements? Do we personally share our food with the hungry?

## CHAPTER 2: FOOD CHOICES

Ruth 2:23 Ruth “gleaned until the barley harvest and the wheat harvest were finished.”

Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat, 140b “Rav Hisda said: ‘One who has the opportunity to eat barley bread but instead eats wheat bread is violating [the spirit of] the rule against needless waste (Deuteronomy 20:19).’”

The “rule against needless waste” is a concept derived from a verse in Deuteronomy. It has important environmental implications—it suggests that must not waste the resources of the earth. In this specific case, the Rabbis know that when barley grows, it does not deplete the soil as much as wheat does.

- Do you believe that we should only eat foods that do as little damage to the earth as possible?
- What are some other examples of food choices we make that have different impacts on the earth?

The text of the Talmud, however, also includes the following: “But this is not what matters most! [Avoiding the] needless waste of one’s own body takes priority.”

Here the argument is that wheat has twice the nutritive value as barley. The conclusion may be, therefore, that one should eat wheat if one needs to, but beyond that, one should eat barley.

- Do we know which foods are healthiest for our bodies?
- Do we always choose those foods?
- Where do we make sacrifices in what we eat?

## CHAPTER 2 & 3: ON THE THRESHING FLOOR—FOOD FROM ITS SOURCE

Ruth 2:17 Ruth “gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned—it was about an ephah of barley”

Ruth 3:2 Boaz “will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor tonight.”

- Have you ever gotten food directly from its source?
- Have you ever seen stalks of grain up close?
- Do you know how grain is turned into flour?
- Do we know what the terms “glean,” “reap,” “winnow” (3:2), and “threshing floor” mean? How and why should we find out?

## **Appendix B**

### **QUESTIONNAIRE for FOOD SOURCE**

#### Instructions

After you have researched all of the ingredients that are necessary to create a particular dish, please take ONE ingredient and learn about it in detail. We highly recommend that you choose an ingredient that is locally grown or processed so that you can go the field/factory in which this particular ingredient is manufactured and interview someone who works there. If it is not possible to go to the field/factory, then you may interview someone by telephone. Think about what ecological, as well as social impact your ingredient may have.

Try your best to find out the answers to the questions below. Feel free to add and answer any questions that are not on the list.

#### Questions that may have an Ecological impact in our society

- 1) Where and how far did you need to travel in order to find this production facility?
- 2) How is your ingredient/product made?
- 3) What is in it?
- 4) Are there any pesticides or chemicals that are used in or during its production?
- 5) What season, if any, does it grow in?
- 6) How is it grown / produced? What kind of technology is used?
- 7) Where else is it grown?
- 8) How much of it is grown / produced?
- 9) How is it prepared?
- 10) How is it packaged? What specifically is used?
- 11) At what point and when does it get shipped? Where does it get distributed?
- 12) How much does it cost to manufacture?
- 13) Other than food, is it used for other purposes?
- 14) What is its historical/cultural background?

#### Questions that may have a Social impact in our society

- 1) Who works in the field/factory? Where are they from?
- 2) How many people work in the field/factory?
- 3) What are some of the various jobs at this production field/factory?
- 4) What is the average wage that is earned?
- 5) Is there a union?
- 6) Do the employees and their families receive health care?

## Appendix C:

### Sample Answers to Questionnaire

Ingredient: Barley, specifically organic pearled barley from Arrowhead Mills

Questions that may have an Ecological impact in our society

- 1) Where and how far did you need to travel in order to find this production facility?

Arrowhead Mills is a national company, so to get information on this specific product, we read through the website and called consumer relations. One can also send them an email, or speak to more than one person in consumer relations.

- 2) How is your ingredient/product made?

Most barley that is used for food is either in pearled or flour form. For human consumption, barley must undergo 3-4 pearlings. Pearlning is a polishing or abrasive grinding process which removes the outer husk and part of the bran layer of the kernels. After pearlning it can be used in food, or ground into flour.

- 3) What is in it?

Barley is a widely distributed cereal plant belonging to the genus *Hordeum*, of the grass family, that has awned flowers that grow in tightly bunched spikes, with three small additional spikes at each node.

- 4) Are there any pesticides or chemicals that are used in or during its production?

No, because the Arrowhead Mills barley is organic.

- 5) What season, if any, does it grow in?

Barley can be grown in spring or winter, but should be planted early in the season. For winter barley, October is the best time to plant. For spring barley, January is the best time to plant.

- 6) How is it grown / produced? What kind of technology is used?

Barley is a tender grain and is easily hurt in any of the stages of its growth, requiring greater effort than in the case of other grains. This includes soil conditions. Barley prefers a well-drained light soil that is not too rich in nutrients. Barley plants can be ruined by heavy rain.

The harvest process is difficult, and often dangerous. Even the threshing of barley is not easily executed with machines, because the awn (the bristlelike addition to the plant) generally adheres to the grain, and renders separation from the straw a troublesome task.

- 6) Where is it grown?

Barley is grown in significant quantity in many places around the world. Barley is a popular grain throughout parts of the United States where it offers environmental advantages when grown in rotation.

Our specific product is grown in the North-Central United States. The company was not able to provide more specific information, but indicated that all Arrowhead Mills grains are grown in the United States.

7) How much is grown / produced?

We were unable to answer this for our specific product, but in 2005, barley ranked fourth in quantity produced and in area of cultivation among cereal crops in the world.

8) How is it prepared?

See question #2

9) How is it packaged? What specifically is used?

The Arrowhead Mills pearled barley is packaged in a plastic bag that may be recyclable.

10) At what point and when does it get shipped? Where does it get distributed?

It is distributed from Texas.

11) How much does it cost to manufacture?

We do not know for our specific product, but barley is raised at greater expense than wheat, and, as indicated above, is generally a more hazardous crop.

12) Other than food, is it used for other purposes?

Half of the United States' barley production is used for animal feed. A large part of the remainder is used for malting and is a key ingredient in beer and whisky production.

13) What is its historical/cultural background?

Excerpts from *Olive Trees and Honey* by Gil Marks (Wiley Publishing, 2005):

Barley is arguably the world's first cultivated plant. In much of the ancient world, most people primarily drank beer, which is made from barley, and ate bread from barely flower. Mentioned throughout the Bible, barely was one of seven species associated with the land of Israel's blessing. Although wheat was the preferred grain, barley served as the staple. Hence, in biblical times, when someone said bread, they generally meant bread from barley flower. Shortly after the Roman conquest of the Levant, common wheat became the primary grain of the Middle East and barley was thereafter reduced to a poor man's food and animal fodder. Nevertheless, barley continues to play a role in the traditions of several Jewish communities.