

שבועות

A FESTIVAL GUIDE FOR SHAVU'OT, 5780



Whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with [the Lord]
he would leave the veil off until he came out;
and when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded,
the Israelites would see how radiant the skin of Moses' face was.
Moses would then put the veil back over his face
until he went in to speak with God [once more] Exodus 34:34.

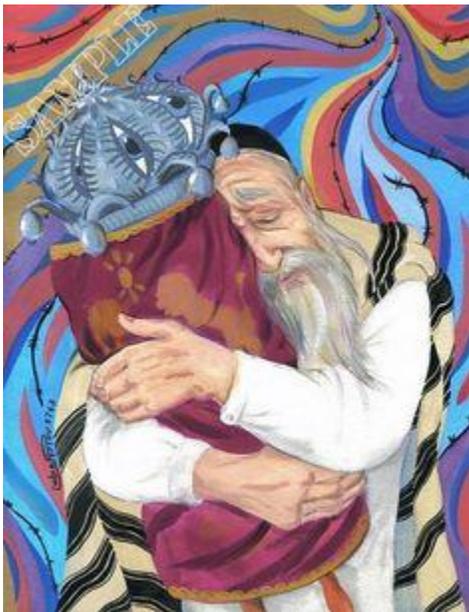
זמן מתן תורתנו -- Zeman Matan Torateinu
THE TIME WHEN THE TORAH IS GIVEN TO
THE JEWISH PEOPLE

זמן רפואה -- Zeman Refu'ah
A TIME OF HEALING DURING THE
PANDEMIC OF 2020

Shavu'ot Begins: Thursday, May 28, 220; Candle Lighting: 7:58 PM
Shavu'ot Ends: Saturday, Motza'ei Shabbat, May 30, 2020, 9:08 PM

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*It is a tree of life to those who grasp onto it.
(The Siddur)*

INTRODUCTION

The festival of Shavu'ot commemorates *zeman matan Torateinu*—the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. For the Jew who believes in morality and ethics, there can be no festival more important than Shavu'ot. It is the day on which we commemorate an event in which the will of God and the will of the Jewish people became one and the same. It is a day on which we commemorate an event at Sinai that changed the national character of the Jewish people forever. And it is a day on which we commemorate the promotion of sacred values, without which the world would be void of *kedushah* or sanctity. For the Jewish people, Torah is the ultimate Guide.

Shavu'ot is special because it demands that we live not only by reason, but by faith as well.

If, after the twentieth century, Jews still believe that reason alone is the vehicle to moral life, they have not absorbed the bitter lessons of modern history. It was the 20th century that proved to all just how amoral reason is.

Like the tornado which cannot distinguish between an abandoned building and a school filled with children, reason does not naturally lead us to any moral high ground.

It is a slave to people, and immoral people will rationalize their every act. Shavu'ot comes to teach us that our reason is only as sound as the moral values that guide it.



And what is it that the Jewish people value?

We value the sanctity of human life, the importance of compassion and love, the need to cultivate the mind, the necessity of creating sacred time via *shabbatot* (Sabbaths) and *hagim* (festivals), the One power greater than ourselves who both cares and protects us, and above all we value *emet*— the truth.



There are those who readily recognize this unique gift which the Jewish people has given to the world, and there are those who deeply resent us for our convictions. Nevertheless, it is the Jewish mission to live by these values and to promote these values. Unless we demand of ourselves the highest moral standard, we cannot seriously call ourselves Jews.

On Shavu'ot, we chant that portion of the Torah which recalls the giving of *Aseret Hadibrot*, the Ten Commandments, on Mt. Sinai. In order to hear the Ten Commandments chanted in the synagogue on Shavu'ot, we must take time off from our hectic schedules. That's no easy sacrifice to make and it often entails a lot of explanation to people who are otherwise unfamiliar with Jewish sacred time and holidays. And yet, the time invested in synagogue is a worthy investment. Jews of the twenty-first century must take steps to assure a Jewish future that is both vibrant and vital. The tradition that we permit to encroach on our mundane work week is a powerful tradition, and its future will definitely be both vibrant and vital.

Shavu'ot is a good reason for celebration together with our sacred synagogue family. Make it a part of your Jewish identity. Make it a part of your Jewish family life.



YOM TOV—WHAT IS IT?

We all know the expression, "Have a good day." "Good day" is literally what Yom Tov means—and more. Yom Tov technically refers to the three major festivals in our Tradition: Pesah, Shavu'ot, and Sukkot. "Yontif" (the Yiddish pronunciation) is interchangeable with Yom Tov, but we use the latter in accordance with modern Hebrew conventions.

In Conservative Judaism, Yom Tov is a joyous, yet serious business. It is serious because it is a day when no business is permitted. Like Shabbat, it is a day when we close our stores, refrain from writing, postpone arts and crafts projects, leave the laundry alone, and concentrate on being together with family, friends, and community.

Conservative Jews observe Yom Tov. It is part of our identity as Jews and part of the way we relate to God. Since you might want to incorporate a bit of Yom Tov into your home, here are a few pointers on how to get started.



1. Cover your Yom Tov table with a white tablecloth and take out your best china and silverware. Prepare a dairy meal.
2. Make sure to come to synagogue for the evening and morning services.
3. Invite guests to your home for Yom Tov and make a commitment to speak of Torah, ethical challenges in the world, the values of Jewish tradition, etc.
4. Work is prohibited. Don't wash the floors, cut, or water the grass, do the laundry, etc. Rather, take walks, talk to friends, start a good book, study a passage from the Bible.
5. Finally, and this is ambitious—plan on taking off from work or school during Yom Tov, if not both days, at least the first day. After all, Yom Tov is a vacation that you deserve.

The Jewish people “keep kosher,” the dietary customs that establish a connection between us and God. Since on Shavuot, we recreate the giving of the Torah at Sinai, and the Israelites would not yet have known the precise traditions regarding the dietary customs, a tradition evolved to “play it safe” and eat only dairy foods, at least for one’s first meal of the Yom Tov.

**SHELOSHET YEMEI HAGBALAH—THREE DAYS PREPARATION FOR
THE GREATEST SHOWING ON EARTH**

We sometimes hear people who are not fond of organized religion draw a distinction between religion and spirituality. They may not attend church or synagogue, but they are nonetheless drawn to the spiritual, something that apparently transcends the four walls of any particular house of worship. They are not lying when they express these sentiments, but the distinction they draw exists only because they have been exposed to a pathetic religiosity. Religion, by definition, is all about spirituality, and a religious institution unable to convey this has failed in its mission.

Shavu'ot is a profoundly spiritual festival in its calling us to the foot of Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, as did our ancestors. But what does that calling mean? The image itself evokes a thousand questions:

Do we dare imagine ourselves at the foot of Sinai prepared to abide by the law of God?

What does the voice of God sound like?

Is the voice audible through the ear or comprehended through the heart?

Does it feel as if God is speaking to us as a group or directly to me, or to each individual?

Do we feel blessed to hear the voice or burdened with a responsibility too great to carry?

Is the experience comforting or terrifying?

Who will be standing next to us?

The exodus from Egypt freed our bodies, but the experience of Sinai liberated our souls. No longer would we be beholden to the whims of a flesh and blood ruler. Instead, our lord would now be the Lord of the Universe. Whoever may temporarily hold political power over us, there is always a law greater and weightier than that of the rule of humans, and that is the law of God. And that's why Shavu'ot is so powerful a festival. It gives us an opportunity to stand at Sinai again, to be charged again, to be the agents of God's life-affirming ways to our friends and family.

This Shavu'ot, however, will be different. This year we will not be standing at Sinai; we won't even be in synagogue. We would be too close to each other, and the threat of the Covid-19 infection would be too great a risk to take. And yet, one of the fundamental messages of God to us is to always find a way, and so we have. However tyrannical this virus, it deals with unruly subjects, and we continue to find ways to foil its insidious demands.

Prior to the giving of the commandments, God instructs Moses to tell the people of Israel "to stay pure today and tomorrow. Let them wash their clothes. Let them be ready for the third day; for on the third day the Lord will come down, in the sight of all the people, on Mount Sinai" (Exodus 19:10b-11). It took three days of preparation for the Sinai experience, and these three days are known as ***Sheloshet Yemei Hagbalah***, the Three Days of Limitation, during which the Israelites minimized their business as usual in order to prepare for the greatest showing on Earth—God showing up with a divine message to deliver.

Although we maintain the sanctity of Shabbat and Yemi Tov by not zooming or streaming, we will nonetheless be prepared for the day by observing ***Sheloshet Yemei Hagbalah***—with the reading of Ruth, the singing of Shavu'ot songs, Torah study, a little wine, a little ice cream, and a whole lot of Torah. We need Shavu'ot this year like no other and nothing, not even a deadly virus will keep us from its influential and inspirational rites. Make sure you check the schedule below for all the details. And next year, I pray that we will all stand together, if not literally at the foot of Sinai, then certainly in our holy sanctuary.

THE CANDLE LIGHTING SCHEDULE & BLESSINGS



Part of the way we make Yom Tov special, a day separate and apart from other days of the week, is by ushering it in with light. We light at least two candles, of the Shabbat variety, or one for each member of the family. Anyone can say the candle blessings, though the honor is generally given to the woman of the household.

This is how to welcome in Yom Tov with light and happiness:

1. Light the candles;
2. With both hands, circle the candles three times, as if welcoming someone;
3. Cover your eyes so you cannot see the candlelight;
4. Say the appropriate blessings as listed below;
5. Add a few personal prayers for yourself or for your family to God;
6. Uncover your eyes, say **Hag Same'ah** (Happy Holiday) and give everyone a Yom Tov kiss.

The Blessings Schedule

<u>DAY</u>	<u>MAY</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>BLESSINGS</u>
Thursday	28	7:58 PM	1, 2
Friday	29	7:59 PM*	3, 2

* The flame used to light candles on the second night must be obtained from an existing fire, like a pilot light or a candle lit before Yom Tov for this express purpose. This is because on Yom Tov, we may transfer fire, but we can neither create it nor extinguish it.

BLESSING # 1

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל יוֹם טוֹב.

*Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu melekh ha'olam,
asher kidishanu bemitzvotav, vitzivanu lehadlik ner shel Yom Tov.*

Praised are You, Adonai our God, who rules the universe,
who makes us holy through mitzvot
and has commanded us to bring light to this good day.

BLESSING # 2

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
שֶׁהַחַיִּינוּ וְקִיַּמְנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמֶן הַזֶּה.

*Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu melekh ha'olam,
shehehyanu, vekiyimanu, vehigi'anu, lazeman hazeh.*

Praised are You, Adonai our God, who rules the universe, who has given us life, and given us
sustenance, and has brought us to this special time.

BLESSING # 3

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל שַׁבָּת וְשֶׁל יוֹם טוֹב.

*Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu melekh ha'olam,
asher kidishanu bemitzvotav, vitzivanu lehadlik ner
shel Shabbat vishel Yom Tov.*

Praised are You, Adonai our God, who rules the universe,
who makes us holy through mitzvot
and has commanded us to bring light to this Shabbat and to this good day.

SOME SHAVU'OT TERMINOLOGY AND TRADITIONS

AKDAMUT	A beautiful hymn composed by Meir ben Isaac Nehorai of Orleans (11 th century), sung before the Torah reading on the first day of Shavuot, and which describes the faithfulness of the Jewish people to God.
ASERET HADIBROT	The Ten Commandments.
<u>HAG HAKATZIR</u>	The Festival of Harvest, which is another name for the festival of Shavu'ot. It is an appropriate name as Shavu'ot coincided with the time for harvesting in the fields.
REVELATION	The theological process by which the <i>Aseret Hadibrot</i> were given at Mount Sinai.
SEFIRAT HA'OMER	The Counting of the Omer—is a sacred ritual in which we count, with a special blessing, every day between the second day of Pesah and 49 days thereafter. The 50 th day is Shavu'ot.
SHAVU'OT	The holiday commemorating the giving of the <i>Aseret Hadibrot</i> at Mount Sinai.
TARYAG MITZVOT	The 613 commandments, or sacred connections, in the Torah.
YOM HABIKKURIM	The Day of First Fruits, which is another name for Shavu'ot. It is an appropriate name for on Shavu'ot, the first of the crops were brought to the ancient Temple in Jerusalem as an offering of thanks to God. And these offerings were made on a regular basis right up until the time of Sukkot (Bikkurim1:6).

SHAVU'OT CUSTOMS מנהגי שבועות

TIKKUN LEL SHAVU'OT—On Shavu'ot, the Kabbalists would study all night long and begin services with the dawn. They believed that this all-night study would prepare or “repair” (*tikkun* means “repair” in Hebrew) their souls for the hearing of the Ten Commandments read from the Torah.



It will not be possible to conduct a Tikkun this year but check the schedule for times when we will be studying Torah in preparation for Shavu'ot.

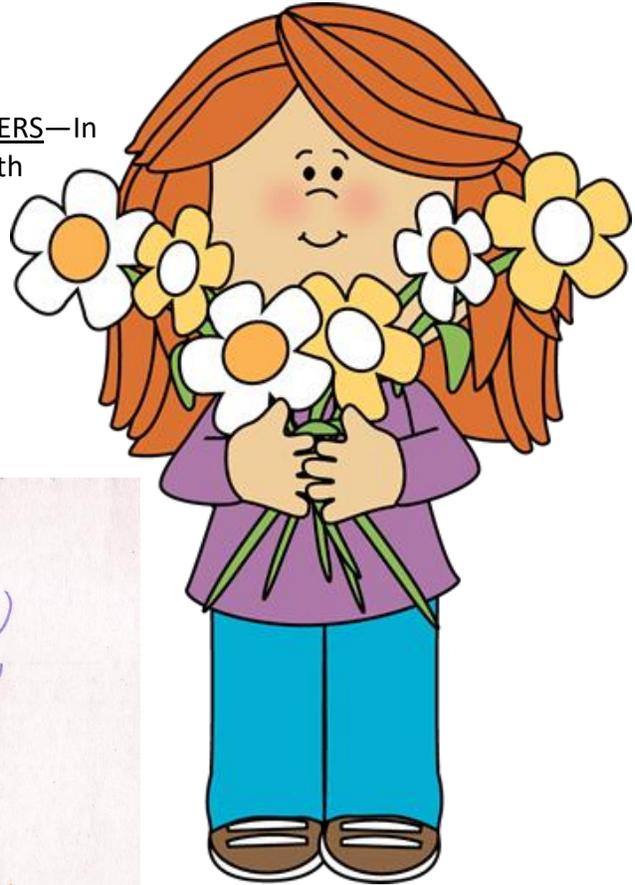
DAIRY FOODS—As our ancestors prepared themselves for receiving the Torah, they made certain sacrifices which heightened their awareness of the great act of Revelation. One such



sacrifice was abstention from meat, at least for part of the festival. Dairy foods on Shavu'ot underscores our belief that a life of Torah is one which brings peace, not only between humanity and itself, but between humanity and the animal kingdom. Shavu'ot—a festival with respect for ice cream: ingenious!

READING THE BOOK OF RUTH—The story of Ruth occurs during the festival of Shavu'ot. Tradition thus regarded the study of Ruth as most appropriate for the holiday. But perhaps there is a deeper meaning. Ruth was a convert to Judaism. Lest anyone argue that the Torah was given to Jews alone, let them read the book of Ruth. This story will maintain that Torah was given to all who choose to accept it. God's word is accessible to all.

DECORATING THE SYNAGOGUE WITH FLOWERS—In some synagogues, the floors were covered with grass. This custom reminds us of the holiday's early agricultural origins. It might also be one more symbol of the peace between humanity and nature which we try to effect at this time.



**CALLING OUR PRE-
SCHOOL FRIENDS**

THE DAY THE TORAH WAS GIVEN, THE WORLD BURST INTO FLOWERS AND HERBS AND GOOD ENERGY!

**IN HONOR OF SHAVU'OT,
WE INVITE OUR PRE-SCHOOLERS TO DRAW PICTURES OF FLOWERS, TREES
AND ALL THINGS THAT GROW IN ORDER TO DECORATE OUR ZOOM ROOM IN
HONOR OF SHAVU'OT.**

The kids will hold up their artwork for the screen and for all to see—a veritable art museum of Midway Jewish Center.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 27, 7:00-7:15 PM

YOUR USER-FRIENDLY GUIDE TO THE MATAN TORAH FESTIVAL OF

SHAVU'OT — שבועות

All candle lighting times recorded follow the tradition of lighting candles 18 (which in Hebrew is *hai*, a word which also means “life”) minutes prior to sunset. This is the latest candles may be lit. Candles may always be lit earlier. When going to services, light the candles first in a safe spot and then come to synagogue.

<u>DAY</u>	<u>MAY</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>EVENT</u>
T	26	7:15 PM 8:00 PM 8:30 PM	FIRST DAY OF SHELOSHET YEMEI HAGBALAH Reading of the Book of Ruth Cantor Frei on the Melodies of Shavu'ot <i>Minhah</i> & <i>Ma'ariv</i> (Afternoon and Evening Services) Wine & Cheese Party BYOW&C Pre-Tikkun #1 with Rabbi Rank on the Topic: Is the Coronavirus a Punishment from God?
W	27	7:00 PM 7:15 PM 8:00 PM 8:30 PM	SECOND DAY OF SHELOSHET YEMEI HAGBALAH Pre-schoolers Decorate the Zoom Room with Flowers Meditations on Each of the Ten Commandments Recitation of Aseret Hadibrot (The Ten Commandments) Cantor Frei on Melodies of Shavu'ot <i>Minhah</i> & <i>Ma'ariv</i> (Afternoon and Evening Services) Ice Cream Party (BYOIC) Pre-Tikkun #2 Pirkei Avot Highlights in Honor Rabbi Rank's 20 th Year at MJC
Th	28	6:00 PM 7:00 PM 7:20 PM 7:58 PM	THIRD DAY OF SHELOSHET YEMEI HAGBALAH The Moving Up Ceremony for Our Religious School Yizkor—A Service for Loved Ones Who Have Passed On <i>Minhah</i> (Afternoon Service) Candle Lighting
F	29	7:59 PM	Candle Lighting (from an existing flame)
Sa	30	9:05 PM	<i>Ma'ariv</i> (Evening Service) & Havdalah

HOW ABOUT CHEESE OR POTATO PIEROGIES?



Everyone knows about blintzes on Shavu'ot, but why not try something equally delicious and perfectly suitable for a dairy day—cheese pierogi. Pierogi are dumplings of East European origin, and our families hailing from Poland, Ukraine, Romania, or Russia almost certainly knew of this this dish. The noodle dough surrounds a filling of cheese, potato, spinach, or meat (though on Shavu'ot you would want something dairy or pareve) and the dumplings themselves would be either boiled or fried. They are then served with caramelized onions, apple sauce or sour cream.

If you are dieting, rip this page out of the Shavu'ot Guide and burn it, but everyone else can reasonably indulge moderately in pierogi paradise.

They are readily available in the grocery store (check for the hekhsher, not all are kosher) or explore on-line for a recipe you might want to follow, with a little help from the kids.
