

The National Jewish Committee on Scouting

Shavuot שבועות

Shavuot is a major holiday for the Jewish people. This holiday marks the anniversary of the day when we received the Torah (Holy Scriptures) at Mount Sinai. This is a Biblical holiday, complete with special prayers, holiday candle lighting and holiday meals; many forms of work and labor are prohibited.

The word "Shavuot" means "weeks." It marks the completion of the seven-week counting period between Passover and Shavuot. During these seven weeks, the Jewish people traveled from Egyptian slavery to Mount Sinai to enter into an eternal covenant with God with the giving of the Torah.

On this day, we received a gift from the Holy One, blessed by He, which we could not have realized with our own limited faculties. We received the ability to reach and touch the Divine; not only to be refined human beings, but Divine human beings who are capable of rising above and beyond the limitations of nature and truly realize that we are created in the image of God.

In preparation for receiving the Holy Word, Jewish people stay up the first night of Shavuot, studying Scriptures and other holy writings. The first morning, the Book of Ruth is read in the synagogue. It is traditional to eat dairy foods at some of the holiday meals as the Torah was referred to by King Solomon that it should be as "honey and milk upon your tongue."

Every year on the holiday of Shavuot, we reenact this historic moment: God re-gives us the Torah and we lovingly re-accept it and reaffirm our devotion to Him alone.



The Best Guarantee - for all ages - מֹשֶׁה / Moshe / Moses commanded the people to wash their clothes, to be prepared for the Sixth of Sivan and went up to הַר סִינַי - *Har Sinai* (Mount Sinai). ה' / Hashem (God) said to him:

"Gather all the people, but speak to the women first, and with kind words, convince them to accept the Torah. These words will convince them to bring up their children according to the Torah."

וּמֹשֶׁה עָלָה אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים וַיְקַרָּא אֵלָיו יְהוָה מִן־הַהָר לֵאמֹר
כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבֵית יַעֲקֹב וְתִגִּיד לְבָנֶי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

u'Moshe eelah el haElokim va'yikrah eilav Hashem min haHar lemod ko somar l'beis Yaakov v'sagid livnei yisreal.

And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel; (Exodus 19:3)

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THUS SHALT YOU SAY TO THE HOUSE OF JACOB - this refers to the women. AND TELL THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL - this refers to the men.

The question is asked: "Why did He command the women first?" - "It is because they are prompt in the fulfilment of the commandments."



"When you have finished speaking to them, turn to the men and tell them everything, just as I have told you. Do not leave out one word." Moses came down and spoke these words to all the people. They answered, saying: "Everything that Hashem has said, we will do." Hashem then said that He wanted witnesses to guarantee that the Jewish people would live according to the Torah and its mitzvot (commandments). The Children of Israel answered the Holy One, blessed by He, saying: "Let our forefathers Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov be our witnesses before You." But Hashem was not satisfied. He said: "I want proof from you." The people then said to Hashem: "Let our children that will be born in the future be our guarantors before You." This pleased Hashem and He said: "This is the best guarantee that the Torah will not be forgotten." "We shall certainly teach the Torah to our children and to our children's children," the Jewish people declared, "They will speak of it when they lie down to sleep and when they rise up; and when they walk upon their way, and it shall not leave their mouths forever."

Names of the Holiday
Shavuot
Feast of Weeks
Pentecost Shevuos
שבועות

It is called Shavuot, or the Feast of Weeks because of the seven weeks that we count from the second night of Pesach (Passover), the day on which the barley harvest (omer) was brought, which was from the first harvest of barley until this holiday, when we began the first harvest of the wheat, whose time was established by the Torah on the 50th day of the omer at the end of 7 weeks.

Another reason for the name of Shavuot is because it was on the holiday that two Shavuot (promises) (from the word to swear) were made. The Holy One, blessed be He, swore to the Jewish people that He would never change us for another nation and we swore to Him that we would never serve another god but Him.

Another reason for the name Shavuot is because it took the people 50 days to travel from Egypt to Mount Sinai. During the trip, the people prepared and purified themselves so they could receive the Holy Word from God.

Day of the First Fruits Yom haBikurim

וּבְיֹם הַבִּכּוּרִים בְּהַקְרִיבְכֶם מִנְחָה חֲדָשָׁה לַח
בְּשִׁבְעַתֵּיכֶם מִקְרָא-קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם כָּל-מְלֶאכֶת עֲבֹדָה לֹא
תַעֲשׂוּ:

במדבר כח : כו

*u'va-yom ha-bikurim b'hakrivchem minchah chadasha la'Hashem
b'shvuoseichem mikrah kodesh yhiyhe lachem kol m'leches avodah lo sa'asu*

Also, in the day of the first fruits, when you bring a new meal offering to the Lord, in your feast of weeks, you shall have a holy gathering; you shall do no labor. Numbers 28:26

It is called Day of the First Fruits because of the two loaves from the first harvesting of wheat that was brought as an eternal sacrifice to God.

The Time of the Giving of the Torah Zeman Matan Toraseinu

חג חֲשֵׁבֵעוֹת הַזֶּה, זְמַן מַתַּן תּוֹרַתֵינוּ

Chag Hashavuous hazeh, z'man matan toraseinu

the Feast of Weeks, the season of the Giving of our Torah
Holiday Shemonah Esrei (Prayers)

On this day, the Torah was given to the Jewish people. The reason why the Torah did not call Shavuot, z'man matan toraseinu (The Time of the Giving of the Torah) is that the Holy One, blessed be He, did not want to set aside a special day as matan Torah (a time of Torah) because a person should look at the Torah as if they had just received it and every day is a new opportunity to read or study the Torah.

Customs of Shavuot

There is a custom to decorate shuls (synagogues) and homes with flowers, roses and other plants. Some have a tradition to put trees next to the Holy Ark (Aron Kodesh) and the Bimah (reading table from which the Torah is read). The reasons for these customs are

Grass grew around Mount Sinai.

Trees remind people that they are judged by the Holy One, blessed be He, on the fruits of the tree and they should grow in their knowledge and understanding of Torah and pray that tomorrow will bring the seeds to grow as a tree.

Roses and Flowers are for the honor of this great day of the giving of the Torah.

There is a story: A great and wise king once entered his garden to see how his flowers were growing and he saw that the whole garden was filled with weeds and thorns. He commanded that the whole garden should be cut down and, just as the workers were about to cut down the garden, they noticed a rose among the thorns. They told the king, who said: "For the sake of this rose, the whole garden will be saved." The lesson is, "for the sake of the Torah, God's Holy Word, the whole world is saved."

We have a custom to eat michig (dairy) and honey or honey cake on Shavuot. We eat dairy as a remembrance of the giving of the Torah because Torah is likened to milk, as the verse says:

“Like a honeycomb, honey and milk are under your tongue.”
Song of Songs 4:11

Just as milk has the ability to sustain the body of a person, so too, the Torah provides all the spiritual nourishment necessary for the human soul.

Torah Portions Read on Shavuot

On the first day of Shavuot, we read from the Torah portion Yitro, the account of the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai.
Exodus 11:1 - 20:23

On the second day, we read from portion Re’eh about the firstlings.
Deuteronomy 15:19 - 16:17

Reading Ruth: Rhyme and Reason

The Book of Ruth (Megillat Rut or Megillas Rus) is traditionally read on the festival of Shavuot.

Megillat Rut was written by the Prophet Shmuel and it is customarily read on the holiday of Shavuot.

There are many reasons why the Book of Ruth is read on the holiday of Shavuot, some of which are listed below:

1. The Torah was given to the Jewish people on this day, the Sixth day of Sivan, and just as Torah learning is acquired through pain and poverty, so did Ruth endure poverty and sorrow in her quest to become part of the Jewish Nation.
2. Like Ruth, who converted and was accepted by God, so too the nation of Israel entered the covenant with God this day as they eagerly accepted the Torah.
3. The gematria, or numerical value, of the Hebrew letters of Ruth is 606 (the letter “Reish” valued at 200, the letter “Vav” valued at six and the letter “Tav” valued at 400). On the holiday of Shavuot, the Jewish nation received 606 mitzvot in addition to the Seven Laws of Noah (Noahide Laws or Noahide Code).
4. King David was born and, seventy years later, died on the holiday of Shavuot. David, the head of the Judean Kingdom, was Ruth’s great grandchild. Ruth is often referred to as Em haMalchus, the Mother of the Kingdom.
5. The central theme of the Book of Ruth is all about Chessed (loving kindness). The book relates the loving kindness Ruth gives her mother-in-law, Naomi, the compassion shown by the people of Bethlehem towards the impoverished and Boaz’s thoughtfulness towards Ruth. The Book of Ruth teaches us that, not only does the Torah, which was given to the Israelites on Shavuot, instruct us to accept converts, but it commands us to treat them with loving kindness.
6. Shavuot is also called Chag Hakatzir, or, the Harvest Festival. The Book of Ruth paints for us a picture of the harvest time in Israel. It shows us how the Jewish people, by following the laws of the Torah, treat their poor with loving kindness during the harvest.

One of our great heroines, Ruth, is now and forever beloved and revered. So much does Ruth, in her modesty of nature, her dignity and her grand deeds, demonstrate for us what a true friend, a true daughter, a true woman, is made of. And thus, now and forever, will Ruth represent and personify nobility, humility and loving kindness.