

THE EREZ SERIES

RABBI ADIN  
EVEN-ISRAEL  
STEINSALTZ

# A CONCISE GUIDE TO THE TORAH

A STUDY EDITION OF THE TORAH



**Steinsaltz  
Center**



**MAGGID**

## The Festival of *Shavuot*

At the conclusion of the counting of the *omer*, the Festival of Weeks is celebrated. The central commandment on that day involves the offering of the two loaves, a meal offering from the new wheat crop.

**<sup>17</sup>From your dwellings you shall bring two loaves of waving, two meal offerings, from two-tenths of an ephah, one-tenth of an ephah for each loaf. Of choice wheat flour they shall be, baked as leavened bread, a first offering from the new crop of wheat to the Lord. <sup>18</sup>You shall offer with the bread seven unblemished lambs in their first year, and one young bull, and two rams. They shall all be a burnt offering to the Lord, and their meal offering and their libations, in accordance with the quantities stated elsewhere in the Torah, shall be a fire offering of a pleasing aroma to the Lord. <sup>19</sup>You shall also present one goat as a sin offering, and two lambs in the first year as a peace offering. <sup>20</sup>The priest shall wave them, the lambs, with the loaves of the first offering as a wave offering before the Lord, the loaves placed with, or on, the two lambs. They shall be sacred to the Lord, and their flesh shall be given as a portion for the priest.**

**<sup>21</sup>You shall proclaim on that very day, the fiftieth day, that it is a festival; a holy convocation it shall be for you; you shall not perform any toilsome labor, it is an eternal statute in all your dwellings for your generations.**

**<sup>22</sup>When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not finish the corner of your field in your reaping; rather, you shall leave an unharvested area. And the gleanings of your harvest, the sheaves that fall during the harvest, you shall not gather. For the poor and for the stranger you shall leave them. I am the Lord your God.**

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A CONCISE GUIDE TO  
**HALAKHA**

AN OVERVIEW OF JEWISH LAW



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# Sivan and Shavuot

The third of the three pilgrimage festivals is *Shavuot*, which falls on the sixth of Sivan. It is called *Shavuot* (“weeks”) because it is celebrated exactly seven weeks after Passover, as it is stated: “You shall count seven weeks for you... You shall hold the Festival of Weeks to the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 16:9–10). Other names of the festival that are mentioned in the Torah are “the festival of the harvest” (Exodus 23:16) and “the day of the first fruits” (Numbers 28:26), as the crops are harvested at this time of year, and when the Temple was standing they would bring a special offering of loaves from the new flour of the year (Leviticus 23:17). *Shavuot* is also referred to as “the time of the giving of our Torah” in the prayer service, because on this day, the sixth of Sivan, the children of Israel received the Torah at Mount Sinai. Therefore, most of the customs of this festival are connected to the giving of the Torah and its acceptance by the Israelites.

In ancient times, the Jewish calendar was determined on a month-by-month basis by a central religious court in accordance with the testimony of witnesses who would come before them and testify that they had seen the new moon. Since the Torah does not specify a date for *Shavuot*, stating only that it occurs on the fiftieth day after the first day of Passover, the festival could have fallen on the fifth or the seventh of Sivan as well, as the preceding months of Nisan and Iyar could each consist of twenty-nine or thirty days. Nowadays, when there is a fixed yearly calendar, the first day of *Shavuot* always occurs on the sixth of Sivan.

On *Shavuot* (as on Passover and *Sukkot*), all the people of Israel were commanded to undertake a pilgrimage to the Temple and to bring their offerings there. Like the months of Nisan and Tishrei, when Passover and *Sukkot* are observed, there is also a celebratory element to the month of Sivan, due to the festival. This festive quality is reflected mainly in the fact that *Tahanun* (a prayer of supplication, which is omitted on festive occasions) is not recited for almost the entire first half of the month, as detailed below.

*Shavuot* is a holiday [*yom tov*], a festival day on which the laws of Shabbat apply, according to their unique application to festival days. This section presents the laws and customs of the days before *Shavuot*, the festival itself, and the days that follow.

## The Start of the Month

### **Tahanun Is Not Recited**

During the first part of the month of Sivan, *Tahanun* is not recited, for several reasons.

The first day of Sivan is *Rosh Hodesh*, and *Tahanun* is never recited on *Rosh Hodesh*.

The second day of Sivan is called *Yom HaMeyuhas*, the “Day of Distinction,” and this is also a reason not to say *Tahanun*. Two explanations have been offered for the name “Day of Distinction.”


(1) It is on this day that God said to the children of Israel: “You shall be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6), and the people of Israel thereby received a special “distinction.”

(2) This day has a particular distinction because it occurs between *Rosh Hodesh* and the three days before *Shavuot*, which are called the “three days of demarcation,” during which the Israelites surrounded Mount Sinai and prepared themselves for the receiving of the Torah (Exodus 19:15). Accordingly, it was determined that *Tahanun* should not be recited on this day either.

As mentioned, the third, fourth, and fifth days of Sivan are known as the “three days of demarcation.” God commanded the children of Israel to demarcate Mount Sinai so no one would ascend, and to encamp around it. They were to use these days to prepare themselves physically and spiritually in a variety of ways to receive the Torah. Even today these are considered festive days, on which *Tahanun* is not recited.

The sixth and seventh days of Sivan are *Shavuot* itself. The following day (or in Israel, the seventh of Sivan) is called *Isru Hag*, and it is considered a festive day.

For the next several days (through the twelfth of Sivan), many communities do not recite *Tahanun*, because these are “days of compensation” for the festival (see explanation at the end of the section, p. 357).

 **Further reading:** For a description of the days leading up to the receiving of the Torah, see *A Concise Guide to the Torah*, p. 180.

### **Preparations for the Festival**

In addition to preparing the festival meals, there are other important preparations that are carried out before the onset of the festival, including ones that are unique to *Shavuot*.

## Decorating the Home

On the eve of the festival, many people decorate their homes and synagogues with green vegetation. The reason for this custom is twofold: First, the Midrash derives from the verse: “The flocks and the cattle shall not graze before that mountain” (Exodus 34:3), that Mount Sinai was covered with greenery in anticipation of the giving of the Torah there. Another reason, based on a mishna (*Rosh HaShana* 1:2), is that on *Shavuot* we are judged concerning the fruits that will grow on our trees during the upcoming year, and the decorative vegetation reminds us to request from God that the trees should yield a substantial and quality harvest.

## Final Preparations

There are other things that one should do on the eve of *Shavuot*:

One should leave a twenty-four-hour candle burning before the holiday, so that it will be possible to transfer fire from it for cooking and other uses during the holiday.

When the holiday occurs on a Friday, one must make an *eiruv tavshilin* before the start of *Shavuot*, so that it will be permitted to cook food on the holiday for the adjacent Shabbat, and also to light the Shabbat candles toward the end of the holiday.

 **Further reading:** For the laws of *eiruv tavshilin*, see p. 474.

## Candle Lighting

If *Shavuot* is on a Sunday, one must be careful to light the festival candles only after Shabbat has ended. This time is generally listed in synagogue calendars. The candles must be lit from an existing flame that was lit before Shabbat. Before lighting the candles, one should recite the formula: “Blessed be He who separates between the sacred and the sacred,” that is, between the more intense holiness of Shabbat and the lesser holiness of the holiday. Under no circumstances may one light the candles any earlier, as this would be a desecration of Shabbat.

When *Shavuot* falls on a weekday, some are accustomed to light the candles at the start of the festival, before sundown, while others light them after the holiday has already begun, just before the beginning of the meal. Those who light after the festival has started should use only an existing flame; that is, they should light a match from a fire that was burning before the festival began. One may not produce a new fire on the holiday itself.


When lighting the candles, one recites two blessings:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר  
שֶׁל יוֹם טוֹב. *Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu, melekh  
ha'olam, asher kideshanu bemitzvotav,  
vetzivanu lehadlik ner shel yom tov.*

“Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who sanctified us through His commandments, and commanded us to light a candle for the festival.”

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
שֶׁהַחַיִּינוּ וְקִיְּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמַן הַזֶּה. *Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu, melekh  
ha'olam, sheheheyanu vekiyemanu  
vehigi'anu la'zeman hazeh.*

“Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has given us life, sustained us, and brought us to this time.

 **Further reading:** For more details regarding the *halakhot* of candle lighting, see p. 381. For more on the festival of *Shavuot*, see *A Concise Guide to the Sages*, p. 309; *A Concise Guide to Mahshava*, p. 99.

## The Night of the Festival

In addition to the standard festival prayers, as well as *Kiddush* and the festive meal, the night of *Shavuot* has the special status of a “night of guarding,” on which it is customary to stay awake and devote time to Torah study and to reciting the *Tikkun Leil Shavuot*.

### Evening Prayer

The festival evening prayer can be found in most prayer books. This prayer service is generally started relatively late on *Shavuot* night, so that the period of the counting of the *omer* will be complete, in accordance with the commandment of the Torah: “Seven weeks; they shall be complete” (Leviticus 23:15), as explained in the previous section.

### The Meal

**Kiddush:** As is done on the eve of every Shabbat and festival, *Kiddush* is recited over a full cup of wine.

 **Further reading:** For details of the laws of *Kiddush*, see p. 386.

## The Wording of Kiddush

For Ashkenazim:

When *Shavuot* is on Friday night, begin here:

(בלחש - ויהי ערב ויהי בקר) יום הששי, ויכלו השמים והארץ וכל צבאם. ויכל אלהים ביום השביעי מלאכתו אשר עשה, וישבת ביום השביעי מכל מלאכתו אשר עשה. ויברך אלהים את יום השביעי ויקדש אתו, כי בו שבת מכל מלאכתו אשר ברא אלהים לעשות.

(Quietly: *Vayhi erev vayhi voker*) *yom hashishi. Vaykhulu hashamayim voha'aretz vekhol tzeva'am. Vaykhal Elohim bayom hashevi'i melakhto asher asa, vayishbot bayom hashevi'i mikol melakhto asher asa. Vayvarekh Elohim et yom hashevi'i vaykadesh oto, ki vo shavat mikol melakhto asher bara Elohim la'asot.*

On weekdays begin here:

סברי מרנן ורבנן ורבותאי.

*Savri meranan verabanan verabotai:*

ברוך אתה אדוני, אלהינו מלך העולם, בורא פרי הגפן.

*Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu, melekh ha'olam, boreh peri hagafen.*

ברוך אתה אדוני, אלהינו מלך העולם, אשר בחר בנו מכל עם, ורוממנו מכל לשון וקדשנו במצותיו, ותתן לנו אדוני אלהינו באהבה (בשבת: שבתות למנוחה) ומועדים לשמחה, חגים וזמנים לששון, את יום (בשבת: השבת הזה ואת יום) חג השבועות הזה, זמן מתן תורתנו (בשבת: באהבה), מקרא קדש זכר ליציאת מצרים. כי בנו בחרת ואותנו קדשת מכל העמים, (בשבת: ושבת) ומועדי קדשך (בשבת: באהבה וברצון) בשמחה ובששון הנחלתנו, ברוך אתה אדוני, מקדש (בשבת: השבת) וישראל והזמנים.

*Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu, melekh ha'olam, asher bahar banu mikol am, veromemanu mikol lashon, vekideshanu bemitzvotav. Vatiten lanu Adonai Eloheinu be'ahava, (on Shabbat: Shabbatot limnuha u)mo'adim lesimha, hagim uzmanim lesason, et yom (on Shabbat: hashabbat hazeh ve'et yom) hag haShavuot hazeh, zeman matan toratenu (on Shabbat: be'ahava) mikra kodesh, zekher litziat Mitzrayim. Ki vanu vaharta ve'otanu kidashta mikol ha'amim, (on Shabbat: veShabbat) umo'adei kodshekha (on Shabbat: be'ahava uvratzon) besimha uvsason hinhaltanu. Barukh ata Adonai, mekadesh (on Shabbat: haShabbat ve)Yisrael vaha'zemanim.*



When *Shavuot* is on Shabbat, begin here:

(Quietly: “It was evening and it was morning,) the sixth day. The heavens and the earth and their entire host were completed. God completed on the seventh day His works that He had made; He rested on the seventh day from all His works that He had made. God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because on it He rested from all His works that God created to make” (Genesis 1:31–2:3).

On weekdays begin here:

“Attention, my masters, gentlemen, teachers.

“Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

“Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has chosen us from all nations, and raised us above all tongues, and sanctified us through His commandments. And You have given us, Lord our God, in love, appointed times for joy, festivals and seasonal holidays for gladness, this day of the festival of *Shavuot*, the time of the giving of our Torah, a holy convocation, in commemoration of the exodus from Egypt. For You have chosen us and sanctified us above all nations, and Your holy festivals, in joy and in gladness You have given us for an inheritance. Blessed are You, Lord, who sanctifies Israel and the seasonal holidays.”

When *Shavuot* begins on Saturday night, it is necessary to incorporate *Havdala* into the *Kiddush* in order to distinguish between the sanctity of Shabbat and the lesser sanctity of the festival. Therefore, two additional blessings are added at this point in the *Kiddush*. First one brings a candle that was lit before Shabbat, or one lights a candle from an existing flame. It is important to note that one may not extinguish any flame on the festival. The following blessings are then recited:

<p>בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בוֹרֵא מְאוּרֵי הָאֵשׁ.</p>	<p><i>Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu, melekh ha'olam, boreh me'orei ha'esh.</i></p>
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<p>בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַמְבַדִּיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְחֹל בֵּין אוֹר לְחֹשֶׁךְ בֵּין יִשְׂרָאֵל לְעַמִּים בֵּין יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי לְשִׁשֶׁת יְמֵי הַמַּעֲשֶׂה. בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ שַׁבָּת לְקֹדֶשׁת יוֹם טוֹב הַבְּדִלְתָּ וְאֵת יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִשִּׁשֶׁת יְמֵי הַמַּעֲשֶׂה קֹדֶשׁת הַבְּדִלְתָּ וְקֹדֶשׁת אֵת</p>	<p><i>Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu, melekh ha'olam, hamavdil bein kodesh lehol, bein or lehoshekh, bein Yisrael la'amim, bein yom hashevi'i lesheshet yemei hama'aseh. Bein kedushat Shabbat likdushat Yom Tov hivdalta, ve'et yom hashevi'i misheshet yemei hama'aseh kidashta. Hivdalta vekidashta et</i></p>
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עֲמַךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקֹדֶשׁתֶּךָ. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי,  
הַמְבַדִּיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְקֹדֶשׁ.

*amekha Yisrael bikdushatekha. Barukh  
ata Adonai, hamavdil bein kodesh le-  
kodesh.*

“Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who creates the lights of fire.

“Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who distinguishes between sacred and mundane, between light and darkness, between Israel and the [other] nations, between the seventh day and the six days of work. You have distinguished between the sanctity of Shabbat and the sanctity of festivals, and You have sanctified the seventh day above the six days of activity. You have distinguished and sanctified Your people Israel with Your sanctity. Blessed are You, Lord, who distinguishes between sacred and sacred.”

The additional section for the conclusion of Shabbat ends here.

As on the other festivals, at the end of *Kiddush* one adds the *Shehecheyanu* blessing on both nights (some place a new fruit on the table on the second night, so that one can look at it and have it in mind when the blessing is recited):

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
שֶׁהַחַיִּינוּ וְקִיָּמְנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמַן הַזֶּה.

*Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu, melekh  
ha'olam, shehecheyanu vekiyemanu  
vehigi'anu la'zeman hazeh.*

“Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has given us life, sustained us, and brought us to this time.”

For Sephardim:

When *Shavuot* is on Friday night, begin here:

(בלחש - וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר) יוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי,  
וַיְכַלּוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל צְבָאָם. וַיְכַל  
אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר  
עָשָׂה, וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִכָּל מְלַאכְתּוֹ  
אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה. וַיְבָרַךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי  
וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ, כִּי בּו שְׁבֹת מְכַל מְלַאכְתּוֹ  
אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת.

(Quietly: *Vayhi erev vayhi voker*)  
*yom hashishi. Vaykhulu hashamayim  
veha'aretz vekhol tzeva'am. Vaykhal  
Elohim bayom hashevi'i melakhto ash-  
er asa, vayishbot bayom hashevi'i mikol  
melakhto asher asa. Vayvarekh Elohim  
et yom hashevi'i vaykadesh oto, ki vo  
shavat mikol melakhto asher bara Elo-  
him la'asot.*

On weekdays begin here:

אֱלֹהֵי מוֹעֲדֵי אֲדֹנָי מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ, אֲשֶׁר  
תִּקְרְאוּ אֹתָם בְּמוֹעֲדָם. וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶת  
מִעַדֵי אֲדֹנָי אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

*Eleh mo'adei Adonai, mikra'ei kodesh,  
asher tikre'u otam bemo'adam. Vayda-  
ber Moshe et mo'adei Adonai el benei  
Yisrael.*

סַבְרֵי מְרַנָּן.

*Savri meranan.*

הַשּׁוֹמְעִים עֹנִים: לְחַיִּים!

Those listening answer: *Lehayim.*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
בוֹרֵא פְרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

*Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu, melekh  
ha'olam, boreh peri hagefen.*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר בְּנוֹ מִכָּל עַם, וְרוֹמְמָנוּ מִכָּל  
לָשׁוֹן, וְקִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו. וַתִּתֵּן לָנוּ אֲדֹנָי  
אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּאַהֲבָה (בשבת: שְׁבֻתוֹת לְמִנוּחָה  
(ו) מוֹעֲדִים לְשִׂמְחָה, חַגִּים וְזִמְנִים לְשִׂשׁוֹן,  
(בשבת: אֶת יוֹם הַשְּׁבֻת הַזֶּה וְ) אֶת יוֹם  
חַג הַשְּׁבֻעוֹת הַזֶּה. אֶת יוֹם טוֹב מִקְרָא  
קֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה, וְזִמן מִתֵּן תּוֹרָתְנוּ בְּאַהֲבָה מִקְרָא  
קֹדֶשׁ, וְכָר לִיצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם. כִּי בָנוּ בְּחֻרָתָ,  
וְאוֹתָנוּ קִדְּשָׁתָּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים (בשבת:  
וְשְׁבֻתוֹת ו) מוֹעֲדֵי קֹדֶשׁךָ (בשבת: בְּאַהֲבָה  
וּבְרִצּוֹן) בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְשִׂשׁוֹן הִנְחַלְתָּנוּ. בָּרוּךְ  
אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי, מִקְדָּשׁ (בשבת: הַשְּׁבֻת ו) יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהַזִּמְנִים.

*Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu, me-  
lekh ha'olam, asher bahar banu mikol  
am, veromemanu mikol lashon, ve-  
kideshanu bemitzvotav. Vatiten lanu  
Adonai Eloheinu be'ahava, (on Shab-  
bat: Shabbatot limnuha u)mo'adim  
lesimha, hagim uzmanim lesason, (on  
Shabbat: et yom haShabbat hazeh  
ve) et yom hag haShavuot hazeh,  
et yom tov mikra kodesh hazeh, ze-  
man matan toratenu be'ahava mikra  
kodesh, zekher litziat Mitzrayim. Ki  
vanu vaharta ve'otanu kidashta mikol  
ha'amim, (on Shabbat: veShabbatot)  
umo'adei kodshekha (on Shabbat:  
be'ahava uvratzon) besimha uvsason  
hinhaltanu. Barukh ata Adonai, me-  
kadesh (on Shabbat: HaShabbat ve)  
Yisrael vеха'zmanim.*

When *Shavuot* is on Shabbat, begin here:

(Quietly: “It was evening and it was morning,) the sixth day. The heavens and the earth and their entire host were completed. God completed on the seventh day His works that He had made; He rested on the seventh day from all His works that He had made. God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because on it He rested from all His works that God created to make” (Genesis 1:31–2:3).

On weekdays begin here:

“These are the appointed times of the Lord, holy convocations, that you shall proclaim at their appointed time” (Leviticus 23:4). “And Moses spoke to the children of Israel the appointed times of the Lord” (Leviticus 23:44).

“Attention, my masters.”

The listeners respond: “To life!”

“Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

“Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has chosen us from all nations, and raised us above all tongues, and sanctified us through His commandments. And You have given us, Lord our God, in love, appointed times for joy, festivals and seasonal holidays for gladness, this day of the festival of *Shavuot*, this festival day of holy convocation, the time of the giving of our Torah, with love, in commemoration of the exodus from Egypt. For You have chosen us and sanctified us above all nations, and Your holy festivals, in joy and in gladness You have given us for an inheritance. Blessed are You, Lord, who sanctifies Israel and the seasonal holidays.”

When *Shavuot* begins on Saturday night, it is necessary to incorporate *Havdala* into the *Kiddush* in order to distinguish between the sanctity of Shabbat and the lesser sanctity of the festival. Therefore, two additional blessings are added at this point in the *Kiddush*. First one brings a candle that was lit before Shabbat, or one lights a candle from an existing flame. It is important to note that one may not extinguish any flame on the festival. The following blessings are then recited:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
בוֹרֵא מְאוּרֵי הָאֵשׁ.

*Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu, melekh ha'olam, boreh me'orei ha'esh.*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
הַמְבַדִּיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְחֹל בֵּין אֹר לְחֹשֶׁךְ  
בֵּין יִשְׂרָאֵל לְעַמִּים בֵּין יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי לְשִׁשֶּׁת  
יְמֵי הַמַּעֲשֶׂה. בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ שַׁבָּת לְקֹדֶשׁת  
יוֹם טוֹב הַבְּדִלְתָּ וְאֵת יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִשִּׁשֶּׁת  
יְמֵי הַמַּעֲשֶׂה קֹדֶשׁת הַבְּדִלְתָּ וְקֹדֶשׁת אֵת  
עַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקֹדֶשׁתְךָ. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי,  
הַמְבַדִּיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְקֹדֶשׁ.

*Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu, melekh ha'olam, hamavdil bein kodesh lehol, bein or lehoshekh, bein Yisrael la'amim, bein yom hashevi'i lesheshet yemei hama'aseh. Bein kedushat Shabbat likdushat Yom Tov hivdalta, ve'et yom hashevi'i misheshet yemei hama'aseh kidashta. Hivdalta vekidashta et amekha Yisrael bikdushatekha. Barukh ata Adonai, hamavdil bein kodesh le-kodesh.*

“Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who creates the lights of fire.

“Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who distinguishes between sacred and mundane, between light and darkness, between Israel and the [other] nations, between the seventh day and the six days of work. You have distinguished between the sanctity of Shabbat and the sanctity of festivals, and You have sanctified the seventh day above the six days of activity. You have distinguished and sanctified Your people Israel with Your sanctity. Blessed are You, Lord, who distinguishes between sacred and sacred.”

The additional section for the conclusion of Shabbat ends here.

As on the other festivals, at the end of *Kiddush* one adds the *Shehehyanu* blessing on both nights (some place a new fruit on the table on the second night, so that one can look at it and have it in mind when the blessing is recited):

<p>בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהַחַיִּינוּ וְקִיְמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזִמְנֵי הַזֶּה.</p>	<p><i>Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu, melekh ha'olam, shehehyanu vekiyemanu vehigi'anu la'zeman hazeh.</i></p>
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“Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has given us life, sustained us, and brought us to this time.”

**The blessing of *HaMotzi*:** The blessing is recited over two whole loaves of bread. After the meal, Grace after Meals is recited with the addition of the *Ya'aleh VeYavo* section.

### *Tikkun Leil Shavuot*

On the night of *Shavuot*, it is customary to conduct an all-night study vigil. Many concentrate on a prescribed set of selections from various Torah sources, called *Tikkun Leil Shavuot*. It consists mainly of the first and last verses of each weekly portion in the Torah, and also the first and last verses from the books of the Prophets and the Writings. Some have the custom to also read the first and last mishna of each of the sixty-three tractates of the Talmud, a list of the 613 commandments, and certain passages from the Zohar.

This custom of *Tikkun Leil Shavuot* was originally instituted by the kabbalists of Safed, based on a statement of the Zohar. The meaning of the word *tikkun* in Aramaic is “decoration”; just as one decorates a bride on the eve

of her marriage, likewise, through reciting the *tikkun* one adorns the Torah before accepting it anew.

Another explanation for this custom is that it is based on the statement of the Midrash that on the night of the sixth of Sivan, the children of Israel sank into a deep sleep, so that in the morning, Moses had to wake them and hurry them to gather around Mount Sinai to receive the Torah. In order to make up for this behavior, we remain awake all night long, waiting eagerly for the Ten Commandments, which are read from the Torah in the morning.

Just before dawn, some people immerse themselves in a *mikva*, as part of their spiritual preparation for receiving the Torah.

Over the course of the generations, many communities developed the practice of conducting different types of study sessions all night on *Shavuot*, including independent Torah study as well as a variety of lectures. Some maintain that these are less preferable alternatives to the saying of the formulated *tikkun*, which is the main custom of this night.

At the end of the recitation of the *tikkun*, some have the custom of praying the morning prayer service in a manner called *vatikin*, which means that *Shema* is recited just before sunrise, and exactly at the moment of sunrise, the *Amida* prayer is recited. Others first go home to rest and then reconvene for the morning prayers after a few hours of sleep, so that they will be able to concentrate properly on their prayers.

 **Further reading:** For more on *Tikkun Leil Shavuot*, see *A Concise Guide to Mahshava*, p. 99.

## The Festival Day

After the preparations that last the whole night, the great moment arrives when the Ten Commandments are read from the Torah. This reading is considered a kind of reenactment of the giving of the Torah at Sinai.

### Morning Prayers

In the morning, the congregation prays the festival morning prayer service, as appears in prayer books. After the *Amida* prayer, the full *Hallel* is recited. Afterward, *Kaddish* is said and, in some congregations, the Song of the Day is recited at this point. Two Torah scrolls are removed from the synagogue ark.

### Torah Reading and the Additional Prayer [*Musaf*]

Five men are called up for the reading from the first scroll, a passage from Exodus (19:1–20:22) that recounts the giving of the Torah. By reading this

passage from the Torah on *Shavuot*, it is considered as though we ourselves are standing at the foot of Mount Sinai and receiving the Torah. According to Chabad custom, it is appropriate to bring children of all ages, and even babies, to hear the Ten Commandments being read as, according to the Midrash, the young children of Israel played an important role in God's decision to give us the Torah.

The second scroll is for the shorter reading of the *maftir*, which discusses the additional festival offerings (Numbers 28:26–31) for *Shavuot*. The man called up for the *maftir* then reads the *haftara*, which is from the book of Ezekiel (1:1–28; 3:12). This *haftara* describes the Divine Chariot, the divine revelation experienced by the prophet Ezekiel. This vision is reminiscent of God's revelation to the people of Israel at Mount Sinai.

There is a custom to recite certain liturgical poems before the reading of the Torah. Ashkenazim recite the liturgical rhyme *Akdmut*, a poem in Aramaic that describes the praise of the Torah and the reward of those who study it.

Sephardim chant the poem *Ketuba*, by Rabbi Yisrael Najara, which is written as a kind of marriage contract [*ketuba*] between God and Israel, who are compared to a groom and bride.

Afterward, the congregation recites the festival *Musaf* prayer.

### The Festive Meal

After the prayer service, *Kiddush* is recited, followed by the festive meal.

### The Text of *Kiddush*

For Ashkenazim:

On Shabbat, many begin with all or some of the following verses:

<p>אִם תִּשְׁבַּח מִשְׁבַּת רַגְלֶךָ, עֲשׂוֹת חֲפָצֶךָ בְּיוֹם קָדְשִׁי. וְקִרְאֵת לְשַׁבַּת עֲנִיג, לְקָדוֹשׁ אֲדֹנָי מְכַבֵּד. וְכִבְדֵתוּ מַעֲשׂוֹת דְּרֹכֶיךָ, מִמְצוֹא חֲפָצֶךָ וְדַבֵּר דָּבָר. אִזּוֹ תִתְעַנֵּג עַל אֲדֹנָי, וְהִרְכַּבְתִּיךָ עַל בָּמֹתַי אֶרֶץ. וְהִאֲחַלְתִּיךָ נַחֲלַת יַעֲקֹב אָבִיךָ, כִּי פִי אֲדֹנָי דָּבָר.</p>	<p><i>Im tashiv miShabbat raglekha asot hafatzekha beyom kodshi, vekarata laShabbat oneg likdosh Adonai mekhubad, vekhibadeto me'asot derakheikha mimetzo heftzekha vedaber davar, az titanag al Adonai, vehirkavtikha al bamotei aretz, vaha'akhaltikha nahalat Ya'akov avikha, ki pi Adonai diber.</i></p>
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וְשָׁמְרוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַשַּׁבָּת, לַעֲשׂוֹת  
אֶת הַשַּׁבָּת לְדֹרוֹתֵם בְּרִית עוֹלָם. בֵּינִי וּבֵין  
בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, אוֹת הִיא לְעוֹלָם, כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת  
יָמִים עָשָׂה אֲדֹנָי אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ,  
וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שָׁבַת וַיִּנְפַּשׁ.

*Vesha'meru venei Yisrael et haShabbat,  
la'asot et haShabbat ledorotam berit  
olam. Beini uvein benei Yisrael ot hi  
le'olam, ki sheshet yamim asa Adonai  
et hashamayim ve'et ha'aretz, uwayom  
hashevi'i shavat vayinafash.*

זְכוֹר אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ. שֵׁשֶׁת  
יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשִׂיתָ כָּל מְלַאכְתְּךָ. וַיּוֹם  
הַשְּׁבִיעִי שָׁבַת לְאֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהֶיךָ, לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה  
כָּל מְלָאכָה אֲתָהּ וּבְנֶךָ וּבִתְךָ, עַבְדְּךָ  
וְאִמְתְּךָ וּבַהֲמִתְךָ, וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ.  
כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים עָשָׂה אֲדֹנָי אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם  
וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ, אֶת הַיָּם וְאֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר בָּם,  
וַיִּנַּח בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי.

*Zakhor et yom haShabbat lekadesh.  
Sheshet yamim ta'avod ve'asita kol  
melakhtekha. Veyom hashevi'i Shab-  
bat ladonai Elohekha. Lo ta'aseh  
khol melakha, ata uvinkha uvitekha,  
avdekha va'amtekha uvhemtekha, veg-  
erekha asher bisharekha. Ki sheshet  
yamim asa Adonai et hashamayim  
ve'et ha'aretz, et hayam ve'et kol asher  
bam, vayanah bayom hashevi'i.*

עַל כֵּן בְּרַךְ אֲדֹנָי אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת וַיְקַדְּשֶׁהוּ.

*Al ken berakh Adonai et yom haShab-  
bat vayka'deshehu.*

אם חל ביום חול מתחילים כאן:

On weekdays, start here:

אֱלֹהֵי מוֹעֲדֵי אֲדֹנָי, מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ, אֲשֶׁר  
תִּקְרְאוּ אֹתָם בְּמוֹעֲדָם. וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶת  
מוֹעֲדֵי אֲדֹנָי אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

*Eleh mo'adei Adonai, mikra'ei kodesh,  
asher tikre'u otam bemo'adam. Vayda-  
ber Moshe et mo'adei Adonai el benei  
Yisrael.*

סַבְּרֵי מֵרַגְזֵי וּרְבִנֵי וּרְבוֹתֵי.

*Savri meranan verabanan verabotai:*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
בוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

*Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu, melekh  
ha'olam, boreh peri hagafen.*

On Shabbat, many begin with all or some of the following verses:

“If you restrain your walking because of the Sabbath, pursuing your needs on the day of My holiness and you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord’s sacred, honored, and you honor it by refraining from doing your business, from seeking your needs and from speaking of matters, then you will delight in the Lord and I will mount you onto the heights of the earth and I will feed you the inheritance of Jacob your forefather, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken” (Isaiah 58:13–14).



“The children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath for their generations an eternal covenant. Between Me and the children of Israel, it is a sign forever. For in six days the Lord made the heaven and the earth and on the seventh day, He rested and was invigorated” (Exodus 31:16–17). “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall work and perform all your labor. The seventh day is Sabbath for the Lord your God; you shall not perform any labor, you, and your son, and your daughter, your slave, and your maidservant, and your animal, and your stranger who is within your gates, because in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and everything that is in them and He rested on the seventh day; therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and He sanctified it” (Exodus 20:8–11).

On weekdays, begin here:

“These are the appointed times of the Lord, holy convocations, that you shall proclaim at their appointed time” (Leviticus 23:4). “And Moses spoke to the children of Israel the appointed times of the Lord” (Leviticus 23:44).

“Attention, my masters, gentlemen, teachers.

“Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.”

For Sephardim:

On Shabbat, begin here:

מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד, אֲדַנִּי רַעִי לֹא אֶחָסֵר. בְּנֵאוֹת  
דָּשָׂא יִרְבִּיצְנִי, עַל מֵי מִנְחוֹת יִנְהַלְנִי. נַפְשִׁי  
יִשׁוּבָב, יִנְחַנֵּי בְּמַעְגְלֵי צְדָק לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ.  
גַּם כִּי אֵלֶיךָ בָּגִיא צַלְמוֹת, לֹא אֵירָא רַע  
כִּי אַתָּה עֲמֹדִי, שְׁבִטְךָ וּמִשְׁעֲנֶנְתְּךָ הִמָּה  
יִנְחַמְנִי. תִּעְרַךְ לִפְנֵי שְׁלֹחַן נֶגֶד צָרְרִי, דְּשַׁנְתָּ  
בְּשִׁמְן רֹאשִׁי כּוֹסֵי רוּיָהּ. אַךְ טוֹב וַחֲסֵד  
יִרְדְּפוּנִי כָּל יְמֵי חַיִּי, וְשִׁבְתִּי בְּבֵית אֲדֹנָי  
לְאֶרֶךְ יָמִים.

*Mizmor LeDavid: Adonai ro'i lo ehsar. Binot deshe yarbitzeni, al mei menuhot yenahaleni. Nafshi yeshovev, yanheni vema'agelei tzedek lema'an shemo. Gam ki elekh begei tzalmavet lo ira ra, ki ata imadi, shivtekha umishantekha hema yenaḥamuni. Ta'arokh lefanai shulhan neged tzorerai. Dishanta vashemen roshi, kosi revaya. Akh tov vahesed yird-funi kol yemei hayay, veshavti beveit Adonai le'orekh yamim.*

אִם תִּשְׁבֵּב מִשְׁבַּת רַגְלְךָ, עֲשׂוֹת חֲפָצְךָ בְּיוֹם  
קִדְשִׁי, וְקִרְאֵת לְשַׁבַּת עֲנִי, לְקִדּוֹשׁ אֲדֹנָי  
מִכְבָּד, וְכִבְדָּתוֹ מֵעֲשׂוֹת דְּרֻכֶיךָ, מִמְצוֹא

*Im tashiv miShabbat raglekha asot hafatzekha beyom kodshi, vekarata laShabbat oneg likdosh Adonai mekhubad, vekhibadeto me'asot derakhekha*

חִפְצְךָ וּדְבַר דְּבַר. אִז תִּתְעַנֵּג עַל אֲדֹנָי  
וְהִרְכַּבְתִּיךָ עַל פְּמָתֵי אֶרֶץ, וְהִאֲכַלְתִּיךָ  
נַחֲלַת יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיךָ כִּי פִי אֲדֹנָי דְּבַר.

*mimetzo heftzekha vedaber davar, az titanag al Adonai, vehirkavtikha al bamotei aretz, vaha'akhaltikha nahalat Ya'akov avikha, ki pi Adonai diber.*

וּשְׁמְרוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַשַּׁבָּת, לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת  
הַשַּׁבָּת לְדֹרוֹתָם בְּרִית עוֹלָם. בֵּינִי וּבֵין בְּנֵי  
יִשְׂרָאֵל אוֹת הִיא לְעוֹלָם. כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים  
עָשָׂה אֲדֹנָי אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ, וּבַיּוֹם  
הַשְּׁבִיעִי שָׁבַת וַיִּנְפַּשׁ.

*Vesha'meru venei Yisrael et HaShabbat, la'asot et HaShabbat ledorotam berit olam. Beini uvein benei Yisrael ot hi le'olam, ki Sheshet yamim asa Adonai et hashamayim ve'et ha'aretz, uwayom hashevi'i shavat vayinafash.*

אם חל ביום חול מתחילים כאן:

On a weekday, begin here:

אֵלֶּה מוֹעֲדֵי אֲדֹנָי, מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ, אֲשֶׁר  
תִּקְרָאוּ אֹתָם בְּמוֹעֲדָם. וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה  
אֶת מוֹעֲדֵי אֲדֹנָי, אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. שְׁלֹשׁ  
פְּעָמִים בַּשָּׁנָה יִרְאֶה כָּל זְכוּרָךְ אֶת פְּנֵי  
אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּמִקּוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר, בַּחֹג  
הַמִּצּוֹת וּבַחֹג הַשְּׁבָעוֹת וּבַחֹג הַסְּפֹת, וְלֹא  
יִרְאֶה אֶת פְּנֵי אֲדֹנָי רִיקָם. אִישׁ כַּמִּתְנַת  
יָדוֹ, כְּבִרְכַּת אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָךְ:

*Eleh mo'adei Adonai, mikra'ei kodesh, asher tikre'u otam bemo'adam. Vaydaber Moshe et mo'adei Adonai el benei Yisrael. Shalosh pe'amim bashana yera'e khol zekhurekha et penei Adonai Elohekha bamakom asher yivhar: Behag hamatzot uvhag hashavuot uvhag hasukkot. Velo yera'e et penei Adonai reikam. Ish kematnat yado, kevirkat Adonai Elohekha asher natan lakh.*

סְבִירֵי מְרָנָן.

*Savri meranan.*

הַשּׁוֹמְעִים עֲוֹנִים: לְחַיִּים!

Those listening answer: *Lehayim.*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
בוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

Continue: *Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu, melekh ha'olam, boreh peri hagefen.*

On Shabbat, begin here:

“A psalm by David. The Lord is my Shepherd; I lack nothing. He has me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Even when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup is full. May only goodness and kindness pursue me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the House of the Lord forever” (Psalms 23).

“If you restrain your walking because of the Sabbath, pursuing your needs on the day of My holiness and you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord’s sacred, honored, and you honor it by refraining from doing your business, from seeking your needs and from speaking of matters, then you will delight in the Lord and I will mount you onto the heights of the earth and I will feed you the inheritance of Jacob your forefather, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken” (Isaiah 58:13–14).

“The children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath for their generations an eternal covenant. Between Me and the children of Israel, it is a sign forever. For in six days the Lord made the heaven and the earth and on the seventh day, He rested and was invigorated” (Exodus 31:16–17).

On a weekday, begin here:

“These are the appointed times of the Lord, holy convocations, that you shall proclaim at their appointed time” (Leviticus 23:4). “And Moses spoke to the children of Israel the appointed times of the Lord” (Leviticus 23:44).


“Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God in the place that He shall choose: On the Festival of Unleavened Bread, and on the Festival of Weeks, and on the Festival of Tabernacles, and they shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed. Each man according to the gift of his hand, in accordance with the blessing of the Lord your God that He gave you” (Deuteronomy 16:16–17).

“Attention, my masters.”

The listeners respond: “To life!”

“Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.”

The *HaMotzi* blessing is recited over two whole loaves of bread, and in Grace after Meals the *Ya’aleh VeYavo* section is added.

 **Further reading:** To read about the choice of Mount Sinai for the giving of the Torah, see *A Concise Guide to the Sages*, p. 310.

## Dairy Foods

On *Shavuot*, it is customary to eat dairy foods. Several reasons have been suggested for this: (1) When the Torah was given to the children of Israel and the laws concerning what one may eat came into effect, they had no kosher meat, as preparing kosher meat requires the use of special slaughtering knives, and likewise it is necessary to soak the meat in water and to salt it, all of which takes time. Therefore, they ate dairy foods on that day.

(2) The Torah is compared to milk, as it is stated: “Honey and milk are under your tongue” (Song of Songs 4:11). Just as milk has many nutritional qualities, so too, the Torah provides spiritual nourishment to the soul of a Jew. As the Torah is also likened to honey in the above verse, some likewise eat foods with honey on *Shavuot*.

(3) Mount Sinai is called “a mountain of ridges [*gavnunim*]” (Psalms 16:16). Thus, the Hebrew word for cheese, *gevina*, is seen as a verbal allusion to Mount Sinai.

That said, it is a mitzva to eat meat on festivals. This requires special attention and planning, so that the consumption of dairy and meat is done in a permissible manner.

 **Further reading:** See the chapter dealing with the laws of kosher food, p. 545.

There are various customs regarding the manner of eating the dairy foods. Some serve them immediately after *Kiddush*, as a separate meal, and only later serve a meat meal. Others partake of the dairy foods as an afternoon meal. Yet others start the daytime meal as a dairy meal, and when they have finished eating the dairy foods, they clear the table, change the tablecloth and the bread, rinse out their mouths, and then eat the rest of the meal with meat.

In the afternoon, the festival afternoon prayer service is recited.

 **Further reading:** Why doesn't the Torah explicitly identify *Shavuot* as the festival of the giving of the Torah? See *A Concise Guide to Mahshava*, p. 102. What else is the Torah compared to? See *A Concise Guide to the Sages*, p. 449.

### Second Day of *Shavuot*

As with all the Torah's holy days except Yom Kippur, *Shavuot* is celebrated outside of Israel for two days.

It is customary to read the book of Ruth on the second day of *Shavuot*, as its story occurred during the wheat and barley harvests, which are connected to the period of the counting of the *omer*. Furthermore, the book of Ruth also mentions the birth and lineage of King David who, according to tradition, passed away on *Shavuot*. In Israel, where only one day of *Shavuot* is observed, the book of Ruth is read on that day.

The main Torah reading for the second day is a section from Deuteronomy (15:19–16:17), which mentions the three pilgrimage festivals and the counting of the *omer*. Five men are called up for this reading. If it is a Shabbat, seven men are called up and the reading is expanded by beginning from Deuteronomy 14:22. The *maftir* is the same as on the first day, and the

*haftara* is from Habakkuk (2:20–3:19), a prayer by Habakkuk that includes a depiction of the Divine Chariot, linking this *haftara* to that of the previous day, which describes the revelation of Ezekiel. After the first verse of the *haftara*, the reading is interrupted for the recitation of the Aramaic liturgical poem *Yetziv Pitgam*, which praises God, who gave us the Torah and created the universe.

According to the Ashkenazic custom, the *Yizkor* prayer, in memory of the deceased, is recited before *Musaf*. In Israel, this is recited on the previous day.

One who travels to Israel for *Shavuot*, or a resident of Israel who is abroad, should consult a rabbi regarding how to conduct himself on this second day.

### ***Havdala***

Upon the conclusion of the festival, *Havdala* is recited over a full cup of wine. The wording of this *Havdala* is identical to the *Havdala* of Shabbat, but without the blessings over the candle and the spices. Likewise, the introductory verses before *Havdala* are not recited. One recites the blessing over the wine: “who creates the fruit of the vine,” followed by the blessing of: “who separates between the sacred and the mundane.”

### **The Days After the Festival**

Unlike *Sukkot* and Passover, *Shavuot* consists of only one day, not seven. However, there are special customs that pertain to the days following the festival.

### ***Isru Hag***

The day after a festival is called *Isru Hag*, based on the verse: “Bind the festival offering [*isru hag*] with cords, and thence to the horns of the altar” (Psalms 118:27). This is homiletically interpreted to mean: Tie the days of the festival to the following mundane weekdays. Therefore, this day has a slightly festive nature, and some have the custom to add something special to their meal in its honor.

### **Days of Compensation**

The six days, from the seventh to the twelfth of Sivan, are “days of compensation” for the festival offerings. By Torah law, Passover and *Sukkot* are celebrated for seven days, during which all Jews were required to make pilgrimages to the Temple and bring the festival offerings. In contrast, the

festival of *Shavuot* lasts only one day, which made it difficult for everyone to ascend to Jerusalem and bring their offerings in that single day. Therefore, six days were added after the festival during which one could bring his individual *Shavuot* offerings, to make a total of seven days during which the festival offerings of *Shavuot* may be brought.

Consequently, it is customary in many Jewish communities not to recite *Tahanun* during all these days of compensation.

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# Shavuot

The appointed time of the festival of *Shavuot* is fifty days from the second day of Passover. *Shavuot* marks the conclusion of the period of the counting of the *omer* and the sacrifice of the offering of the “two loaves” in the Temple. In addition, the Sages noted that based on the Torah account, the Torah was given on or around that day. Ever since, *Shavuot* is characterized primarily by its close connection to the Torah and the revelation at Sinai. Today, when the annual calendar and the number of days in each month are determined in advance, *Shavuot* always coincides with the sixth day of Sivan.

In the chapter that follows, we cite statements of the Sages regarding the sublime occasion of the revelation at Sinai and the events that preceded it.

## We Will Perform and We Will Heed

“Everything that the Lord has spoken we will perform and we will heed” (Exodus 24:7). This concept, that the obligation to obey (“we will perform”) precedes hearing and understanding the details of the Torah (“we will heed”), is considered by the Sages to be an exalted principle, comparable to the conduct of the celestial angels. Because of this, the Israelites were worthy of distinction and majesty.

**Reish Lakish said: What is the meaning of what is written: “It was evening and it was morning, the sixth day [*hashishi*]” (Genesis 1:31)? Why do I require the superfluous *heh*?<sup>62</sup> It teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, made a condition<sup>63</sup> with the act of Creation, and said to them: If Israel accepts the Torah on the sixth day of Sivan you will continue to exist; but if not, I will return you to the primordial state of chaos and disorder.**

**Rabbi Simai taught: When Israel pronounced the declaration: “We will perform” before the declaration: “We will heed,” 600,000<sup>64</sup> ministering angels came and tied two crowns to each and every member of the Israelites, one corresponding to “we will perform” and one corresponding to “we will heed.” And when Israel sinned [with the Golden Calf], 120,000 angels of destruction descended and removed them...**

62. All the other days of Creation are written without the definite article [*heh*], e.g., *sheni*.

63. The continued existence of creation is contingent on Israel accepting the Torah at Sinai on “the sixth day” of Sivan.

64. The number of angels corresponds to the number of Israelite males between 20 and 60 (see Exodus 12:37).



Reish Lakish said: In the future, the Holy One, blessed be He, will return them to us...

Rabbi Elazar said: When Israel pronounced “we will perform” before “we will heed,” a Divine Voice emerged and said to them: Who revealed to My children this secret used by the ministering angels? As it is written: “Bless the Lord, His angels, mighty in strength, who do His bidding, heeding His word” (Psalms 103:20). Initially, the angels do His bidding, afterward they heed.

(*Shabbat* 88a)

### Though the Lord Is Exalted, He Sees the Lowly

God selected Mount Sinai as the site for the giving of the Torah not because it is the tallest and grandest of all mountains; on the contrary, because it is small and relatively short.

When the Holy One, blessed be He, sought to give the Torah to Israel, Mount Carmel came from Spain and Mount Tavor came from Beit Eilim.... This one said: I am called Mount Tavor, and the Divine Presence should rest upon me, as I am taller than all the mountains, and the waters of the flood did not fall upon me and cover me. This one said: I am called Mount Carmel, and the Divine Presence should rest upon me, as I lowered myself in the middle, and they passed through the sea<sup>65</sup> over me.

The Holy One, blessed be He, said: You are already disqualified before me due to your haughtiness; you are all disqualified before me... I want none other than Sinai, for it is more humble than all of you, as it is stated: “Exalted and holy I will dwell and I will be with the downtrodden and humble” (Isaiah 57:15), and it is stated: “Though the Lord is exalted, He sees the lowly” (Psalms 138:6).

(*Midrash Tehillim* [Buber] 68)

### The Speech of God

At the giving of the Torah, the Israelites heard the voice of God Himself. The Sages depict the tremendous effect of the speech of God.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Each and every utterance that emerged from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, caused the entire world to be filled with fragrant spices....

65. During the splitting of the Red Sea.

And Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Each and every utterance that emerged from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, caused the souls of the Israelites to depart from their bodies, as it is stated: “My soul had departed with His speaking” (Song of Songs 5:6). Since their souls left from the first utterance, how did they receive the second utterance? God rained the dew upon them that, in the future, will revive the dead, and it revived them.

The Holy One, blessed be He, may His name and might be blessed, when He pronounced His speech, the voice was divided into seven voices, and from seven it split into the seventy languages of the seventy archetypal nations, so that everyone would understand.

(*Shabbat* 88a; *Midrash Tehillim* [Buber] 68)

## Moses and the Ministering Angels

The exalted Torah of God was written specifically for humans, here, in this world. The Sages expressed this idea in their story about Moses our Master, who was forced to quarrel with the ministering angels until they relented and allowed him to take the Torah down to earth.

When Moses ascended on High to receive the Torah, the ministering angels said before the Holy One, Blessed be He: Master of the Universe, what is one born of a woman doing among us? God said to them: He came to receive the Torah. The angels said before Him: The Torah is a hidden treasure that was concealed for You for 974 generations<sup>66</sup> before the creation of the world, and You seek to give it to flesh and blood? “What is a mortal that You remember him, a man that You take him into account?” (Psalms 8:5). Rather, “Lord, our Master, how mighty is Your name throughout the world! You place Your glory in the heavens” (Psalms 8:2).<sup>67</sup> The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: Provide them with an answer. Moses said before Him: Master of the Universe, I am afraid that they might burn me with the breath of their mouths. God said to him: Hold onto My Throne of Glory and provide them with an answer....

Moses said before God: Master of the Universe, the Torah that You are giving me, what is written in it? God said: “I am the Lord your God, who took you out of the land of Egypt” (Exodus 20:2). Moses said to the angels:

66. Including the twenty-six generations since Creation results in a total of 1,000 generations.

67. Therefore, Your glory and Your Torah should be given to the residents of the heavens.

Did you go down to Egypt? Were you enslaved to Pharaoh? Why should the Torah be yours?

Moses said before God: What else is written in it? God said: “You shall have no other gods” (Exodus 20:3). Moses said to them: Are you among the nations who worship idols?<sup>68</sup>

Again, Moses asked: What else is written in it? God said: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8). Moses asked the angels: Do you perform labor that you require rest?

Again, what else is written in it? “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain” (Exodus 20:7).<sup>69</sup> Moses asked: Do you conduct business with one another?<sup>70</sup>

Again, what else is written in it? God said: “Honor your father and your mother” (Exodus 20:12). Moses asked: Do you have a father or a mother?

Again, what else is written in it? God said: “You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:13). Moses asked: Is there jealousy among you? Is there an evil inclination within you? Immediately, they conceded to the Holy One, Blessed be He.

(*Shabbat* 88b)



**Further reading:** For more on the festival of *Shavuot*, its inner meaning and laws, see *A Concise Guide to Mahshava*, p. 99; *A Concise Guide to Halakha*, p. 340.

## Moses and Rabbi Akiva

The Sages relate that Moses was granted a glimpse into the future, and that he was enthused to see the development of the Torah and the novel ideas stated in it.

When Moses ascended on High, he found the Holy One, blessed be He, sitting and attaching crowns to the letters of the Torah. Moses said before Him: Master of the Universe, who is preventing You?<sup>71</sup> God said to him: There is a man who is destined to live after several generations, and Akiva ben Yosef is his name; he is destined to derive from each and every stroke of these crowns mounds and mounds of *halakhot*. Moses said before Him: Master of the Universe, show him to me. God said to him: Take a step back and look into the future.

68. Is there a danger that you will be influenced by them and worship idols?

69. It is prohibited to take a false oath.

70. Often in the course of conducting business, disputes, which require one of the parties to take an oath, arise.

71. Who is preventing You from giving the Torah as it is? Why do You need to enhance it?

Moses went and sat behind eight rows of students<sup>72</sup> in Rabbi Akiva's study hall and did not understand what they were saying. Moses felt weak. When Rabbi Akiva reached a certain matter, his students said to him: My teacher, from where do you derive this? Rabbi Akiva said to them: It is a *halakha* transmitted to Moses from Sinai. Moses' mind was put at ease.<sup>73</sup>

Moses returned and came before the Holy One, blessed be He; he said before Him: Master of the Universe, You have a man like this and You give the Torah through me? God said to him: Be silent; this is My will that arose before Me.

Moses said before Him: Master of the Universe, You have shown me Rabbi Akiva's Torah, show me his reward. God said to him: Take a step back. Moses saw that the Romans were weighing Rabbi Akiva's flesh in a butcher shop after killing him. Moses said before God: Master of the Universe, this is Torah and this is its reward? God said to him: Be silent; this is My will that arose before Me.

(*Menaḥot* 29b)



**Further reading:** For the fascinating biography of Rabbi Akiva, see p. 335; about his tragic death, see p. 364.

## The Two Loaves

On *Shavuot* the priests bring the "two loaves," an offering made from leavened bread, unlike most meal offerings, which may not be brought from leavened bread. The Sages explain why *Shavuot* is the time for this offering.

For what reason did the Torah say: Bring the two-loaves offering on *Shavuot*? Because *Shavuot* is the beginning of the time of the ripening of fruits that grow on a tree. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Bring the two loaves before Me on *Shavuot* so that the fruits of the tree will be blessed for you.

(*Rosh HaShana* 16a)

72. The beginners sat toward the back of the hall.

73. He saw that ultimately the core of the Torah of the Sages is based on a tradition that he transmitted.

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# Shavuot

We count the seven weeks of the *omer* beginning at Passover. At the conclusion of the seven weeks, on the fiftieth day, we celebrate the festival of *Shavuot*. According to the Sages, this was the day of the revelation at Mount Sinai, when the Jewish people received the Torah, although in the Written Torah no explicit date is mentioned with regard to this event.

What do we do on *Shavuot*? Why does the Torah have so many names for this festival? And why is it not stated explicitly that it is the day on which the Torah was given?

Every year, we engage in preparations to receive the Torah, recognizing our obligation to demonstrate that we truly want it. The giving of the Torah was not a one-time event. Each day, and each year, we relive that wonderful experience of connecting to the Giver of the Torah.

## What Do We Do on *Shavuot*?

*Shavuot* night is a time of preparation for receiving the Torah. The giving of the Torah is not just an event that took place thousands of years ago; rather, each year on this day, we receive the Torah anew, and are like a bride entering the wedding canopy with her husband, that is, with God.

On *Shavuot* night, the Jewish people spend their time studying the Torah, which is likened to the jewel worn by a bride:

**Rabbi Shimon would sit and engage in Torah study on the night when the bride joins her husband [that is, on *Shavuot*]. As the Sages taught: On the night before a bride is to come under the wedding canopy with her husband, all those friends [that is, Torah scholars] who are close to the bride [that is, the community of Israel] must remain with her all night and rejoice with her during her preparations. They engage in the Torah, Prophets, and Writings, in interpretations of the verses, and in the concealed wisdom, because these are her enhancements and jewels. She enters and stands at the head of her attendants and is adorned by them. She rejoices with them all that night, and the next day she enters the wedding canopy accompanied by them. They are known as the wedding party. When she enters the wedding canopy, the Holy One, blessed be He, asks about them and blesses them, and crowns them with the crown of the bride. Fortunate is their lot.**

Those who study Torah on this night receive protection:

Sit, honored ones, sit, and we will renew the preparation of the bride on this night. As everyone who joins her on this night will be protected, both above and below, for the entire year, and will end his year in peace. With regard to such people it is written (Psalms 34:8–9): “The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them. Consider and see that the Lord is good.”

(*Zohar* 1:8a)



**Further reading:** For more on learning Torah throughout *Shavuot* night, see *A Concise Guide to Halakha*, p. 349.

Beyond feeling joy and gratitude at having received the Torah, we must strive to make it a meaningful part of our lives. *Shavuot* is the day of judgment with regard to the extent of our connection to Torah:

One is obligated to greatly rejoice on this festival because it is the day on which we merited to receive the crown of Torah.... Nevertheless, it is written: “Rejoice with trembling” (Psalms 2:11); this joy is a spiritual joy of thanks and praise to God for giving us the Torah. One’s heart is roused and he resolves to become sanctified, to rectify his ways, and to be crowned with the crown of Torah, in order to fulfill: “And you shall ponder it day and night” (Joshua 1:8). For this holy day is the day of judgment.

(Rabbi Yeshaya HaLevi Horowitz, *Shenei Luhot HaBerit, Masekhet Shavuot, Ner Mitzva*)

### Names of the Festival: *Shavuot*

Why is this festival named after the seven weeks that were counted starting from Passover, which culminate on this day? These weeks build up the bond of love between us and God. We renounce all else for the sake of our love for Him.

The counting of these weeks is similar to the counting of the seven days [free of menstrual blood] before a wedding:

The counting of weeks is to teach us that at the giving of the Torah we became joined to God like a bride entering the wedding canopy.... Now she will direct her love to him alone, and therefore she counts seven days especially for this bridegroom.... In the same way, aside from our obligation to observe the mitzvot, we became obligated to direct our love to Him alone.

The seven weeks symbolize the period of preparation and the bestowal of our love upon God. This is why the festival is called *Shavuot*:

Since it is not an easy matter for a person to direct his love to God like a woman does toward her husband, God commanded us to count seven weeks [*shavuot*]. This is why the festival is called *Shavuot*, that is, the Festival of Weeks, and not the Festival of Days [even though the days are also counted during the *omer*]. It is to enable us to understand that we must direct our love to God and restrain ourselves [*ne'etzar*] before Him [to disconnect from all mundane matters in order to concentrate on God]. This is why this festival is called *Atzeret* by the Sages; this is the purpose of *Shavuot*.

(Netziv, *Ha'amek Davar*, Numbers 28:26)

 **Further reading:** For more on *Shavuot*, see *A Concise Guide to the Torah*, pp. 192, 317, 472; *A Concise Guide to the Sages*, p. 309; *A Concise Guide to Halakha*, p. 340.

## Names of the Festival: *Atzeret*

The Sages called the festival of *Shavuot*: *Atzeret* [literally: restraint or cessation], because there are no specific mitzvot associated with the festival through which our connection to God is expressed. Therefore, it is a unique day, as the illumination that comes from above is not limited to specific types of connections.

There are two types of divine light: that which comes as a result of observing the mitzvot, and that which is tied to a particular time:

Why is *Shavuot* called *Atzeret* [in the Mishna], and likewise, why is the festival on the eighth day of *Sukkot* called *Atzeret* [see Leviticus 23:36]? There are two lights that the Creator shines upon the Jewish people. He shines the first one upon them because they fulfill His mitzvot. The other is not connected to the observance of mitzvot; rather, it comes as a result of the abundance of holiness at specific times. Now we will explain the difference between them: The light that comes as a result of the observance of mitzvot is limited and finite, as the mitzvot themselves are finite [that is, they each have a defined time, place, and procedure]. But the light that comes as a result of abundant holiness has had no limits set upon it.

When the divine light is revealed through a certain mitzva, the illumination corresponds to the mitzva and is therefore limited. But illumination that is not linked to a particular mitzva is unlimited:

On *Sukkot* and Passover the light shines due to the mitzvot that are fulfilled on these days, for example, the mitzvot of *sukka* and *lulav* on *Sukkot* and



the mitzva of matza on Passover, in addition to the other mitzvot associated with these days. But on *Shavuot* and *Shemini Atzeret*, there are no unique mitzvot, and the light on these days has had no limits set upon it.

On these days of unlimited illumination, we must direct the light in accordance with our needs. The term *Atzeret* refers to the restraint and limitation of the light in furtherance of a certain purpose.

We must limit the light until the upper and lower worlds receive it, for if the light is unlimited, the lower worlds cannot hold it. Each individual must limit the light to the matter that he is in need of, for example, wisdom, children, life [health], or livelihood. For this reason these two festivals, that is, *Shavuot* and the eighth day of *Sukkot*, are called *Atzeret*. The word *Atzeret* hints to restraint and limitation, from the term: “And [the plague] was stopped [*vate'atzar*]” (Numbers 17:13). We must restrain and limit the light.

(Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev, *Kedushat Levi*, Numbers, *Shavuot*)

### Why Is It Not Written in the Torah That *Shavuot* Is the Festival of the Giving of the Torah?

Is the day on which we received the Torah a joyous one? The gentiles did not want to receive it. In a certain sense it is the day we accepted upon ourselves obligations. Of course, we have accepted the Torah, and we rejoice over having received it. But since it is a day that also contains the necessity of servitude to God, the date is not explicitly mentioned in the verses that deal with the festivals.

God gave the times for the festivals, which are the joy of Israel, as they merited receiving goodness. For example, the verse states with regard to Passover that Israel left the house of bondage, and with regard to *Sukkot* that “I had the children of Israel dwell in booths” (Leviticus 23:43) ... But on *Shavuot*, God gave us the Torah, which is a burden on Israel. Indeed, the nations of the world did not want to receive it. Even though we say: “The time of the giving of our Torah” (*Shavuot* prayer), that is, we ourselves accepted the Torah, saying: “We will perform and we will heed” (Exodus 24:7), nevertheless, God, who gave us the Torah, held the mountain over the children of Israel to force them to accept the Torah,<sup>26</sup> because it is a burden upon them.

26. A Talmudic midrash relates that God held Mount Sinai over the heads of the children of Israel like a barrel, and said to them that they must accept the Torah or this will be their burial place (*Shabbat* 88a).

How could the time of the giving of the Torah be written in the Torah when God gave it with a decree against man?

(Maharal, *Tiferet Yisrael* 27)

A fixed date limits the event that is said to have taken place on that date. One should accept the Torah every day and become renewed by it. Therefore, the Torah does not specify a date on which the Torah was given.

God did not want to limit the giving of the Torah to a specific day because on every day of the year one should feel as though he has received the Torah from Mount Sinai that very day.... If so, the Torah is given every day to those who study it; therefore, it is not fitting to specify the day on which it was given. With regard to this, our Sages said (see Rashi, Deuteronomy 26:16) that the words of Torah should be for you as if they were brand new.

(Rabbi Shlomo Efrayim Luntschitz, *Keli Yakar*, Leviticus 23:17)

### The Day We Stood at Sinai

By: Rabbi Yitzhak ibn Ghiyyat

When the day we stood at Sinai comes to mind, I am overcome with shudders of trembling.

The north and east feel fear, the western sea crawls;  
All fear You, Your glory, when it was revealed.

Mighty Lord is Your name, my king, when You began by stating "I am,"  
All creatures fell silent, they could not say a word.

When they heard Your voice, they bowed cowered,  
trembled and stirred, those above and below.

Living God, who can evaluate Your greatness?

You have no beginning, no end.

When my heart will see this, then deep inside of me

Fear will enter, trembling and panic.

He limits my plans, He investigates my thoughts;  
my spirit and soul will acknowledge You, sela!

The sharpness and wit of the Gerer Rebbe, Rabbi Yitzhak Meir Alter, author of *Ḥidushei HaRim*, was already evident when he was a child. The scholars of the city loved to discuss matters of Torah with him and enjoyed his insights. Once, one of the scholars asked him: In the passage that addresses the giving of the Torah, the verse states: "All the people

were seeing the voices” (Exodus 20:15). Why did they need to see the voices? Even if they had only heard the words of God, wouldn’t these words have penetrated their hearts?

The boy answered immediately: If the Jewish people had not seen the voices, there would have been room to shrewdly claim that it does not say: “You shall not [*lo*] steal” (Exodus 20:13), but rather: “You shall steal for him [*lo*],” which in Hebrew sounds the same but is spelled differently. In other words, one could have asserted that it is permitted to steal for the sake of Heaven. Therefore, they saw the voices; everyone saw that it says: “You shall not steal,” so there is no room for any excuses or rationalizations.

Each year on *Atzeret*, it is like the day that we stood before Mount Sinai; we receive the Torah anew.

(Rabbi David Frankel, *Korban HaEda, Rosh HaShana* 4)

Every year on this festival, each Jew receives everything that he is going to understand and reveal in Torah in the future.

(Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter, *Sefat Emet*, 5635)

We must take the central purpose of *Shavuot* to heart and remember that it is the day on which we became the servants of God. We must wholeheartedly reaccept the yoke of Heaven upon ourselves and observe all the statutes of the Torah.

(Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg, *HaKetav VahaKabbala*, Deuteronomy 16:10)



**Further reading:** For more on the revelation at Mount Sinai, see *A Concise Guide to the Sages*, pp. 103ff.