



# Shavout

---

The *Yom Tov* (holiday) of *Shavuot* is when we stay up all night learning, decorate our synagogues and homes with flowers and greenery, and eat lots of cheesecake, blintzes and other dairy foods. The *Yom Tov* begins at sundown of the 5th day of *Sivan*, exactly fifty days after *Pesach / Passover*.

This year (5764-2004), *Shavuot*, also called *Zman Matan Torateinu*, (the "Time of the Giving of Our *Torah*") starts at sundown, Tuesday, May 25th and lasts for two days, Wednesday, May 26th and Thursday, May 27th, the 6th and 7th of *Sivan*. In *Eretz Yisroel*, The *Yom Tov* of *Shavuot* lasts for one day, Wednesday May 26th, the 6th of *Sivan*.

*Shavuot* also celebrates the time when the first fruits of the Seven Species with which *Eretz Yisroel* is blessed, were harvested and brought in elaborately decorated baskets to the *Bait Hamikdash*, and is also known as *Chag Ha-Bikkurim* (the Festival of the First Fruits). *Shavuot* is also the wheat harvest festival - *Chag HaKatzir* (the Feast of Harvest). The beginning of the wheat harvest throughout *Eretz Yisroel* was preceded by the offering of *shtay halechem* (two loaves) as a meal-offering in the *Bait Hamikdash*.

No work is permitted on *Shavuot*.

The "work" prohibited on *Shavuot* is the same as that prohibited on *Shabbat*, except that cooking, baking, transferring fire and carrying, all of which are forbidden on *Shabbat*, are permitted on *Shavuot*. When *Shavuot* falls on a *Shabbat*, all bets are off, and all *Shabbat* restrictions must be observed.

*Shavuot* commemorates the giving of the *Torah* by *Hashem* to the entire *Bnei Yisroel* (Jewish people) on *Har* (Mount) Sinai over 3,300 years ago.

In the *Torah*, *Shavuot* is also called Feast of Weeks. In Hebrew, the word "*Shavuot*" means "weeks" and stands for the seven weeks during which the *Bnei Yisroel* prepared themselves for the giving of the *Torah*. During this time they rid themselves of the scars of bondage and became a holy nation ready to stand before *Hashem*.



The period from *Pesach* / Passover to *Shavuot* is a time of great anticipation. We count each of the days from the second day of *Pesach* to the day before *Shavuot*, 49 days or 7 full weeks, The counting reminds us of the important connection between *Pesach* and *Shavuot*: *Pesach* freed us physically from bondage, but the giving of the *Torah* on *Shavuot* redeemed us spiritually from our bondage to idolatry and immorality.

The giving of the *Torah* was far more than an historical event. It was a far-reaching spiritual event -- one that touched the essence of the Jewish soul then and for all time. Our Sages have compared it to a wedding between *Hashem* and the *Bnei Yisroel*. We became His special nation and He became our G-d.

The Revelation at *Har Sinai* was a tumultuous awe-inspiring experience. The entire universe, our Sages say, trembled with the piercing sound of the ram's horn. Thunder and lightning filled the skies. Then -- silence. Not a bird chirped. No creature spoke. The seas did not stir. Even the angels ceased to fly, as the voice was heard: "I am the L-rd your G-d ..."

Each year, *Shavuot* is the special time for us to reawaken and strengthen our special relationship with *Hashem*. We can do so by rededicating ourselves to the observance and study of the *Torah* -- our most precious heritage.

Every Jewish man, woman and child, including young infants, should make every effort to attend services at least on the first day of *Shavuot*, Wednesday morning, May 26, 2004, and hear the *Torah* reading of the *Aseret Hadibrot*, (the Ten Commandments).

Over Three thousand three hundred years ago, the Children of Israel stood at the foot of *Har Sinai* and received the *Torah* from *Hashem*. Together they proclaimed: "*Na'ahseh V'Nishma*, (We will do and we will listen)" (*Shmot* 24:7). Each year on the *Yom Tov* of *Shavuot*, this historic event is relived as we commit ourselves anew to observing the *Torah*.