

Shavuot

Shavuot, (The Festival of Weeks), one of the three pilgrimage festivals, commemorates *zman matan Torateinu*—the time of the giving of the Torah [i.e. the Divine Revelation at Mount Sinai]. Shavuot is a one-day festival in Israel and two days in the Diaspora. Shavuot begins on Sunday evening (candle lighting is at 8:01pm.) and concludes Tuesday evening at 9:19pm.

In the Torah, we are commanded to count “seven full weeks” starting with the 2nd night of Passover. In order to fulfill the literal meaning of this verse our Sages determined that we must wait until *Tzeit HaKochavim* before *davening* the evening service so as to ensure the completion of the 49th day, the “7 full weeks.” *Tzeit HaKochavim*, three stars, is the later time after sunset that is also used to determine when Shabbat would be over. On June 8th, this is after 9:17pm.

Are there other names for the festival of Shavuot?

Yom HaBikkurim—the day of the first fruits. The first fruits of the harvest were brought to the Temple in Jerusalem.

Chag HaKatzir –the festival of the harvest.

Why do we read the Book of Ruth on Shavuot? What is it all about?

Actually, the initial answer is fairly straightforward; the story takes place during Shavuot. The book is about a Moabite woman named Ruth who, after her husband dies, follows her Israelite mother-in-law, Naomi. Ruth is a convert to Judaism and, perhaps, this is also a broader message to us; while the Torah was given at Sinai to the Israelite people, the Torah (and ultimately, God) is actually accessible to all those who choose to follow it. The Book of Ruth contains the famous verse "whither you go, I will go, wherever you lodge, I will lodge, your people will be my people, and your God will be my God." Ruth is said to be an ancestor of King David (and thus, the messiah who shall one day come from the descendants of David son of Jesse).

Why do people stay up all night and study? (possible yawn here)

The tradition is not mentioned in the Talmud, and likely originated with *kabbalists* (mystics) in Medieval Spain. They would study all night in anticipation of receiving the 10 Commandments (i.e. the Torah portion read on the 1st day of Shavuot) and in the hopes that such rigorous study would serve as a “*tikkun*” –a repair-for violations of these commandments. Some people may argue that a good night’s sleep does more to prepare them to pay attention in synagogue the next day. It is left up to each individual to choose his/her method of study. While some groups *daven* (pray) at sunrise, others have a partial-all-night study session and services at a later time on Shavuot.

What is the connection between receiving the Torah and eating dairy?

After all, I am lactose intolerant and it seems to me that receiving the Torah was a gift but eating so much dairy is a cruel punishment. Thus, if you are like me, you might wish that the Torah had called Israel the “Land flowing with LACTAID milk and honey.” Sadly, this is not the case, so if you can, take a few pills and enjoy the blintzes.

Our Torah records several actions taken by the Israelites in preparation for receiving the Torah. One of these was to refrain from eating meat, a luxury, in an effort to better concentrate on God's *mitzvot*.

Where can I learn more about this Festival? (check out the surrounding verses too!)

Exodus 34:22

Leviticus 23:17

Numbers 28:26 (this verse uses more than one of the above phrases to describe Shavuot)

Deuteronomy 16:11

Check out www.myjewishlearning.com for some great articles and a quiz where you can test your own knowledge.

Bonus Question:

Many synagogues still have Confirmation or other assemblies held on Shavuot. Based on what you have learned, can you determine why they might have chosen Shavuot as a time to hold such assemblies?

Chag Sameach,

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