

The Festival of Shavuot





Names for Shavuot

Chag HaShavuot--Feast of Weeks

Chag HaKatzir—Festival of Reaping

Yom HaBikkurim—Day of the First Fruits

Aseret—*Shavuot* brings the Festival of Passover to its actual close

Connection to the Giving of the Torah

Shavuot is not explicitly named in the Bible as the day on which the Torah was revealed by God to the Israelite nation at Mount Sinai, although this is commonly considered to be its main significance.

Several aspects of the Shavuot Temple sacrifice (*shtei halechem*) suggest a connection to the Exodus and the giving of the Torah. The *shtei halechem* is the only holiday sacrifice which includes a communal *shelamim* ("peace") offering, recalling the communal *shelamim* offering which was offered after the acceptance of the Torah [[Ex. 24:5-11](#)].



What is the Shteí Halechem?

The Torah prescribes a special sacrifice for Shavuot: the *shteí halechem* (two loaves of bread), which must be chametz, and which are described as *bikkurim* of the wheat harvest. [Lev. 23:17] These loaves are accompanied by a set of other sacrifices. [Lev. 23:18-20]

According to the Maharal, there is a symbolic contrast between the omer offering (offered on Passover) and the *shteí halechem*. The former consists of barley, which is typically an animal food, and represents the low spiritual level of the Israelites immediately upon leaving Egypt; while the latter consists of wheat and represents the high spiritual level of the Israelites upon receiving the Torah.

When is Shavuot observed?

Unlike other major holidays, the Torah does not specify the date of Shavuot, but only that it falls 50 days after Passover.

Most Talmudic sages agreed that the Torah was given on 6 Sivan.

The Torah states that the Israelites reached Sinai on the first day of the third month following the Exodus, i.e. Sivan. [Ex. 19:1] Then several events occurred, taking a total of at least three days, before the Torah was given. [Ex. 19:2-16]

In practice, Shavuot is observed on 6 Sivan in Israel and a second day is added in the Jewish diaspora (in keeping with a separate rabbinical ruling that applies to all biblical holidays, called Yom tov sheni shel galuyot, Second-Day Yom Tov in the diaspora).

B'nai Mitzvah celebrations take place on the first day of Shavuot.

Yizkor is said on the second day of Shavuot.



Special Liturgy for Shavuot

Akdamut–Piyyut (poem) praising God, His Torah, and His people, written in the 10th Century in Aramaic by Rabbi Meir Bar Yitzchak in Worms, Germany.

Book of Ruth–One of the Five Megillot included in the Writings (Ketuvim). Read on Shavuot because of its connection with the time of harvest [Ex. 23:16] and leaving gleanings for the poor and the stranger [Lev. 23:22]. Ruth the Moabite accepts the God of Israel, just as the Israelites accepted the Torah given by God on Shavuot.

Azharat–didactic liturgical poems of the 613 commandments recited during Musaf on the second day of Shavuot in the Ashkenazic rite.

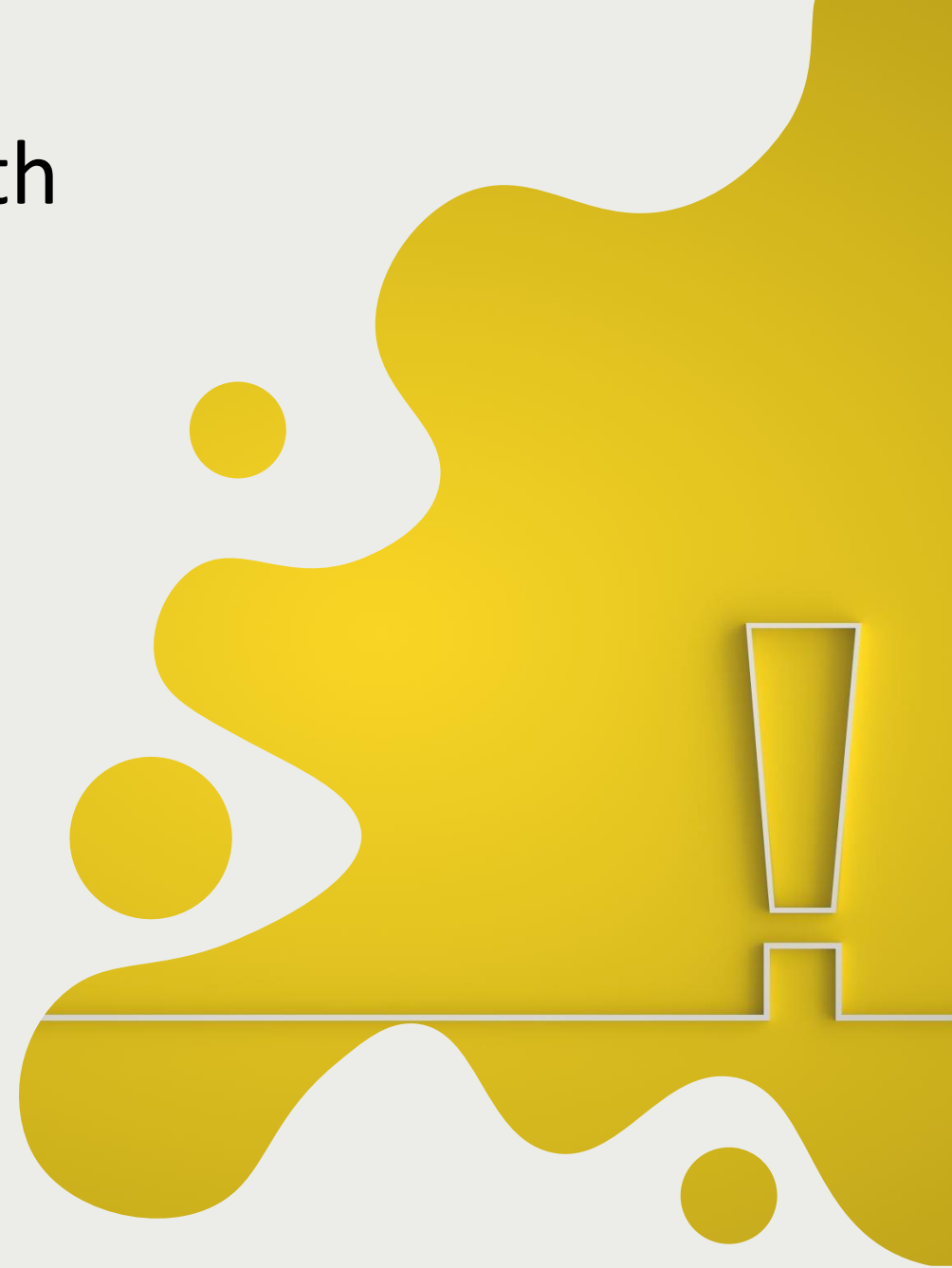
Yetziv Pitgam--Piyyut (poem) by Rabbeinu Tam, inserted in the middle of the haftarah on the second day of Shavuot.

Why are Dairy Foods Associated with Shavuot?

Observance of the laws after learning about kashrut.

The Torah is compared to milk (Song of Songs).

Gematria of the word *halav* – the number 40 represents the 40 days and 40 nights Moses spent on Mt. Sinai.



Tikkun Leyl Shavuot

All night study erev Shavuot was first recorded c. 1300 in the *Or Zarua*. Linked to a midrash which relates that the night before the Torah was given, the Israelites retired early to be well-rested for the momentous day ahead. They overslept and Moses had to wake them up because God was already waiting on the mountaintop. [Shir HaShirim Rabbah 1:57]

To rectify this perceived flaw in the national character, many religious Jews stay up all night to learn Torah. In the 1500's Joseph Caro and other Kabbalists also stayed up to learn Torah following this tradition and during one of those study sessions, an angel reportedly appeared and taught them Jewish law.

Children celebrating Shavuot in Israel



Shavuot in Israel





Shavuot in Israel

Youth bringing wheat offerings.

More Shavuot celebrations in Israel

