

Shavu'ot

שבועות

Level: Basic

You shall count for yourselves -- from the day after the Shabbat, from the day when you bring the Omer of the waving -- seven Shabbats, they shall be complete. Until the day after the seventh sabbath you shall count, fifty days... You shall convoke on this very day -- there shall be a holy convocation for yourselves -- you shall do no laborious work; it is an eternal decree in your dwelling places for your generations. - Leviticus 21:15-16, 21

Shavu'ot, the Festival of Weeks, is the second of the three major festivals with both historical and agricultural significance (the other two are [Passover](#) and [Sukkot](#)). Agriculturally, it commemorates the time when the first fruits were harvested and brought to the [Temple](#), and is known as Hag ha-Bikkurim (the Festival of the First Fruits). Historically, it celebrates the giving of the [Torah](#) at Mount Sinai, and is also known as Hag Matan Torateinu (the Festival of the Giving of Our Torah).

The period from Passover to Shavu'ot is a time of great anticipation. We count each of the days from the second day of Passover to the day before Shavu'ot, 49 days or 7 full weeks, hence the name of the festival. See [The Counting of the Omer](#). The counting reminds us of the important connection between Passover and Shavu'ot: Passover freed us physically from bondage, but the giving of the Torah on Shavu'ot redeemed us spiritually from our bondage to idolatry and immorality. Shavu'ot is also known as Pentecost, because it falls on the 50th day; however, Shavu'ot has no particular similarity to the Christian holiday of Pentecost, which occurs 50 days after their Spring holiday.

It is noteworthy that the holiday is called the time of the *giving* of the Torah, rather than the time of the *receiving* of the Torah. The sages point out that we are constantly in the process of receiving the Torah, that we receive it every day, but it was first given at this time. Thus it is the giving, not the receiving, that makes this holiday significant.

Shavu'ot is not tied to a particular calendar date, but to a counting from Passover. Because the length of the months used to be variable, determined by observation (see [Jewish Calendar](#)), and there are two new moons between Passover and Shavu'ot, Shavu'ot could occur on the 5th or 6th of [Sivan](#). However, now that we have a mathematically determined calendar, and the months between Passover and Shavu'ot do not change length on the mathematical calendar, Shavu'ot is always on the 6th of Sivan (the 6th and 7th outside of [Israel](#). See [Extra Day of Holidays](#).)

[Work](#) is not permitted during Shavu'ot.

It is customary to stay up the entire first night of Shavu'ot and study [Torah](#), then pray as early as possible in the morning.

It is customary to eat a dairy meal at least once during Shavu'ot. There are varying opinions as to why this is done. Some say it is a reminder of the promise regarding the [land of Israel](#), a land flowing with "milk and honey." According to another view, it is

because our ancestors had just received the Torah (and the dietary laws therein), and did not have both meat and dairy dishes available. See [Separation of Meat and Dairy](#).

The book of Ruth is read at this time. Again, there are varying reasons given for this custom, and none seems to be definitive.

List of Dates

Shavu'ot will occur on the following days of the Gregorian calendar:

- Jewish Year 5768: sunset June 8, 2008 - nightfall June 10, 2008
- Jewish Year 5769: sunset May 28, 2009 - nightfall May 30, 2009
- Jewish Year 5770: sunset May 18, 2010 - nightfall May 20, 2010
- Jewish Year 5771: sunset June 7, 2011 - nightfall June 9, 2011
- Jewish Year 5772: sunset May 26, 2012 - nightfall May 28, 2012

<http://www.jewfaq.org/holidayc.htm>