

SHAVUOS INSIGHTS AND GUIDANCE

from Rabbi Chaikin

The holiday of Shavuos has five names; Chag Hashavuos, Chag Hakatzir, Chag Habikurim, Atzeres and Zman Matan Toraseina.

Shavuos means weeks, as it says in the Torah, “Sheva Shavuos” seven weeks you shall count, after which comes the Holiday of Shavuos. The simple meaning is that this holiday comes; after counting the weeks. But everything in Torah has layer upon layer of meaning. Shavuos is also related to the word Shivua, oath, and “Shavuos” being a plural word, implies a double oath. Hashem took an oath that he will not let us go, and we took an oath that we will not let go of Hashem, no matter what might be. This holiday celebrates a special bond, a special relationship of Hashem with the Jewish people.

Chag Hakatzir; Holiday of Harvesting. This is the holiday when they would celebrate the grain harvest in Temple times.

Bikurim, from the “Bechor” (first born), is a gift of the first fruits from the new season. This holiday, also called Chag Habikurim is when the first such offering was brought to the Bais Hamikdash, Holy Temple, each year. They would not eat from the fruits of the new season until that gift was brought.

Shavuos is also called Atzeres, atzeres means hold yourself back from doing melacha, the forbidden forms of labor. The emphasis on the cessation of labor on Shavuos is because, while every holiday has restrictions they each have a special mitzvah as well. We eat Matzah on Pesach and on Sukkos there are many special mitzvos. However, on Shavuos we only have the word Atzeres, the restriction of labor, but there is no special mitzvah for Shavuos.

Deeper than that, just like Shemini Atzeres is the culmination of Sukkos, Shavuos is the culmination of Pesach. In fact, there is no date given in the Torah for Shavuos. It's just 7 weeks of counting from the second day of Pesach which culminates on Shavuos, the “Atzeres” of Pesach. The Jewish People left Egypt on Pesach in the merit of what they would do on Shavuos – accepting the Torah.

The Siddur uses the name Zman Matan Toraseinu, the time when Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave us the Torah.

* * *

According to the Shulchan Aruch, we stay up Shavuos night to rectify the fact that, when Hashem came to give the Torah, the Jews were sleeping. Hashem had to wake them up! Hashem complained, “Why did I come and nobody was there”? To rectify that, we don't go to sleep on the first night of Shavuos.

The Rebbe raises a question: When the Yidden heard that in seven weeks they would be getting the Torah, they were so anxious and experienced such a longing, that they counted 49 days in anticipation. This is how Sefira came about. How then could they have been asleep when the moment of getting the Torah finally came? They should have been so excited, yet they went to sleep?!

To add to the question, the Midrash describes that Heaven helped them sleep peacefully. Even the mosquitos were not allowed to disturb them that night. So it seems that heaven accepted their sleeping.

The Rebbe explains: the reason that the Yidden went to sleep is not for the sake of their bodies. They went to sleep because during sleep the Neshama, soul, is able to go up to heaven and draw levels of light, levels of Torah that are higher than the Torah down here.

Sometimes, throughout history, tzadikim who had difficulties or questions in Torah during the day would “sleep on it” at night and wake up in the morning with answers to their questions. That is because the neshama draws from the Source of Light, when the it goes up to heaven each night during sleep.

That moment, just before Hashem gave the Torah, after having prepared for 49 days and reaching the fiftieth level of holiness, was a very powerful time. The Yidden wanted to utilize that time to its fullest. Therefore, they felt that since you can only reach the fountain of Torah, Torah Shel Maaleh when your neshama goes up at night and you're asleep, they forced themselves to sleep even though they were so excited. We see then, that their intention was a very good one. They wanted to gain from the p'nimius, the essence of Torah.

Why then do we have to rectify this action each year on Shavuos?

* * *

Why did Hashem give us the Torah? The midrash describes how Hashem had a choice. He could lift all the Yidden up and give them the Torah in heaven, or to come down and give the Torah down here. Earlier we mentioned Moshe Rabeinu's explanation, that the Torah is connected to gashmius, to the physical parts of the world. The Torah has the power to elevate the world. Hashem chose to come down here and give the Torah, because that's what the Torah is about.

Additionally, what does it mean Hashem gave us the Torah? We can't just accept it literally. Torah was on earth before also. Avraham Avinu had Torah and all the halachos. Yitzchak had a yeshiva, Yaakov had a yeshiva and Yosef was learning Torah. But the world wasn't ready yet to have the physical turned into holiness.

That is Zman Matan Torasainu, the Time of the Giving of the Torah. It boils down to this: at Mt. Sinai we yidden were given the power to elevate the world through the physical mitzvos. When a person goes to sleep and their soul ascends on high, hopefully, they will be delight in the holiness of heaven, but that's not what Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants from us. Rather, Hashem wants from us 2 things: Firstly, to elevate the gashmius, the physical part of the world by connecting it with the spiritual part of the world through physical mitzvah actions. And Secondly, to share this awareness and mission with another yid.

So when it comes to the day of Shavuos, the day that Hashem gave us the Torah, we must not say, “I am putting myself to “sleep” and I don't care about the whole world.” Instead, we stay up the whole night, treating nighttime as if it were as bright as day, connecting the physical into spiritual with the Torah we learn, and of course we share the precious gift of Torah with others.

DETAILED SHAVUOS GUIDE 5781

General Halachos of Yom Tov

- Yom Tov we should be bsimcha, joyful, as we say “Moadim Lesimcha”, the festivals are meant to be bsimcha”.
- The key ring that you use on Yom Tov may have muktzeh on it, like car keys or key-fobs. Make a point to separate the keys that you need from the muktzeh before Yom Tov.

We are only allowed to do specific forms of labor on Yom Tov.

- On Yom Tov we are allowed to carry outside even without an Eiruv. This applies *only* to objects that are needed on Yom Tov.
- We are only allowed to cook for Jewish people on Yom Tov. Therefore, we don't invite non-Jews for Yom Tov meals, since we may end up cooking additional food for them. This rule does not apply to Shabbos when cooking is completely forbidden. (If someone comes on their own we are allowed to serve them.)
- Just like we can't use a washing machine (or other electrical machines and appliances), we cannot allow a non-Jew use them in our home on Yom Tov.

Things to do before Yom Tov

- Chabad custom is not to take haircuts in all the Shloshes Yimei Hagbala¹ but only on Erev Shavuos. Haircuts should be taken preferably before Chatzos (midday) of Erev Yom Tov.
- Prepare candle holders for the second night.
- Prepare a Tikkun Leil Shavuos, study material for Shavuos night.
- Increase tzedaka giving in honor of Yom Tov. Those who are careful to give tzedaka every day, should give extra on Erev Shavuos for both days of Yom Tov.

First Night of Shavuos

- Candle Lighting for Shavuos – 8:22 PM²
- For those who will be saying Yizkor, it is preferable to light a 48 hour Yartzeit candle at this time.
- Recite two brachos: Lehadlik Ner Shel Yom Tov and Shehecheyanu.
- Maariv cannot be said before nightfall on Shavuos. Similarly, kiddush must be made after the stars have come out and night has fully set.
- In Kiddush we recite the Yom Tov kiddush (page 329)
- Add Yaaleh Veyavo and the Horachaman for Yom Tov in benching.
- The Ancient Custom is to stay up until dawn (4:24 AM) on the first night of Shavuos, in preparation to receive the Torah.
- Chabad custom is to read a special sefer called Tikun Leil Shavuos. You can download and print the Tikun at Chabad.org/shavuot
- After reading the Tikkun you can learn something else until dawn.
- One who cannot read the tikkun should study other things all night.

Shavuos Morning

- Immerse in the mikva a little before dawn (4:17 AM).
- At dawn (4:24 AM) wash Negel Vasser, say the morning brachos and shema.

¹ The three days before Shavuos, beginning on the 3rd of Sivan, when the mourning restrictions observed during Sefira are lifted.

² We can bring Shabbos in earlier by saying maariv and making kiddush earlier. However, regarding Shavuos, the pasuk tells us, “Sheva shabassos” you should count seven weeks, “Temimos tehiyena” they should be complete. The seven weeks will not be complete until the 49th day has fully passed.

First Day of Shavuos

- It is important to rest before davening, to be able to daven Shacharis with proper focus. In Kiddush we recite the Yom Tov kiddush, "Eileh Moadei". (page 357)
- It is a minhag to eat milchigs, dairy foods³, on the first day of Shavuos. Chabad custom is to eat milchig snacks right after kiddush.
- Our custom is to eat only food prepared with soft cheese⁴
- After waiting the correct amount of time we wash and eat a regular Yom Tov meal.⁵
- At Yom Tov meals we must wash and have two loaves for lechem Mishna, just like Shabbos.
- In order to fulfill the obligation of eating a Yom Tov meal we should eat a little bit more challah than a 2 oz.

Second Night of Shavuos

- Candle Lighting for Shavuos – after 9:29 PM.
- In Kiddush we recite the Yom Tov kiddush (page 329)
- Those who didn't light a 48 hour Yizkor candle on Erev Yom Tov should light one now.
- Recite two brachos: Lehadlik Ner'Shel Yom Tov and Shehecheyanu.
- Maariv begins with Shir Hamalos.
- Add Yaaleh Veyavo and the Horachaman for Yom Tov in benching.

Second Day of Shavuos

- The second day of Shavuos we say Yizkor before musaf.
- In Kiddush we recite the Yom Tov Kiddush, "Eileh Moadei". (page 357)
- Holiday ends 9:30 PM - Havdalah with wine only. No Veyiten Lecha.

Chabad custom is to greet each other with:

“Kabolos haTorah b'Simcha ub'Pnimityus”

(Loosely translates: I wish you a joyous and transformative receiving of the Torah)

A project of Chabad of Cleveland. Please do not replicate without permission.

³ Several reasons are given for this custom.

- Here are a few: The Shulchan Aruch explains that when G-d gave the Torah, they needed to first shecht, to slaughter the meat and were unable to do so that day because the Torah was given on Shabbos. Additionally, their dishes needed to be koshered, and they weren't able to do it that day so they ate dairy foods.
- Moshe Rabeinu was born, on 7 Adar. His mother was able to hide him for 3 months, after which she put him in a basket on the Nile River. On that day Batya found him and she gave him to various Egyptian ladies to nurse. Baby Moshe refused because the angels in heaven said, "It is not right that the mouth which is going to reveal the Torah should nurse from a non-Jewish lady." Now make a calculation. Three months to the day from 7 Adar is 7 Sivan, Shavuos. That's when the angel says, "This is the day that he will give the Torah when he grows up". To commemorate Moshe's insistence on Jewish milk, we celebrate with something special made of milk.
- When Moshe Rabeinu came up to heaven, the angels said, "Why is the Torah being given to human beings?" Moshe Rabeinu answered (among other things), "It says in the Torah that you mustn't eat milk and meat together. When you angels came to Avraham Avinu he served you a calf's tongue with butter, so you ate basar b'chalav, meat with milk!" The angels agreed that Torah belongs on Earth, not in heaven.

⁴ The waiting period between milk and meat varies based on the kind of dairy eaten. Soft cheeses only require one hour, while hard cheeses require six hours.

⁵ One reason to eat dairy foods on Shavuos is to show that we are careful to make a separation between milk and meat. While some people feel that on Shavuos we don't have to wait the same amount of time between milk and meat as we usually would, it is actually extra important to wait the proper time on Shavuos.