

# Shavuot

The Conservative Movement, represented by Masorti, MERCAZ, Marom and Noam in its communities in Latin America wishes you a Chag Sameach and wishes that each of you can take part in a Tikun Leil Shavuot, so as to live an experience that will enrich your soul, body and intellect.

The story of this wonderful holiday is a proof of how Jewish tradition has evolved since previous times and managed to adapt itself to the changing conditions of the Jewish people throughout history.

Shavout first appears in the Torah as an agricultural holiday. Our ancestors, who were mainly farmers, referred to this time of the year as the period of harvest of wheat, from where the name of the holiday, Chag Hakatzir, the holiday of harvest, is retrieved. During the same time, and as a natural consequence of the harvest, people with strong faith would offer their bikurim (the first fruits) as an expression of gratitude towards the Lord Almighty. The Torah also refers to this Jag as "Chag Hashavout"- the holiday of the weeks, showing, once more, the agricultural aspect of this celebration, but, in this case, relating it to the Counting of the Omer which starts in Pesach and which reminds us of the harvest of barley. Later on, the Sages of the Talmud referred to Shavout as "Atzaret"- conclusion, establishing the end of the count which began in Pesach and reminding us the spiritual evolution of our ancestors within the first fifty days of the departure of the people of Israel from Egypt.

The most significant transformation of Shavout occurs during the Talmudic period when rabbis acknowledge it to be the anniversary day in which G-d gave the Torah at Mount Sinai. While living in exile and far away from the Land of Israel and from their agricultural duties, the Jews of that new generation provided a new meaning for this holiday, "Zman Matan Torateinu"- the time of the year when the Torah was given. This is how Shavuot gained a renewed meaning and its importance was restated in the core of the Jewish people until today.

There are different traditions when celebrating Shavuot:

We eat dairy food as a way of remembering the parallelism that the Sages make between Torah and milk; children bring fruit to the synagogue following the tradition of bringing the first fruits to the Temple; we read the book of Ruth which reminds us of the time

of harvest and the deep commitment of this woman with the Jewish people; last but not least, there is the practice of staying up all Shavuot night reading and studying different texts, known as "Tikun Leil Shavuot".

Of all its different meanings, I would particularly like to refer to Shavout as an invitation for all of us to renew our commitment with the Torah as an eternal source of wisdom and as a core value of the identity of our People. This holiday reminds us, once more, that although the Torah was revealed thousands of years ago at Sinai, each year we renew our willingness to accept it as our source of inspiration and as a guide for our lives.

According to the Midrash, when the people of Israel were about to receive the Torah at Sinai, G-d lifted up the mount and placed it on top of their heads and claimed: "If Israel accepts the Torah, ye shall exist; but if not, I will turn you back into emptiness and formlessness". I believe it is inaccurate to believe that the sages of the Midrash would have wanted to portray G-d as threatening the people of Israel to accept the Torah. I would rather think of history as a manifestation of how valuable the Torah is for the survival of our people.

Our Sages are telling us: "Appreciate this great gift that G-d has given us! Nurture it and embrace it because it is the only way to survive!"

May G-d help us, in this Shavuot, renew our commitment with the Torah in order to enrich our lives and assure the future of our people.

Chag Sameach,

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