



*To help enrich your appreciation of the upcoming holiday, Kolel is happy to provide this “fact sheet.” We hope it helps you prepare both spiritually and physically. Please feel free to study with us any time at [www.kolel.org](http://www.kolel.org) or at any of our classes at the Miles Nadal Jewish Community Centre, the Bathurst Jewish Community Centre, or the Family Resource Centre at the Promenade. You can reach us at 416-636-1880 ext 255.*

## SHAVUOT

### **WHAT IS IT?**

The commemoration of the giving of the Torah, and the end of the wheat harvest in Israel. Pronounced “Shah-voe-ot” (some say “Shav-oo-us” in Ashkenazi Hebrew.)

### **WHY IS IT?**

The Torah commands a 49-day counting period (Sefirat Ha-omer, the Counting of the Omer) beginning on the second day of Passover. This counting ends on the 50th day, Shavuot.

Agriculturally, the barley harvest took place during Passover, and the wheat at Shavuot. Shavuot was the concluding festival of the grain harvest, the way the last day of Sukkot was the concluding festival of the fruit harvest. Shavuot also recalls the time when the first fruits were harvested and brought to the Temple. Historically, Shavuot celebrates the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, and is known as Zman Matan Torateinu (the Festival of the Giving of Our Torah). The Rabbis teach that the holiday is called the time of the giving of the Torah, rather than the time of the receiving of the Torah because we “receive” the Torah continually, but this was the only time it was “given.” Spiritually, there is a link between Passover and Shavuot: At Passover, we were freed from serving a human master, and at Shavuot we committed ourselves to serving G-d as the Divine Master. The counting of the Omer period between the two festivals expresses a yearning (like a “count down”) for the Giving of the Torah.

### **WHEN IS IT?**

Although the Torah does not provide a date for Shavuot, the Rabbis determined that it falls on the 6th day of the Hebrew month of Sivan, which usually falls around late spring. In modern Israel and among Reform and Reconstructionist Jews, Shavuot is celebrated for one day. Outside Israel, the holiday is celebrated for two days by Orthodox and Conservative Jews.

### **WHERE IS IT FROM?**

The Torah, where it is listed as one of the three pilgrimage festivals (the other two are Sukkot and Pesach.) In Exodus 34:22 and Deuteronomy 16:10 it is called The Festival of Weeks (Hag Hashavuot); in Exodus 23:16 The Festival of Reaping (Hag Hakatzir); and in Numbers 28:26 The Day of First Fruits (Yom Ha-bikkurim.) The Mishnah and Talmud refer to Shavuot as Atzeret (a solemn assembly); since Shavuot occurs 50 days after Passover, Christians gave it the name Pentecost.

### **WHAT DO WE DO?**

Like the other two pilgrimage festivals, we refrain from work, attend special prayer services and have holiday meals. Shavuot also has customs of its own: The Book of Ruth is read at services and Yizkor (memorial prayers) are recited; houses and synagogues are decorated with greenery; and many people engage in all night Torah study called “Tikkun Leil Shavuot.” According to tradition the Israelites actually overslept on the morning of the giving of Torah and so to compensate, we stay awake the whole night now! The spiritual significance of the Tikkun is to prepare ourselves all night for the awesome moment when we receive Torah in the morning, and hear the Ten Commandments read.

### **WHAT DO WE EAT?**

Because the Torah is likened to milk, and because of the special connection to the Land of Israel (“flowing with milk and honey”) it is a custom to eat dairy foods including cheese blintzes and cheesecake. A legend suggests that before the giving of the Torah the Jews did not keep kosher, so it was on this first Shavuot, finding themselves without kosher meats or utensils, the Israelites chose to eat only dairy.

### **WHAT DO WE SAY?**

“Chag Sameach” (“Happy Holiday!”)