

# Celebrating Shavuot

Jewish Family Living – Holiday Celebrations at Home  
Congregation Beth El ♦ Bethesda, MD



## The Feast of Weeks

שְׁבַעָה שָׁבָעַת תִּסְפְּרֶלָּךְ מִהַחֵל חֲרִמַּשׁ בְּקָמָה תַּחֵל  
לְסַפֵּר שְׁבַעָה שָׁבָעוֹת: וְעָשִׂיתָ חַג שְׁבַעוֹת לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ  
מִסֹּת נְדִבַת יָדְךָ אֲשֶׁר תִּתֶּן כַּאֲשֶׁר יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ:

*“You shall count off seven weeks; start to count the seven weeks when the sickle is first put to the standing grain. Then you shall observe the Feast of Weeks for the Lord your God, offering your freewill contribution according as the Lord your God has blessed you.”*

*(Deuteronomy 16:9-10)*

Shavuot is a holiday with both agricultural and historical significance. The most ancient references to Shavuot from the Torah refer to a harvest festival, the festival of first fruits of the harvest season. You might also be familiar with Shavuot as the celebration of the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai, 50 days after Passover. Here are some ideas on incorporating new ways to celebrate this special spring holiday.

## Home Guide for Celebrating Shavuot

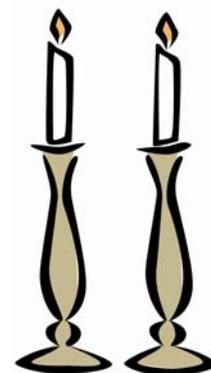
Many Shavuot rituals and traditions occur in communal space – gathering together in a synagogue or congregational setting to celebrate the giving of the Torah. There are also a number of activities that can be done in the home to mark this festive time of the year. This guide will help explain some of these holiday traditions, as well as identify some resources for making this Shavuot a festive holiday for your family.

### The Order of the Home Service/Ritual

1. Lighting Candles
2. Reciting Kiddush (sanctifying the day with a blessing over the wine)
3. Washing Hands
4. Chanting Hamotzi (a blessing over the bread)
5. After the Meal

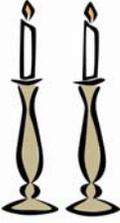
#### 1. Lighting Candles

The holiday celebration begins with the lighting of candles (*hadlakat nerot*), symbolizing the transition between profane and sacred time, much like the lighting of candles both at the beginning and end of *Shabbat*. Candles should be lit eighteen minutes before sunset on the first night of Shavuot. On the second night, candles should be lit one hour later than they were lit the previous night.



This blessing is the same as the blessing said over the candles on Friday night except for the last words. On Shabbat you include the words in the parentheses.

### BLESSING OVER THE CANDLES



*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam,  
Asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav,  
V'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel (Shabbat v'shel)  
Yom Tov.*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק  
וְצִוָּנוּ יָרֵךְ שֶׁל (שַׁבָּת וְשֶׁל) יוֹם טוֹב.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe whose mitzvot add holiness to our lives and who gave us the mitzvah to kindle lights for (Shabbat and for) the Festival.

After lighting the candles, you say **Shehecheyanu** to thank God for enabling us to reach this season.

### SHEHECHEYANU

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam,  
Shehecheyanu v'kimanu v'higi-anu laz'man  
hazeh.*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
שֶׁהַחַיֵּינוּ וְקִיְמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמַן הַזֶּה.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, for keeping us alive, for sustaining us, and for helping us to reach this season.

## 2. Reciting Kiddush

We sanctify the holiday by reciting the special *Kiddush* (blessing over wine) for Shavuot. On Shavuot, there are two parts to the *kiddush*. The first part is the daily blessing over the wine or juice. The second piece, the *Kiddush*, is the longer blessing sanctifying the festival and reminds us of creation and the Exodus from Egypt. As with all other festivals, it is traditional to recite the *shehecheyanu* prayer again after the *kiddush* and before drinking.

### BLESSING OVER THE WINE

*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam,  
Borei p'ri hagafen.*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
בוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, who creates fruit of the vine.





## KIDDUSH

*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-ol  
 asher bachar banu mikol am  
 v'rom'manu mikol lashon, v'kid'shanu  
 b'mitzvotav. Va-teeten lanu Adonai Elohei  
 b'ahavah (Shabbatot lim'nucha u)  
 Moadim l'simcha, chagim uz'manim l'saso.  
 Yom (haShabbat hazeh v'et yom) chag  
 hashavuot hazeh, z'man matan torateinu  
 (b'ahava) mikro kodesh zeicher l'tziat  
 mitzrayim. Ki vanu vacharta v'otanu kidas  
 mikol ha'amim, (v'Shabbat) uMoadei kod-  
 sh'cha (b'ahava uvratzon) b'simcha uv'sas  
 hinchaltanu. Baruch atah Adonai, m'kadei  
 (haShabbat v') Yisrael v'hazmanim*

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם,  
 אשר בחר בנו מכל עם ורוממנו  
 מכל לשון, וקדשנו במצותיו.  
 ותתן לנו יי אלהינו באהבה  
 (שבתות למנוחה ו)מועדים  
 לשמחה, חגים וזמנים לששון,  
 את-יום (השבת הזה ואת-יום)  
 חג השבועות הזה, זמן מתן תורתנו,  
 (באהבה), מקרא קדש זכר ליציאת מצרים.  
 כי בנו בחרת, ואותנו קדשת  
 מכל העמים, (ושבת) ומועדי קדש  
 (באהבה וברצון) בשמחה ובששון  
 הנחלתנו. ברוך אתה יי מקדש  
 (השבת ו) ישראל והזמנים.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe who has chosen and distinguished us by sanctifying our lives with Commandments. In love have You given us, O Lord our God, (Sabbaths for rest) appointed times for gladness, festivals and season for joy, even (this Sabbath day and) this Festival of Shavuot, the festival of Your giving us the Torah. It is for us (in love) a holy convocation, commemorating the Exodus from Egypt. You have chosen us of all peoples for your service, and You have given us a sacred purpose in life. Therefore you gave us (with loving favor) in gladness and joy, Your holy (Shabbat and) festivals as a heritage. Praise are You, O God, who hallows (the Shabbat,) Israel, and the festivals.

## SHEHECHEYANU

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam,  
 Shehecheyanu v'kimanu v'higianu laz'man  
 hazeh.*

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם,  
 שהחיינו וקימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, for keeping us alive, for sustaining us, and for helping us to reach this season.

### 3. Washing Hands

The ritual washing of hands has nothing to do with physical cleanliness. While the hands are obviously to be clean of dirt before food is eaten, even hands that are physically clean should be ritually washed before sitting down to eat.

#### **BLESSING FOR WASHING THE HANDS**



*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech  
ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav  
vtzvivanu al n'tilat yadayim.*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל  
נְטִילַת יָדַיִם.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe,  
who has sanctified us with commandments and has commanded us to wash our hands.

### 4. Chanting HaMotzi

Before eating dinner we recite *HaMotzi*, the blessing over bread. Just like on Shabbat, we say this blessing over challah.

#### **HAMOTZI**



*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam,  
Hamotzi lechem min ha-aretz*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe,  
Who brings forth bread from the earth.

### 5. After the Meal

After dinner is finished you may choose to recite *Birkat HaMazon*, the grace after meals, which can be found in Siddur Sim Shalom beginning on page 754. Make sure to include the paragraphs for Shavuot.



## FAMILY ACTIVITIES FOR SHAVUOT

### PICK YOUR OWN *BIKKURIM*

Shavuot, also known as *Hag HaKatzir* (harvest festival) and *Yom haBikkurim* (Day of the First Fruits), has a very strong tie to agriculture and the land. A great way to get the feel of this harvest holiday is to go out to a local farm or orchard and pick some of the first fruits and vegetables of the season. Strawberries are usually ripening around the middle of May, so take your kids and pick some delicious berries!

### LET THEM EAT CHEESE BLINTZES!

There is no *halachah*, or Jewish law, regarding home practice or rituals for Shavuot. What we know as Jewish practice around this holiday is the result of customs and traditions. Many people associate the eating of dairy dishes with Shavuot. While there are a number of theories about how this practice started, one particularly lovely one comes from the fourth chapter of *Shir haShirim*, or The Song of Songs, and a description of spring in the land of Israel when “honey and milk are under your tongue.” Celebrate Shavuot by planning a special dairy meal and don’t forget to include cheese blintzes with sweet toppings!

### MIDNIGHT READ

Another Shavuot tradition is to stay up the entire night on Shavuot, reading Torah or other Jewish books. Take this opportunity to extend bedtime a few hours and encourage your children to read something that has to do with Judaism. You can start this off by coming to Beth El on the first evening of Shavuot, when we celebrate this evening of study, called Tikkun Leil Shavuot. Following a communal dairy meal, children and parents alike will engage in Jewish learning, with special programs for children from 6:30 – 8:00 PM.

### OTHER HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES:

- ☆ For an additional *mitzvah* and to incorporate themes of *Tikkun Olam* into your holiday celebration, collect canned and boxed food and donate it to a local food pantry once the holiday is over, or make a contribution to an organization that works to end hunger, like Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger.
- ☆ Read fun Shavuot stories as a family. Some favorites:
  - [Sammy Spider’s First Shavuot](#) by Sylvia A. Rouss
  - [Ten Good Rules](#) by Susan Remick Topek
  - [No Rules for Michael](#) by Sylvia A. Rouss
  - [Keeping the Promise: A Torah’s Journey](#) by Tami Lehman-Wilzig
  - [A Mountain of Blintzes](#) by Barbara Diamond Goldin
  - [The Story of Ruth](#) by Maxine Rose Schur

This guide was prepared by Elisha Rothschild Frumkin, Family Education Director at Congregation Beth El, with help from: [www.myjewishlearning.com](http://www.myjewishlearning.com) and [Teaching Jewish Holidays](#) by Robert Goodman. Prayer excerpts are from [Siddur Sim Shalom](#), published by the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.