

“If there is no flour, there is no Torah; if there is no Torah, there is no flour.”
“Im Ein Torah Ein Kemach, Im Ein Kemach Ein Torah”

that the Torah was given in the Hebrew month of Sivan, but not which day it was given (just as we did not know what day Shavuot would fall out on in any given year prior to the fixed calendar system). Torah, it would seem, is not meant to be associated with a particular time and place – and that’s exactly the point. In every generation, wherever we might find ourselves, the Torah is to be understood as relevant and considered as though it were given to us in the very moment and space where we find ourselves now. (See: *Rashi to Shemot/Exodus 19:1*)

Ruth was a direct ancestor of King David, but that is not Shavuot’s only connection to the great monarch. Jewish tradition also teaches that Shavuot is King David’s birthday and *Yahrzeit* – day of death. (T.Y. *Chagigah 12a, Bechor Shor*) Additionally, King David’s son and successor, the wise King Solomon, was crowned King on Shavuot. (Rashi to Shir Hashirim 3:11).
We know the Torah was given at Mount Sinai, but we do not know the exact location of this mountain. We know

Fun Facts

All about Shavuot

Renewing our vows in a celebration of our covenantal bond

May 30–June 1 / Sivan 6–7



Reveling in Revelation!



The Backstory

Shavuot is the middle pillar of the *Shalosh Regalim* (Three Pilgrimage Festivals), flanked by Pesach (Passover) and Sukkot. Connected to the biblical agricultural cycle, Shavuot marked the conclusion of the barley harvest and the beginning of the wheat harvest. It was also the beginning of the window for bringing the *Bikkurim* – choice first fruits brought in gratitude to God from the seven species associated with the land of Israel (wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates – see *Devarim/Deuteronomy* 8:8).

During Temple times, Jews would make annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem. In doing so they demonstrated their complete trust in God's promise (*Shemot/Exodus* 34:24) that our homes and families would remain safe. This, despite the fact that all men of fighting age and strength left the borders of Israel vulnerable when they traveled to the center of the country to appear before God at the Temple.

Additionally, the *Shtei HaLechem*, two leaven wheat loaves, were brought as a communal offering. This unique *Korban* is a biblical nod toward the dominant Rabbinic theme of Shavuot – the giving of the Torah. The *Shtei HaLechem* on Shavuot is the only holiday offerings where a sacrifice is categorized as a *Korban Shlamim* given by the *Tzibur* (the collective - rather than from an individual). The original *Korban Shlamim* took place at the foot of Mt. Sinai as part

of the process of revelation and covenant. The bread itself, representing our very sustenance, is also a symbol of the partnership between God who provides the rains and Man who must convert the raw materials into a refined and finished product by grinding, kneading, and baking. So too with Torah, God provides the essence through revelation, but we must work hard to understand and apply its wisdom.

Shavuot itself does not have a specific calendar date, rather it draws its name (*Shavuot* in Hebrew means weeks) from the fact that its celebration is determined by counting seven weeks of seven days from the *Omer* (barley) offering brought on Passover, connecting the experience of revelation to the national formation which begun with the Exodus. Mystic traditions explain that the passage of time between Passover and Shavuot was to allow the Israelites time for performing introspective spiritual self-help, thereby lifting them from the sorry state they were in as slaves, into the exalted state they would need to reach to successfully receive the Torah. Paralleling that, many today continue to use the time of the counting of the *Omer* to work on their personal character development, and then, when Shavuot arrives, they apply their refined selves anew to the study, celebration, and internalization of Torah wisdom.

How We Celebrate

Megillat Rut/The Book of Ruth: Read both because of seasonal ties, but also because of Ruth's tremendous lesson in kindness and dedication, *Megillat Rut* tells the story of a woman who raises herself from lowly origins into the progenitor of our greatest leaders and ultimate redemption.

Hallel: These additional words of praise and requests for salvation are recited during morning prayers.

Yizkor: The memorial prayer for the departed is recited in synagogue, linking our present with our past in a chain back to Sinai where we are once again propelled forward toward our ultimate future.

Torah Torah Torah: Whether participating in a traditional all-night learning at a synagogue on Shavuot night, finding space for independent study, or attending kid focused programs or adult classes in the afternoons, Torah study is the quintessential Shavuot activity.

Dairy: As with the other festivals, joy is traditionally expressed through delicious festival meals shared with family and friends. While the tradition of meat meals on the festivals isn't diminished, a tradition to eat dairy meals on Shavuot (in particular on the opening night meal) has a long and multifaceted tradition. Classic favorites include *Blintzes* and cheesecake.

Flowers and Greenery: Tradition teaches that Mount Sinai was transformed into a lush and beautiful mountain for the giving of the Torah. In commemoration of that fact, many have the custom to decorate their synagogues and homes with additional flowers and greenery.

