



MINHAGIM AND GUIDELINES FOR SHAUVUOT

A. It is customary to decorate the Shul and home with greenery and flowers for Shavuot.

B. There is customary to eat dairy foods.

C. There is custom to remain awake and study Torah on the night of Shavuot. For those who follow this practice, there are a number of points to bear in mind if one has not slept at all:

The blessing of *Al Netilat Yadayim* and *Asher Yatzar* may be said only after going to the bathroom.

The following blessings should not be said: a. *Al mitzvat tzitzit* b. the blessings on Torah study c. *Elokai neshama* and *Ha'maavir sheina*.

If possible, one should hear someone else (who has slept during the night) say them and intend to fulfill his obligation by listening to the recitation

of the blessings. (The individual who is saying the blessings must also have in mind to allow the listeners to fulfill their obligation through his recitation).

If there is no one to recite these blessings, then the blessing for the *talit gadol* can be used to cover the *talit katan* as well, and the blessing of *Ahava raba* can cover the blessings for Torah study if one specifically has so in mind and if immediately upon termination of the Amida one recites some Torah passages.





MEGILAT RUTH AND TORAH READING FOR SHAVUOT

Many communities read Megilat Ruth on Shavuot morning before Torah reading. (Outside of Israel it is read on the second day.)

Some communities read it in the afternoon (before Mincha).

A recent trend in Vatikin (pre-sunrise) minyanim (in Israel) is to read it before davening. While some feel that it is not ideal to do so, it has become a popular practice because of the time saved for people who are quite tired and appreciate the early morning davening.

When read from a kosher megila (Minhag Yerushalayim), the reading is preceded by the brachot... Al Mikra Megila and Shehechyanu. Read from a book, no brachot are recited.

Various reasons combine to make Ruth a perfect reading for Shavuot:

The text itself tells us that its

story takes place at the time of the "cutting of the wheat". Shavuot is Chag HaKatzir.

One of the major purposes of the book of Ruth is to show us the lineage of David HaMelech and the Davidic line. Tradition tells us that David HaMelech died (and was born) on Shavuot.

Perhaps more significantly, the story of Ruth is the inspiring story of Kabbalat HaTorah on an individual level, just as Shavuot is the commemoration of Kabbalat HaTorah on a national level. All of Israel were like converts at Sinai. This matches nicely that the Torah reading comes from Parshat Yitro, another example of personal Kabbalat HaTorah.





Ruth is the story of Chesed, acts of kindness. The Torah begins and ends with G-d's acts of kindness—clothing Adam and Chava on the one side and burying Moshe on the other.

We recite **Akdamut** on Shavuot morning. After the Kohen is called to the Torah, before his bracha and before the reading begins, it is the Ashkenazi custom to responsively recite a 90-line poem praising G-d, His Torah and His people. Written by Rabbi Meir of Worms (one of Rashi's teachers) it conveys the spirit of love of G-d and Judaism even under the adverse conditions of the Crusades. Rabbi Meir's son was killed by Crusaders and he himself died soon after a "forced debate" with Christian clergy of his town. The poem celebrates Torah. Each line of Akdamut ends with a syllable TA, TAV-ALEF, last and first letters of the Alef Bet, some see this as a reminder of the nature of the Torah itself - as soon as we complete reading or learning the Torah, we immediately begin it again.

Sfardim do not read Akdamut, but they have the custom of reading a poem called the Ketuba composed by Rabbi Yosef Najara, celebrating the marriage, so to speak, of G-d and Bnei Yisrael, or the Torah and Bnei Yisrael. They read the Ketuba when the Ark is opened, before the Torahs are taken out.

Torah Reading from the first of two Torahs on Shavuot, we read from Parshat Yitro, the account of Ma'amad Har Sinai and Matan Torah, from Shmot 19 & 20 a total of 48 psukim. The reading is divided among 5 Aliyot, as on all Yom Tov days (that don't fall on Shabbat – which Shavuot never does).

The reading begins with the famous pasuk: "In the third month from the Exodus, on this day, they (Bnei Yisrael) came to Midbar Sinai." Rashi's two comments on "this day" are:

1. It was Rosh Chodesh Sivan that the People arrived at Sinai, and
2. The Torah uses the term





this day (Bayom Haze) rather than (Bayom Hahu) to teach us that Matan Torah should not be thought of as a "once upon a time, a long time ago" experience, but rather "words of Torah should be fresh in our eyes as if we received them today."

This is such an important concept that it bears constant repeating, attention, and effort to internalize. Especially when there are so many detractors who proclaim the Torah and its Mitzvot as antiquated, outdated, and irrelevant, we must be enthusiastic proponents of the opposite view. Etz Chayim Hi.

Could the Torah's being described as a living tree also contribute towards the custom of adorning the shul and home with tree branches?

The second pasuk is no less famous. "Vayichan sham Yisrael..." Israel, as one being with one heart and a singular purpose, camped opposite the mount. The unparalleled experience of Jewish unity that gave standing at the foot of Mt. Sinai its everlasting significance, become one of our special goals of Jewish life.

This explains the dayeinu couplet: Had You brought us to Har Sinai and not given us the Torah, we would still have reason to thank You.

Aseret Hadibrot is read in the "upper notes", Taamei Elyon, even according to Minhag Yerushalayim (which uses Taamei Hatachton for Parshat Yitro and Vaetchanan.) Taamei Elyon presents the text as separate commandments – with fanfare and flair-rather than psukim -like all the Torah- which is the way we hear it with Taamei Tachton.

Maftir (in the second Torah) is the Musaf of Shavuot from Parshat Pinchas (Bamidbar 28:26-31).

Haftara is Yechezkel's first chapter and his most vivid and esoteric vision. The level and type of prophecy attained by the Jews at Sinai has been compared to the visions of Yechezkel.

Chag Sameach!

