

## SHAVUOT

Shavuot commemorates the anniversary of the day God gave the Torah to the entire Israelite nation assembled at Mount Sinai. The holiday is one of the three Biblical pilgrimage festivals. The date of Shavuot is directly linked to that of Passover. The Torah mandates the seven-week Counting of the Omer, beginning on the second day of Passover and immediately followed by Shavuot. This counting of days and weeks is understood to express anticipation and desire for the Giving of the Torah. On Passover, the Jewish people were freed from their enslavement to Pharaoh; on Shavuot they were given the Torah and became a nation committed to serving God.

According to Jewish law, Shavuot is celebrated in Israel for one day and in the Diaspora (outside of Israel) for two days. Reform Jews celebrate only one day, even in the Diaspora.

Besides its significance as the day on which the Torah was revealed by God to the Jewish nation at Mount Sinai (which includes the Ten Commandments), Shavuot is also connected to the grain harvest in Israel. In ancient times, the harvest lasted seven weeks and was a time of gladness. It began with the harvesting of the barley during Passover and ended with the harvesting of the wheat at Shavuot. Shavuot was thus the concluding festival of the grain harvest, just as the eighth day of Sukkot was the concluding festival of the fruit harvest. During the existence of the Temple in Jerusalem, an offering of two loaves of bread from the wheat harvest was made on Shavuot.

Dairy foods such as cheesecake, cheese blintzes, cheese kugel and cheese ravioli are eaten on Shavuot. One of the reasons given for this is that the Torah is compared to milk by King Solomon.

On Shavuot, we read the Book of Ruth which has a special meaning for those who, like Ruth, are the partner of a Jew and part of a Jewish family. We know very little about Ruth's family of origin, but we do know she chose to leave her family and travel with her mother-in-law, Naomi, to be part of her husband's people after he died. There may be modern day Ruths in your community whose stories echo in some way the difficult choice that Ruth made to follow Naomi when they promised to raise Jewish children. Shavuot is a wonderful time to honor them and to express your gratitude for this gift they give to Judaism!

Excerpts taken from [interfaithfamily.com](http://interfaithfamily.com) and Wikipedia