

What do we do on Shavuot?

The common English translation for the Hebrew word "Shavuot" is "Pentecost." The Scriptures relate that Shavuot is the time of commemorating when the Holy Torah was given to the Nation of Yisrael. We observe Shavuot over a period of 12 days. This year the observance is from May 15th through the 26th. Wednesday and Thursday (15th, 16th) are considered High Sabbaths. Because of the importance of the observance, it is the custom of many to adorn their homes with flowers and green plants.

We carefully read the Sefer Nechemyah (Book of Nehemiah) during this period of time. While the entire collection of Scripture is important to all Chasidim, this Sefer in particular is held in high regard due to its admonition of Elohim's people to return to the pristine Torah. As one brother said, it reminds us of the importance of remaining close to the Mitzvoth of Yahweh and of the importance of unity within the House of Elohim.

In the Hebrew text of Sefer Nechemyah, there are thirteen chapters. These can be read in intervals throughout the days of Shavuot. For example,

May 15, Chapter 1
May 16, Chapter 2
May 17, Chapter 3
May 18, Chapter 4
May 19, Chapter 5
May 20, Chapter 6
May 21, Chapter 7
May 22, Chapter 8
May 23, Chapter 9
May 24, Chapter 10
May 25, Chapter 11
May 26, Chapters 12-13

On the first and second evening (just before sundown), we light candles. The women in the household are chosen first to light candles, but if no women are in the home, men may do this instead.

The candle light blessing for Shavuot (first and second night):

Baruch atah Adonai Yah Eloheinu, Melech ha'Olam asher kidshanu b'minhag vetzivanu le'hadlik neir shal yom tov.

Translation: Blessed are You, Lord Yah our God, King of the universe, who sanctifies us with His Commandments, and gives us the custom of kindling the light of this observance.

Baruch atah Adonai Yah Eloheinu Melech ha'Olam she'he'che'yanu ve'kiyemanu ve'higi'anu lizman hazeh.

Translation: Blessed are You, Lord Yah our God, King of the universe, who has granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion.

On both May 15th and May 16th we read the Ten Commandments or hear them being read by an appointed reader. (This can also be accomplished by listening to an audio recording of the same.)

In the West, some have made it their custom to serve cheese, milk or sweet dairy treats (like cheese cake) to those who gather in their homes to hear the Torah. Although the serving of such foods is not required, for some participants, it helps add to the joy of our fellowship on this occasion.

On the second day of Shavuot (May 16th) we read from the list of names of those who have passed away and we commemorate their memory.

It is customary to greet one another with the phrase "*Chag Shavuot Sameach*" which means "Have a happy Shavuot Festival."

Detailed Instructions

Day 1, May 15

1. We gather together in our homes or in the house of worship. Some kind of colorful flowers or plants should be present for all to see.
2. One of the women (or one of the men if a sister is not present) should light two candles and then say the blessings:

Baruch atah Adonai Yah Eloheinu, Melech ha'Olam asher kideshanu b'minhag vetzivanu le'hadlik neir shal yom tov.

(Translation: Blessed are You, Lord Yah our God, King of the universe, who sanctifies us with His Commandments, and gives us the custom of kindling the light of this observance.)

Baruch atah Adonai Yah Eloheinu Melech ha'Olam she'he'che'yanu ve'kiyemanu ve'higi'anu lizman hazeh.

(Translation: Blessed are You, Lord Yah our G-d, King of the universe, who has granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion.)

3. The head of the household, or the leader of the congregation says:
"We are gathered together to observe the holy day of Shavuot. Let us pray for a blessing upon this gathering." (a non-liturgical prayer is said asking for Elohim to bless the observance).

4. The congregation leader/head of household recites the Sh'ma in its short form:

Sh'ma Yisrael, Adonai Yah, Eloheinu, Adonai Yah echad.

(Translation: Hear, O Israel, the Lord Yah is our God, the Lord Yah is One.)

5. Congregation response: "Adonai Yah echad!" (The Lord Yah is One!)

6. The head of the household or one who has been appointed (male or female) chants/sings or recites the following Hebrew song:

*Hineh ma tov uma na'im
Shevet achim gam yachad.
Hineh ma tov uma na'im
Shevet achim gam yachad.*

7. The congregation responds:

*Hineh ma tov
Shevet achim gam yachad.*

(Translation: How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity)

8. The head of the household or the congregation leader or an appointed reader recites the Ten Commandments in the common language of the people.

9. An appointed reader (or the head of the household, congregation leader) recites to the congregation Exodus 19:1-20:23, Numbers 28:26-31 and Ezekiel 1:1-28; 3:12.

10. Chapter 1 of the Book of Nehemiah is now read to the congregation/house by the head of the household or the group leader.

11. We now come to the conclusion of the liturgy for Shavuot for the first evening. The officiant recites the following prayer:

O Lord Yah, may Your Torah never leave our mouths. May we speak Your Torah with reverence and love. May we speak Your Torah with obedience and fear. May we speak Your Torah to others, with care and guided by the spirit of holiness.

It is not unreasonable to ask us to think upon Your Torah day and night for You are the author of both day and night. Guide us to observe, O Lord Yah, Your Mitzvoth diligently. Guide us to observe them with a pure heart and spirit.

12. The congregation/group responds:

"May we observe the Mitzvoth of Elohim in the manner You proscribe to Your Chasidim."

13. Officiant says:

"Elohim, grant that we may immerse our souls in the Book of Your Holy Presence. May we subsist in Your Presence forever."

14. The congregation/group responds:

Amen.

15. It is appropriate at this time for the congregation/group to enjoy refreshments.

Day 2, May 16

1. We gather together in our homes or in the house of worship. Some kind of colorful flowers or plants should be present for all to see.

2. One of the women (or one of the men if a sister is not present) should light two candles and then say the blessings:

Baruch atah Adonai Yah Eloheinu, Melech ha'Olam asher kideshanu b'minhag vetzivanu le'hadlik neir shal yom tov.

(Translation: Blessed are You, Lord Yah our God, King of the universe, who sanctifies us with His commandments, and gives us the custom of kindling the light of this observance.)

Baruch atah Adonai Yah Eloheinu Melech ha'Olam she'he'che'yanu ve'kiyemanu ve'higi'anu lizman hazeh.

(Translation: Blessed are You, Lord Yah our God, King of the universe, who has granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion.)

3. The head of the household, or the leader of the congregation says:

"We are gathered together to observe the holy day of Shavuot. Let us pray for a blessing upon this gathering." (a non-liturgical prayer is said asking for Elohim to bless the observance).

4. The congregation leader/head of household recites the Sh'ma in its short form:

Sh'ma Yisrael, Adonai Yah, Eloheinu, Adonai Yah echad.

(Translation: Hear, O Israel, the Lord Yah is our God, the Lord Yah is One.)

5. Congregation response: *"Adonai Yah echad!"* (The Lord Yah is One!)

6. The head of the household or one who has been appointed (male or female) chants/sings or recites the following Hebrew song:

Hineh ma tov uma na'im

Shevet achim gam yachad.

Hineh ma tov uma na'im

Shevet achim gam yachad.

7. The congregation responds:

Hineh ma tov

Shevet achim gam yachad.

(Translation: How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.)

8. The head of the household or the congregation leader or an appointed reader recites the Ten Commandments in the common language of the people.

9. An appointed reader (or the head of the household, congregation leader) recites to the congregation Deuteronomy 15:19-16,17a; Numbers 28:26-31; Habakkuk 2:20-3:19.

10. Chapter 2 of the Book of Nehemiah is now read to the congregation by the head of the household or the group leader.

11. We now come to the conclusion of the liturgy for Shavuot for the second evening. Steps 11 through 15 from the instructions for the first night of observance are repeated.

Days 3-12, May 17-26

1. We gather together in our homes or in the house of worship in the late afternoon or in the evening (some have the custom of meeting at night). Some kind of colorful flowers or plants should be present for all to see.

2. The head of the household, or the leader of the congregation says:

"We are gathered together to observe the third day of Shavuot. Let us pray for a blessing upon this gathering." (a non-liturgical prayer is said asking for Elohim to bless the observance).

3. The congregation leader/head of household recites the Sh'ma in its short form:

Sh'ma Yisrael, Adonai Yah, Eloheinu, Adonai Yah echad.

(Translation: Hear, O Israel, the Lord Yah is our God, the Lord Yah is One.)

4. Congregation response: *"Adonai Yah echad!"* (The Lord Yah is One!)

5. The head of the household or one who has been appointed (male or female) chants/sings or recites the following Hebrew song:

Hineh ma tov uma na'im

Shevet achim gam yachad.

Hineh ma tov uma na'im

Shevet achim gam yachad.

6. The congregation responds:

Hineh ma tov

Shevet achim gam yachad.

(Translation: How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity)

7. The next portion of the Book of Nehemiah is read.

8. The officiant/group leader/head of household recites the following prayer:

"You, O Lord Yah, El Shaddai Elohim, have given us the halacha, the divine path of righteousness through the teaching of Your beloved one, Yehoshua. For it was he who confirmed the Torah and the Prophets to Your Chasidim."

9. Congregation/group responds:

"Amen."

10. Some congregations have the custom of reading Psalm 119:1-8 on the last evening of Shavuot. It is the custom of all Chasidim that on the last night, a reader chants Psalm 128. (An audio recording of the chant may be used if the reader is unable to chant).

11. Steps 11-15 from the first night of observance are repeated.