

CHAG SAMAI'ACH. Today is the 6th and 7th days of Sivan, 5786, Shavuot. Corresponding to May 22 + 23, 2026

[Compiled by Rabbi Edward Davis (RED),
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1. This is a special holiday that re-experiences the Revelation at Mt. Sinai with the reading of the Ten Commandments. Hashem singles out the nation of Israel to be His Chosen People, which means that we are a lofty nation, and not a lowly one. All our children are princes, being groomed for roles of leadership in the world. And we are a royal family, ready to serve Hashem and be teachers of Hashem's ways. We are a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. All of us are united in this role, together, ready to accept our role in the world. This is the real lesson of this holiday. But am I a Kohen? In today's reading, each one of us is designated as a Kohen. Each day, as part of the pre-davening prayers, we each say the Birkat Kohanim, indicating our Kohanic status. We are all teachers of Torah. We are all above average human beings. Mediocrity is not acceptable in Jewish life; we strive for loftier heights, accomplishing goals, always striving for a greater fulfillment of the Torah society.

2. AKDAMUT. The author is Rabbi Meir ben Yitzchak whose son was killed in the Crusades of 1096. The author was forced to debate priests, defending his position not to convert to Christianity. He died very soon after the debate. This was in Germany. In the Aramaic poem, he gives praise to Hashem, and thanks Him for choosing the nation of Israel to serve Him. He describes the devotion of Israel to Hashem, despite constant efforts of these enemies to tear the Jews away from Torah and from Hashem. The Jewish people are unshaken in this faith and hopeful for the upcoming day of redemption. There will ultimately be a great reward for Am Yisrael. This is an appropriate poem to be read immediately before the Revelation at Mt. Sinai and the Giving of the Torah and the recitation of the Ten Commandments.

3. There is a Midrash describing Hashem's attempts to give the Torah to other peoples. First Hashem offered the Torah to the descendants of Esav. What is in it? Hashem responded: You shall not murder. No, no said Esav's people. Our ancestor was blessed by his father "you shall live by your sword." This is the way of our life. Next He went and offered it to the descendants of Ammon and Moav. What is in it? Do not commit adultery, was the answer. No, no said Ammon and Moav. Our ancestors were born from an incestual relation with their father. We cannot accept it. He then went to Bnei Yishmael. What is in it? Do not steal. No, no said Bnei Yishmael. The Torah said about our ancestor that he would be a wild man with his

hand in everything. Stealing is our way of life! He then went to Bnei Yisrael. They immediately said: Na'aseh V'Nishma, we will do and we will listen. They never even asked what was in it. I believe their immediate positive response was predicated on an existing relationship.

4. The Ibn Ezra wrote prolifically on the Ten Commandments. I appreciated the following insight from him. The first two commandments are directed to our hearts: to believe in God and not to have other gods. The third commandment is directed to our mouths: don't take God's name in vain. The fourth and fifth commandments are aimed at our deeds: Shabbat and Honoring Parents. The last five commandments are in reverse order. Six, seven, and eight are directed to our deeds. The ninth is aimed at our mouths. And the last one is directed to our hearts. The program calls for directives to our heart, mouth, deeds, followed by deeds, mouth, and back to our heart. These commandments form a pattern, aimed at engaging our entire being enveloped within a life of sanctity to Hashem. When we harness all the dimension of our life, we can become complete Jews, dedicated to Hashem's ways.

5. Shabbat is a very unique Mitzvah. It requires us to separate ourselves from weekday activities and embrace a special spiritual dimension. (RED's sidebar: every element of time: the year, the month, the day, is based on elements in nature. Everything except the week. There is only one source for the duration of the week, and that is the Bible. Our Torah is the sole origin for this idea, which is embraced by everyone, even the most pronounced atheist.) How do we sanctify this day? Our Sages instruct us to eat and drink and to wear clean clothes. Remember the Shabbat: we do so by reciting Kiddush. Six days you shall work: Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah said we were engaged physically with the Mitzvah of building a Sanctuary. And we are to observe the special day with our children. It is a family event, binding the family unit in total involvement with a spiritually uplifting effort. Once a week, a time out from the work week. A very good idea indeed.

6. Do not steal. Even if you did so with a good reason. Consider our matriarch Rachel, who stole her father's Terafim, his idols. Rashi explains that Rachel wanted to distance her father from idol worship. Who could fault her for having such a desire. Yet she is punished for it. She dies in her young age. (Midrashically, Rachel was 45 years old when she died.) And she was denied burial with her husband and his entire family in Me'arat HaMachpeilah, the Double Cave in Chevron. Even though the Torah had not been given yet, as a matriarch, she was judged on a higher level than most. So sad and so tragic. Yaakov could not save her from her punishment. This is the total dedication that we are required to have, the reverence we need to have in observing these laws.

7. RUTH. Our Sages tell us that there are no Halachot in this Megillah. But there is so much that we learn from this small book. The laws of conversion are directly learned from Ruth's response to her mother-in-law Naomi, when she adamantly insists on going with her to Eretz Yisrael. We learn about the gifts to the poor, when Ruth gleanes from Boaz's field. We learn about modesty and the laws of acquisition. The Mashiach comes from Ruth. We learn that true Yichus is not necessarily from ancestors. It is from Middot, proper character traits. The famous Jewish historian Cecil Roth once commented that in every Jew's background you should be able to find a non-Jewish ancestor. And we see that David, our noble King David, and therefore our Mashiach, come from a checkered ancestry. Non-Jewish blood. Incest. A daughter-in-law seducing her father-in-law. We need to analyze these events and come to a conclusion that you can create your own destiny, regardless of your family history.

8. We celebrate the Giving of the Torah. But which "Torah"? The Written Torah and/or the Oral Torah? My answer is BOTH. They are bound together. As Rav Hirsch (19th century Germany) wrote: Moshe ascended Mt. Sinai and learned from Hashem the entire Torah. He wanted to take notes from his Teacher's lectures. Hashem made it easy for Moshe. He dictated to Moshe to write the notes on the lecture, and this was the Written Torah. But the entire lecture included much more, and that was the Oral Torah. So what we received on Mt. Sinai was both. And this is what we celebrate today. When Moshe came down and said to Bnei Yisrael to make a sign on your hand and Totafot on your head, somebody must have asked Moshe what that meant. Moshe explained the Mitzvah of Tefillin to them. And there never has been a different opinion offered for Tefillin in our lengthy history. This is Halachah L'Moshe MiSinai, which is tantamount to being a Torah law.

9. There are 669 different Parshiyot in the Torah. Each Parshah is designated by a blank space in the Torah the length of 9 letters. The spaces were placed there to separate subject matter or to give Moshe the opportunity to absorb the contents of the previous portion. Some of these Parshiyot are short and some are long. But the spaces are of divine origin. Somewhere in the writings of the Netziv (Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, 19th century Volozhin) he offers an interesting observation. Moshe was taught a great deal from Hashem, and he was instructed by Hashem what to transmit to Bnei Yisrael. The other items that Hashem shared with Moshe, reasons or explanations of the Mitzvot, the so-called Pilpul from Hashem, he was not instructed to teach Bnei Yisrael. Moshe, on his own, decided what to share with his people. This is very instructive to our understanding of our Mitzvah world.

QUESTIONS FOR SHAVUOT 5786

1. Why didn't the Torah give Shavuot a calendar date like every other holiday?
2. What agricultural law is associated with Shavuot?
3. Why do we pray Ma'ariv late on Shavuot night?
4. What Megillah is read on Shavuot and Why?
5. Why is there no Chol HaMoed on Shavuot?
6. Who composed the special unique Nussach tune for the prayers of the Three Pilgrimage Festivals?
7. Why is there a custom to eat dairy foods on the first day of Shavuot?
8. Why is there a custom to decorate the synagogue with greenery on Shavuot?
9. Why was the Torah given in the desert (and not in Eretz Yisrael)?
10. Why are the Ten Commandments written in singular?

Relationships

- a) Moshe - Bityah
- b) Moshe - Itamar
- c) Moshe - Miriam

ANSWERS FOR SHAVUOT 5786

1. To connect the holiday to Pesach.
2. Bikkurim
3. To make sure that the Sefirah has seven complete weeks.
4. Megillat Rut. Many reasons, among them: The harvest season is the same as now. We are all converts to Judaism when we accept the Torah on this holiday.
5. Because workers need to work in the fields this time of the year.
6. Rabbi Yaakov Moelin, 1365-1427, Germany.
7. Many answers. I like because we just received the Torah laws, including Kashrut. Wasn't enough time to prepare a meat meal for Yom Tov.
8. Because Mt. Sinai was in green this time of the year.
9. Because everyone in the world is entitled to learn it.
10. Because every individual person is given these words.
 - a) Bityah was foster mother to Moshe. She was Pharaoh's daughter.
 - b) Uncle Moshe
 - c) Siblings