

Laws & Customs: Sivan & Shavuot

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Compiled by Yossi Fraenkel in memory of his grandparents

ר' ראובן בן הרב משה אליעזר הלוי ע"ה וזויה ברכה בת ר' נפתלי משה ע"ה רבינוביץ

ר' יוסף בן ר' אורי ע"ה ומלכה בת ר' יצחק צבי הלוי ע"ה פרנקל

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🕊️ EREV ROSH CHODESH SIVAN

Rosh Chodesh Sivan starts Tuesday night, May 11th.

The Shla"h Hakadosh writes "the most appropriate time to recite the prayer he wrote for parents to say on behalf of their children is on Erev Rosh Chodesh Sivan, for this is the month when Hashem gave us His Torah, and when we began to be called his children."

🕊️ SIVAN

Tachnun is not recited from Rosh Chodesh Sivan until after Shavuot, some however hold not to say Tachanun until the twelfth day of Sivan.

One should not undertake a fast on these days, even for a Yahrzeit. [However, a Chattan and Kallah fast on their wedding day, unless their wedding occurs on the day after Shavuot.]

Some have the custom that an Avel (within 12 months of a parent's passing or within 30 days of a spouse, child or sibling's passing) should not serve as the Chazzan in Shul during these days. This does not apply to one who has a Yahrzeit. Others, (including Chabad) have the custom that he should serve as the Chazzan, except of course, on Shabbat and Chag.

During these days, we do not eulogize someone who has died.

Some hold that one can take a haircut from Rosh Chodesh Sivan, some hold from the first morning of the Shloshet Y'mei Hagbalah (i.e. Friday). According to some, a Bar Mitzvah boy who is having his Bar Mitzvah after Rosh Chodesh Sivan may have a haircut in honor of his Bar Mitzvah beforehand. Nevertheless, according to the Chabad custom, one shouldn't take a haircut until Erev Chag.

🕊️ SHLOSHET Y'MEI HAGBALAH

From the 3rd of Sivan (Friday May 14th) starts the Shloshet Y'mei Hagbalah.

Many customs associated with mourning during Sefirat Haomer no longer apply from Friday morning. Music, dancing and haircuts, are permissible.

From Rosh Chodesh Sivan some hold that one can have a wedding (within the guidelines of the Health Ministry), but most hold only from the beginning of the Shloshet Y'mei Hagbalah. And some hold that due to Rosh Chodesh being on Wednesday, one may get married on Friday.

🕊️ SHABBAT BAMIDBAR

In 5746 (1986), the Lubavitcher Rebbe made a "*Bakasha Nafshit* (heartfelt request) that, in association with *Rosh Chodesh Sivan*, when the Jewish people encamped around *Har Sinai* with unity, every community should utilise the day of *Shabbat* to focus on the idea of *Achdut*, including through *Torah* and gatherings. This *Shabbat* is often referred to in Chabad circles as *Shabbat Achdut*.

Av Harachamim and *Tzidkatcha* are **not** recited this *Shabbat*.

The sixth chapter of *Pirkei Avot* is recited after *Mincha*.

Vihi Noam and *V'atah Kaddosh* are **not** recited on *Motzei Shabbat*.

🕊️ PREPARATIONS FOR CHAG

The Mitzvah of V'Samachta B'Chagecha on Chag entails eating meat, wine and delicacies; providing new clothing or jewelry for one's wife according to his means; and giving candies to children. These should be arranged in advance.

Prior to every Chag, we also need to remember that the Chag requirements of the needy be met. Chag is also an especially appropriate time to host guests.

One should make spiritual preparations for Shavuot as well. These include learning Torah – especially the laws of Shavuot,

Matan Torah, as well as increasing in Ahavat Yisrael.

During the period before Chag, one should reach out and do all within his or her power to ensure that all Jews – men, women, children and even small babies – should attend the Aseret Hadibrot on the day of Shavuot.

🕊️ EREV CHAG (5TH SIVAN)

In honor of Shavuot, if one has not done so yet, one should take a haircut on Erev Chag.

On Erev Shavuot, one should not donate blood, take a blood test, or undergo any procedures involving blood loss. [Of course, this prohibition does not apply in a case of Pikuach Nefesh.]

For those who regularly shave or trim, it is a Mitzvah to do so on Erev Chag and there are some who are particular not to shave after Chatzot (12:35pm).

Some have the custom to immerse in a Mikvah after midday, to prepare for Chag.

It is a Mitzvah to cut one's finger nails on Erev Chag, and for some who are particular, not to cut them after Chatzot (12:35pm).

Just like on Erev Shabbat, it is preferable to refrain from eating a proper meal once the tenth Halachic hour of the day begins (4:02pm), in order to properly enjoy the Seudat Chag at night. However, one may snack in small quantities.

Shavuot is an opportune time to enhance one's Torah learning and make positive resolutions; to spread Torah to others; to enhance one's adherence to daily study; and to accept upon oneself the Ol Shel Torah (yoke of Torah).

The Lubavitcher Rebbe's customary Shavuot greeting: "Kabbalat Hatorah B'Simcha ub'Pnimitut" is loosely

translated as: “May you receive the Torah joyfully and internally”.

🌸 FLOWERS AND FOLIAGE

Shulchan Aruch mentions the custom of decorating the Shul with trees (since Shavuot is the day of judgement for fruits), and flowers (to commemorate the foliage that appeared on barren Har Sinai). For various reasons, it is not the Chabad custom to decorate the Shul with trees and flowers, but this may be done at home.

Flowers and decorative leaves or branches which were cut and arranged prior to Shavuot are regarded as a decoration and are not Muktzah. Therefore, when necessary, they may be moved on Shavuot. However, if some of the flowers are not yet in full bloom and exposure to additional moisture will induce them to blossom further, the vase must be moved very gently so that the water level remains constant.

When all flowers are already in full bloom and exposure to additional moisture will not induce them to blossom further, the following further leniencies apply:

- On Shavuot, one may take flowers out of the vase of water. One may also return the flowers to the same vase, as long as the original water was not changed.
- On Shavuot, one may place the flowers in a new vase that was prepared and filled with water before Chag. One may also add flowers to a vase which already has flowers from before Chag.
- On Shavuot, one may top up the water in the vase if necessary, but the ratio of the new water must be less than half of the total. One may certainly not replace the existing water.

A potted plant should not be moved due to two concerns – Muktzah and aiding plant growth. [In principle, these issues are subject to differing Halachic opinions and other variables.] If the potted plant accidentally overturns, or some soil spills out, it should be left alone. [If doing so will create a hindrance or

inconvenience, a Rav should be consulted.]

For practical purposes, a potted plant should generally be treated as attached to the ground. Therefore, one may not water it at all or detach any of its leaves or branches. One may not lean on a potted tree or shrub, move it with his hands even ever so slightly, place anything in its branches, or remove anything caught in its branches.

Flowers, branches or leaves that were detached (regardless of the cause) on Shavuot are Muktzah. It goes without saying that they are Muktzah when still attached to the ground.

One may smell flowers and plants on Shavuot – even if still attached to the ground (and hence Muktzah). One should remember to make the appropriate Brachah. However, one may not smell attached fruits.

🕯️ CANDLE-LIGHTING

Prior to candle-lighting, one should give Tzedakah on Erev Chag for Chag itself.

Candle-lighting is at 6:54pm. The Brachot are Shel Yom Tov and Shehecheyanu. [If eating out, one should ensure that some practical benefit is derived from the candles after Chag begins.]

Since it is Chag, if one neglected to light at the proper time, one may – and should – light candles on Chag itself, from a pre-existing flame.

When a man is required to light candles, he does not recite Shehecheyanu, as he will be doing so in Kiddush. [Therefore, it is best that he lights candles right before Kiddush, so that his Shehecheyanu is linked to both.] Similarly, if a woman needs to recite her own Kiddush, she does not recite Shehecheyanu, as she already did so at candle-lighting.

🌙 NIGHT OF SHAVUOT

Maariv (and Kiddush) should preferably not begin before Tzeit Hakochovim (8:09pm) so that one can complete the full Sefirat Haomer cycle.

If someone davened Maariv before this time he should read Kriat Shema for Maariv before the Seudah.

At the Seudat Chag, it is good and correct not to overeat or drink as overeating or drinking will make one tired.

One should speed up their meal in order for them to go and learn Torah or say Tikun Leil Shavuot.

According to the Ari Z"l, one should refrain from marital relations, unless it is the night of Mikvah.

🌙 YA'ALEH VEYAVO IN BENTCHING

If one forgets to recite Ya'aleh Veyavo in bentching, but remembers before Hashem's name at Bonei Yerushalayim, he goes back. If one realized after that, but before starting the next Brachah, he recites the extra Brachah as printed in some Birkonim. If one already began even the first word of the next Brachah, one must begin bentching again.

The Harachamon for Chag is recited.

🌙 TIKUN LEIL SHAVUOT

The custom is to stay awake the entire night of Shavuot, Saying Tikun or learning Torah.

Needless to say, the night of Shavuot is not the appropriate time for lectures or forums about social, economic, political and communal issues. Although important, they cannot really be regarded as a form of Torah study – unless the focus is to learn the Torah's perspective.

The recitation of Tikun Leil Shavuot should be prioritized over all other forms of learning and Shiurim.

According to some the Tefillot and Yehi Ratzons that appear in some editions of Tikun Leil Shavuot are omitted, and Kaddish is not recited.

If, for whatever reason, one did not complete the entire Tikun Leil Shavuot on the night of Shavuot, he should do so at the earliest opportunity during the day.

Shortly before dawn (4:18am), those who have the custom should immerse in the Mikvah.

At dawn, one washes Netilat Yadaim and recites Brachot.

One should not begin learning Torah after dawn until he concludes Brachot.

The Brachah of Tzitzit is not recited at this time as it is still too early.

After staying awake the entire night, some have the custom to daven at Sunrise (5:41am), and others hold to sleep for several hours and daven at the usual time, in order to allow one to focus on his davening at his usual pace.

Since B'dieved one fulfils his obligation when reciting the daytime Shema immediately after dawn, it is worthwhile to recite it with the intention that he thereby fulfils his obligation only if he neglects to do so at the ideal time.

One does not recite Kriat Shema She'al Hamittah when going to sleep after dawn.

If one chooses to daven before going to sleep, he should ensure that he recites the Brachah of Tzitzit and Shema after the earliest time (4:44am), and the Amidah after sunrise (5:41am).

The Brachah of Tzitzit is not recited on a Tallit Katan worn overnight. One who does not wear a Tallit Gadol should change his Tallit Katan before reciting the Brachah.

🕊️ SHACHARIT & HALLEL

Care must be taken to recite Kriat Shema during the proper time (between 4:44 - 8:27am (Magen Avraham) or 4:44 - 9:08am (Gra & Baal HaTanya). One who goes to sleep prior to davening should ensure that he awakens in time to recite Shema.

Full Hallel is recited on Shavuot. When reciting Hallel, one may not interrupt it – other than for those things that one may respond to during the Brachot of Kriat Shema. [i.e. If the Chazzan recites Kedushah, one responds Kadosh, Baruch and Yimloch. When the Chazzan says Ha'E-l Hakadosh, one answers Amen. When the Chazzan says Modim, one answers the three words Modim Anachnu Lach. When the Chazzan recites Kaddish, one answers Amen Yehei Shmei etc, and Amen to

d'amiran b'alma. One also answers Barchu and Amen when the Brachot are recited before and after an Aliyah or Haftarah.]

Hallel is recited standing (unless one is feeble or infirm).

It is preferable to recite Hallel with the Minyan. If one is not up to the Minyan, this creates a dilemma; on the one hand it is appropriate to recite Hallel with the congregation (if he hasn't yet begun Baruch She'amar), and on the other hand, it is appropriate that one davens in the correct order. For this reason, the Chabad Rabbeim were punctilious about being up to Hallel when the Minyan recited it on Chag.

If one forgot to recite Hallel, he should recite it with a Brachah as soon as he remembers, as long as it is not yet sunset 7:43pm (or without a Brachah until Tzeit).

If one mistakenly recited half-Hallel, he must repeat the entire Hallel (without a Brachah).

🕊️ KRIAT HATORAH

Akdamut is said by most, however, it is not the Chabad custom to recite it. (the Lubavitcher Rebbe would say it quietly.)

The Aliyah containing the Aseret Hadibrot is given to a prominent person.

All men, women, children, and even babies and newborns (health permitting), should attend Shul to hear the Aseret Hadibrot. The congregation stands during the reading of the Aseret Hadibrot, facing the Sefer Torah.

Maftir is usually given to a learned and prominent person, due to the special significance of the Haftarah. The congregants read along in an undertone, and some have the custom to stand up while reading it.

Some have the custom of reading Megillat Rut in Shul on Chag. Although it is not the Chabad custom because the link between Rut and Shavuot is observed by the fact that one reads the entire Sefer as part of Tikun Leil Shavuot.

Yizkor is recited before Musaf. Those who leave the Shul for Yizkor may recite "Av Harachamim" after Yizkor.

Yizkor may be recited at home without a Sefer Torah.

🕊️ SHAVUOT DAY

The Mitzvah of V'Samachta B'Chagecha requires one to celebrate Chag with his family. As such, one should not overly prolong the time he spends at any communal Kiddush.

It is customary to eat dairy on Shavuot day. By the same token, Chag must be celebrated with meat.

One of the reasons for eating dairy is to emphasize that Jews – unlike the angels who visited Avraham Avinu – are careful to separate between milk and meat. As such, special care must be taken to adhere to all the Halachot of Kashrut. These include:

- Waiting one full hour after dairy, or six hours after eating cheeses cured for more than six months. [It may not be practical to consume aged cheeses on Shavuot, as one must also eat meat.]
- Making a Brachah Acharonah between dairy and meat.
- Not using the same tablecloths and loaves for dairy and meat.
- Not eating dairy together with a Challah baked in a Basari oven or vice versa. [There is grounds to be lenient if the Challot weren't physically touching any part of the oven, and the oven was absolutely clean and devoid of steam whilst the Challot were baking.]
- Not baking a dairy or meat loaf of bread lest people mistakenly think it is Parve. If already baked, it may not be eaten. Exceptions: The loaf has a distinctive shape, or it is visibly and obviously noticeable as dairy or meat, or it is small enough to be consumed within one day.
- Using separate knives (or a Parve knife) to cut vegetables used with dairy and meat. This is especially true when cutting sharp vegetables, since they assume the status of the knife even if it was

completely clean and recently unused.

Needless to say, some people are careful to eat only Chalav Yisrael. Accordingly, one should not eat even Parve or Chalav-Yisrael foods if they came into contact with non-Chalav-Yisrael utensils whilst hot.

The Brachah on cheesecake containing flour is Mezonot, even if it has a thin crust.

One must drink a cup of wine on the day of Chag, even by those who did not make their own Kiddush.

Shavuot is the Yahrtzeit of the Baal Shem Tov, and is therefore an opportune time to mention a teaching and story of the Baal Shem Tov. Shavuot is also associated with

Moshe Rabbeinu (who received the Torah) and David Hamelech (who compiled Tehillim). Therefore, Shavuot is an opportune time to enhance one's commitment to learning Torah and saying Tehillim.

There is an old Jerusalem custom to go visit the grave of David Hamelech on Har Tzion (of course this is only done within the regulations of the Health Ministry).

If Shavuot is on a bright day it is a good sign for the whole year.

MOTZEI SHAVUOT

Ya'aleh Veyavo (and Horachamon) is recited during *Bentching*, even if it is already *Tzeit Hakochavim* (8:10pm).

On *Motzei Shavuot*, *Kiddush Levana* is recited after *Maariv*.

Havdalah is recited without *Besamim* and candles. *V'Yiten Lecha* is not recited.

AFTER SHAVUOT

The day after *Chag* is known as "*Yom Tovo'ach*". It is also *Isru Chag*, and should be celebrated with additional food items. One may not fast on this day – even a *Chattan* and *Kallah* on their wedding day.

The days after Shavuot until the twelfth of Sivan (inclusive) are known as "*Y'mei Tashlumin*", during which *Tachnun* is not recited, however, some people have the custom to say *Tachanun*. The Baal Hatanya once remarked that these are the days to "pack" all the treasures and revelations of Shavuot.

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