

Hilkhhot Shavuot 5775

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The Holiday of Shavuot begins this Saturday night (May 23, 2015). Shavuot is also called *z'man matan Torateinu* - the day of the giving of our Torah - and it marks the anniversary of the revelation at Mt. Sinai. On Shavuot we celebrate our relationship to Torah and rededicate ourselves to Torah study. Below is an overview of the basic halakhot of Shavuot.

The way the calendar fell out this year, we will not be having any Shavuot activities on campus. Please be in touch with me if you need any help making the holiday. My family and I look forward to spending more holidays together with all of you!

Decorating the Synagogue

There is a *minhag* to decorate the synagogue with plants and flowers to mark the fact that Mt. Sinai was covered in flowers and greenery¹.

Three Day Holiday

Note that this year, Shavuot is Sunday and Monday, creating what is called a "three day holiday." Unlike Thurs-Fri-Sat three day holidays, there are less complications in this configuration. For instance, on Thurs-Fri-Sat three day holidays, there is much ado about preparing from the holiday (Friday) to Shabbat. In this configuration, there is no such possibility: one may not prepare on Shabbat for a holiday. One may not begin any aspect of the holiday until Shabbat is over. (There is no need for an eruv tavshilin.)

The only complication is havdallah Saturday night, which is addressed below.

Candle Lighting

REMEMBER that Shavuot begins Saturday night, so **candles may ONLY be lit after Shabbat is over** (and on the following night, after Yom Tov is over). See myzmanim.com for specific times. Additionally, **candles MUST be lit from a pre-existing flame**.

Two blessings are said over the candles:

ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו להדליק נר (1)

של יום טוב

*Baruch Atah Hashem Elokeinu Melech ha-Olam Asher kidshanu
be-mitzvotav ve-tzivanu lehadlik ner shel yom tov*

¹ See Chaye Adam 131:13 for an amazing but discontinued minhag

You are the Source of all Blessing, Timeless One, our God,
Sovereign of the Universe, Who has sanctified with His
commandments and has commanded us to kindle the light of
the festival.

2) ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם שהחיינו וקיימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה
*Baruch Atah Hashem Elokeinu Melech ha-olam she-hechyanu
ve-kiymanu ve-higyanu la-zman ha-zeh.*

You are the Source of all Blessing, Timeless One, our God,
Sovereign of the Universe, Who has kept us alive, sustained
us, and brought us to this season.

Davening

The normative practice is to delay davening and recitation of Kidush until after *tzeit ha-kochavim* (when the stars come out). The reason for this is that the Torah instructs us that when counting the Omer we should count *sheva shabatot temimot* - seven complete weeks. We refrain from starting Yom Tov early in order to give us seven complete weeks of the Omer.

This year, that issue is largely irrelevant since we are forced to start davening after Shabbat is concluded anyway. However, many communities will also wait on the second night to daven only after *tzeit ha-kochavim* in order to not disrespect the second day of Yom Tov. Every shul has different practices - check with your local synagogue for when they will be davening.

Kiddush and Havdallah

Havdallah after Shabbat is recited during kiddush. The reason for making havdallah is because, even though most melachot (acts of creative labor) remain prohibited, a number become permitted (namely cooking and carrying, detailed below). The blessing is subsequently altered - it reads “hamavdil bein kodesh l’kodesh” (as opposed to “hamavdil bein kodesh l’chol”).

The order is remembered in a mnemonic: YaKNaHaZ

- Yayin - wine - *borei peri ha-geffen*
- Kiddush - sanctification - *mkadesh Yisrael v'ha-zmanim*
- Ner - the havdallah candle - *borei meorei ha-esh*
- Havdallah - distinguishing - *ha-mavdil bein kodesh*
- Zman - time, or shechyanu - *sh'hechyanu v'kiymanu v'higyanu l'zman ha'zeh*

The order second night is the more standard yayin - kiddush - zman.
All of this is detailed in any mahzor.

Tikun Leil Shavuot

The custom has developed to stay up all night on the first night of Shavuot learning Torah. Different explanations are offered: it shows our

enthusiasm to receive the Torah. It also addresses a number of midrashic accounts that say B'nei Yisrael fell asleep when camped at Mt. Sinai and did not display full enthusiasm.²

Make sure to find some exciting shiurim in your area (they are offered at most shuls) or pick something you've been excited to learn/read but haven't found the time!

Reading of the Torah

On the first day of Shavuot we read the section of the Torah describing the Revelation at Mt. Sinai. Torah reading customarily includes the recitation of *akdamot* - liturgical poetry.

Yizkor

Like every Yom Tov, *yizkor* is recited on the last day of Chag. Those who say *yizkor* have the custom to light a yartzheit candle along with Yom Tov candles on the second night.

This year, *yizkor* falls out on the American Memorial Day. If your shul isn't already, encourage them to honor American Jewish veterans and memorialize American Jewish soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice.

As with the Yom Tov candles, the *yizkor* candle **must** be lit from a pre-existing flame.

Megilat Rut/ The Book of Ruth

The minhag is to read the Book of Ruth on the second day of Shavuot. Different shuls have different customs of when they read it. There are many explanations of the connection between Ruth and Shavuot. Some of them are:

- Ruth serves as the paradigm for converts willingly accepting the Torah. At Mt. Sinai the Jewish people were all converts.
- The Book of Ruth takes place during the wheat harvest, which coincides with Shavuot as *chag ha-bikurim*.
- The Book of Ruth describes many act of kindness (*chessed*) which go beyond the strict *halakhic* requirements. It therefore sets the model of the Torah personality we strive to develop and become.

Eating Dairy

Another custom is to eat dairy on Shavuot. Tradition explains that the Jewish people were nervous at Mt. Sinai that they would not be able to observe the intricate laws of *kashrut* outlined in the Torah. They therefore ate dairy to mitigate the complications. There is a lot of interesting discussion in the halakhic literature over whether it is appropriate to eat dairy, or if we should eat meat as is our custom to celebrate every other Yom Tov. The Rama suggests that we should observe both: start your meal with cheesecake (and

² The custom, of course, is meant to encourage limmud ha-Torah, Torah learning, and not to diminish it. One should ultimately do what is best for their religious growth and not feel bound to pulling an all-nighter if that is difficult.

blintzes? No, just cheesecake), clear the table and cleanse the palette, and then move on to steaks³. Each family has its own practice.

Cooking on Yom Tov

On Yom Tov we are allowed to perform certain activities that we can't do on Shabbat if they fall under the category of *ochel nefesh* (things that are beneficial to the soul). The most common application of this is that all activities associated with food preparation are permitted, provided the following criteria are met:

- One may only cook using a pre-existing flame or heat source that was lit before Yom Tov. One may leave on the oven as well as burners.
- One may adjust the temperature, but only if there is no electrical/digital indicator that will be changed. One cannot turn *down* the heat unless it is for the benefit of the food being cooked (but not to save fuel).⁴
- One may not intentionally cook on one day of Yom Tov for the following day of Yom Tov. If there are leftovers, they may be eaten on the following day. Similarly, one may not intentionally cook on Yom Tov for after the holiday. Leftovers may be eaten after Chag.
- One may not use a microwave, toaster oven or other electrical appliances. An electric stove or oven can be used. One may adjust the temperature only if there is no digital temperature indicator or lights that go on when the temperature is adjusted.

Carrying

There is no prohibition against carrying on Yom Tov, and thus no need to rely upon an eruv. The capacity to carry is considered to fall under the category of *ochel nefesh*, primarily so community members can share Yom Tov meals together. Because carrying is permitted in this context, it is permitted in all contexts. It is therefore permissible to carry keys and books, push strollers, etc.

Bathing

Bathing also falls under the category of *ochel nefesh*. However, there is a debate among *poskim* whether this applies to bathing one's entire body (including showering) or only to one's face and limbs. Many permit bathing on Yom Tov, but only under the following conditions:

- Do not take an excessively long shower.
- One must be careful against violating the *melacha* of *sechita* (squeezing), which is not allowed on Yom Tov. In particular:
 - do not use a washcloth or sponge,

³ Examples are my own

⁴ Therefore, if you want the flame to be left on low, it is wise to leave your food *on* the burner until it is cooked, and then turn down the burner in order to keep the food warm but not burnt.

- o do not squeeze water or shampoo out of your hair (especially if you have long hair)
- o try to air dry, but if you use a towel, be cautious to only pat down.
- One may not use bar soap as this poses a problem of *memareach* (smoothing out). One must use liquid soap or body wash. Similarly, one may not use bar soap to wash one's hands or face.

Havdala

At the conclusion of Yom Tov, on Monday night, havdala is recited over wine. We do not use a candle or spices, so skip those brakhot and only recite the ones for the wine and the final one beginning "ha-mavdil bein kodesh le-chol..."

For Further Reading

A number of excellent resources are available on the Internet describing the holiday of Shavuot. A few suggestions are:

- The Orthodox Union Shavuot Page -- <http://www.ou.org/holidays/shavuot>
- Yeshiva University's Shavuot to Go - <http://www.yutorah.org/togo/shavuot/>
- Yeshivat Har Etzion Virtual Beit Midrash -- <http://vbm-torah.org/shavuot.htm>
- Rav Schachter's practical halakha guide: [http://download.yutorah.org/2014/1053/Shavuot To-Go - 5774 Rabbi Schachter.pdf](http://download.yutorah.org/2014/1053/Shavuot%20To-Go%20-%205774%20Rabbi%20Schachter.pdf)

Halakhot for One Who Stays Up All Night

Rabbi Mordechai Rackover, the Rabbi and Jewish Chaplain at Brown University, prepared the following guidelines for morning preparations and *brakhot* for one who does not sleep.

Kitzur Dinei HaNei'ur Kol HaLayla For Ashkenazim

One who has been awake all night should wash their hands, three times each, alternating between hands, after Alot haShachar. Even if one washed their hands overnight.

Whether or not one needs to wash immediately at alot hashachar or wait until they get up from learning to pray is a machloket - each rav should make a decision for the community.

It is appropriate to use the restroom or to cause one's hands to be dirty in some other way so that one can make the blessing *al netilat yadaim*. If one has no need then they should hear the blessing from another.

The blessing can be recited after washing, after using the restroom and washing or immediately before prayer.

If one uses the restroom then they should recite *asher yatzar*. If they have no need then they should hear the blessing from someone else.

One who has not slept may not recite *elohai neshama* therefore they should hear it from another who has. If this is impossible they should recite it without the name of God.

One who has not slept may not recite *hamavir sheina* therefore they should hear it from another who has. They should only answer amen after *hagomel hasadim tovim l'amo israel* If this is impossible they should recite it without the name of God.

One who has not slept should not recite *birkat hatorah*. Rather a member of the congregation who has slept a 'fixed sleep' on their bed, etc... should recite it with intention on everyone's behalf. The community members answer amen after *hamelamed torah lamo israel* and *noten hatorah*. Each person then reads the pesukim and braitot, etc.. that follow *birkat hatorah*.

If there is no one to recite *birkat hatorah* or it was for some reason missed then the individual should have intention during *ahava rabbah* for the mitzvah of talmud torah. Immediately following prayers they should then do a bit of learning.

If one wears their tallit kattan over night then they needn't recite a blessing in the morning. Ideally they should listen to the blessing over the tallit gadol as recited by another and then adjust their tallit kattan. If they wear a tallit gadol then their own beracha exempts the tallit kattan.

Birkot hashakhar may be recited even if one did not sleep. But since the custom in most communities is for the shaliah tzibbur to recite them it is appropriate to listen and answer amen.

In my opinion based on the customs I learned in yeshiva - there should be a designated sleeper. This person should make sure to be up and in the shul/beit midrash 10 minutes before zman tallit. At this point the rav should announce that those who need the restroom should use it. All should wash their hands and then return to beit midrash. The rav then announces that those who do not

wear a tallit gadol should pair off with someone who does so they can hear the blessing.

The designated sleeper is then reminded by the rav that he is reciting these berakhot on behalf of everyone present. The rav reminds them of the halakhot above regarding when to answer amen, etc...

Chag Sameach!