

# DAF HASHAVUA

## שבועות | SHAVUOT

### Thursday 21 May

Light candles for Shavuot, preceded by a long-lasting candle, **in London** by 8.40pm

### Friday 22 May

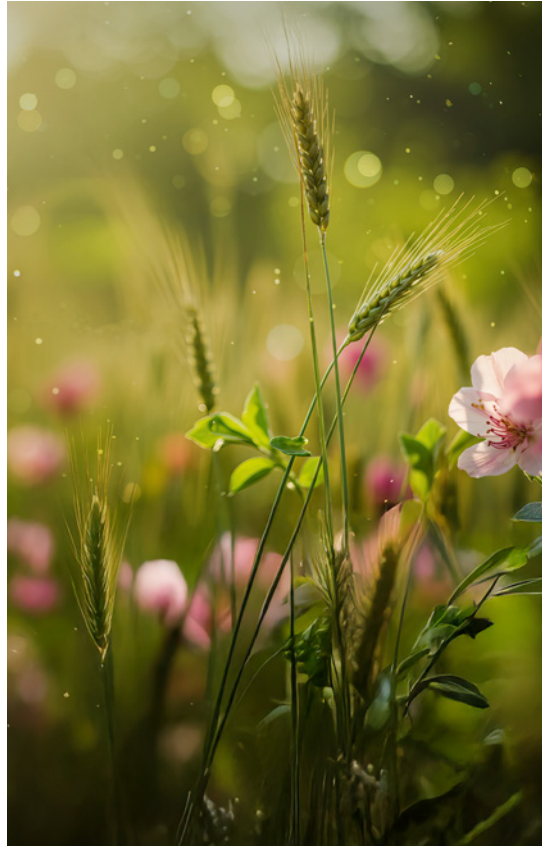
Candles for 2<sup>nd</sup> night Shavuot **in London** should be lit from the long-lasting candle **before** 8.42pm

(For Shavuot times in other cities, please consult your local community)

### SHABBAT AND YOM TOV END:

#### Saturday 23 May

London: 9.58pm  
 Birmingham: 10.11pm  
 Bournemouth: 10.06pm  
 Cardiff: 10.17pm  
 Dublin: 10.35pm  
 Edinburgh: 10.48pm  
 Glasgow: 10.55pm  
 Hull: 10.25pm  
 Leeds: 10.20pm  
 Liverpool: 10.31pm  
 Manchester: 10.25pm  
 Nottingham: 10.20pm  
 Sheffield: 10.25pm  
 Southend: 9.54pm  
 Southport: 10.34pm  
 Jerusalem: 8.16pm



# TORAH READING SUMMARY

Shavuot is “The Time of the Giving of our Torah”, so the Torah reading for the first day and both haftarot are about Divine Revelation. The Torah Reading of the second day focuses on the *Shalosh Regalim*, the three pilgrim festivals, of which Shavuot is one. On the first day, we precede the Torah Reading with *Akdmut*; on the second day we precede the haftarah with *Yatziv Pitgam*.

## FIRST DAY

### TORAH READING (SHEMOT 19:1-20:23)

On Rosh Chodesh Sivan, the people arrive at Mount Sinai. God tells Moshe (Moses) to inform the people that if they listen to His voice and keep His covenant, they will become “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation”. The people respond: “All that God says we will do”.

On the third day, God’s Presence descends onto the mountain. There is thunder, lightning and shofar blasts; the mountain is covered in smoke. God declares the Ten Commandments: I am God who brought you out of Egypt, do not worship idols, do not use God’s name in vain, remember Shabbat, honour your parents, do not murder, commit adultery, kidnap, give false testimony in court or covet.

The people were frightened by the experience and said to Moshe: “let God speak with you, but not to us, for we do not want to die”. The fact that God then spoke to Moshe later helped the people accept that Moshe’s teachings were from God.

God told Moshe to say to the people. “You saw that I spoke with you from heaven, do not have other gods”. The reading concludes with the law of making an altar for sacrifices, but not out of hewn stone.

### MAFTIR (BEMIDBAR 28:26-31)

The Maftir describes the offerings brought on Shavuot.

### HAFTARAH (EZEKIEL 1:1-28 & 3:12)

Rabbi Sacks zt”l describes the haftarah, from the beginning of the prophet Yechezkel’s (Ezekiel) mission, as “dazzling...the most vivid of its kind

anywhere in *Tanach*, Divine Revelation not to a nation, but to a prophet”.

Yechezkel was already in exile in Babylon, along with many other Jews. The Temple was about to be destroyed, but the message is one of reassurance. We recommend Rabbi Sack’s commentary in his *Shavuot Machzor*.

## SECOND DAY

### TORAH READING (DEVARIM 14:22-16:17)

When the second day of Shavuot falls on Shabbat, the reading is longer, in order to accommodate two additional call-ups. This extra portion contains the laws of the Second Tithe – produce brought to Jerusalem, the tithe given to the poor – and a reference to *tzedakah* generally, as well as the law of loan cancellation in the *Shemita* (Sabbatical) year.

The regular second day reading then follows, beginning with the law of a first-born male animal from the flock or herd. This is followed by some of the laws of the *Shalosh Regalim* (the three Pilgrim Festivals), Pesach, Shavuot and Succot. Seven times in this short reading, the Torah says that these offerings are to be brought to “*hamakom asher yivchar*”, the place that God will choose, a reference to the Tabernacle in Shiloh, and later, the Temple in Jerusalem.

### MAFTIR (BEMIDBAR 28:26-31)

(As first day).

### HAFTARAH (HABBAKUK 2:20-3:19)

This haftarah describes a future revelation, with God saving His nation from its foes. It describes “faith at its most sublime” (Rabbi Sacks).



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# MORE MUD THAN THUNDER IN THE LANGUAGE OF HARVEST

BY: **RABBI AARON LIPSEY**

New West End Synagogue

We speak of Shavuot as *zman matan Torateinu*, the time of the giving of our Torah. This is how it appears in our prayers and kiddush, and how most of us instinctively think about the festival. Yet if you look in the Torah it is called *Chag HaKatzir*, the harvest festival, or *Yom HaBikkurim*, the day of first fruits. Less thunder on a mountain, more mud on your boots.

So why does the Torah present this festival of revelation in the language of harvest?

Perhaps because the two sit side by side, each highlighting a different dimension of the festival. Revelation is all very well, but most of Jewish life does not take place in a blaze of glory. It happens in the in-between bits: on the school run, in the *erev-Shabbat* rush, during the *shul* announcements.

The farmer bringing first fruits to Jerusalem joined others in a festive musical procession. There was a building sense of occasion as they approached the Temple Mount. But what he carried was still a simple basket of figs or dates. He said his piece, handed it over to the Kohen, and went home. Behind that basket were months of work: preparing the ground, tending the crop, and early mornings spent watching the sky, hoping the rain would come when it should.

We live in a world that likes things quick and obvious. Big moments, big feelings, something you can point to and say, "that's it." Even religiously, there is a temptation to look for the lightbulb moment, an insight that lands fully formed and settles everything.

But most things worth having do not work like that. They creep up on you. A child who knows the tune of *Shalom Aleichem* without remembering when they learnt it. A habit of turning up to *shul* that somehow stuck.

That is more like farming than fireworks. This may explain why we read the Book of Ruth on

Shavuot, a story set not at Sinai but in the fields. Ruth's story doesn't come with a drum roll. It unfolds in small decisions that

**“ Not everything needs a headline. Some things just need time, a bit of care, and the patience to keep at it.**

would not have felt historic at the time. She follows Naomi, she gleanes, she keeps going. Only later do we see what was taking shape.

Ruth does not get a revelation; she just gets on with it.

For us, juggling work, family and everything else life throws at us may sound more familiar than standing at Sinai. Some days are just about keeping the show on the road. And those days count.

Shavuot, when read this way, is less about a single moment and more about noticing what has been happening under our noses: the things that did not arrive with a bang but have nevertheless put down roots. The routine of lighting Shabbat candles every week, the discipline of making time to learn Torah, a way of living shaped, slowly, by *halacha*, now part of who we are.

Not everything needs a headline. Some things just need time, a bit of care, and the patience to keep at it.





# THE CREATION OF THE MODERN CHIEF RABBINATE: CHIEF RABBI DR J.H.HERTZ (1872-1946)

## SHAVUOT 1938: RESPONDING TO THE ANSCHLUSS

BY: **RABBI MICHAEL LAITNER**

US Director of Education, Interim rabbi at Belmont US

In early March 1938, my great-great-aunt Eva took her young children to a photographer's studio in Vienna for something ordinary, a birthday gift for Uncle Leo on 18 March. The photographs were carefully composed, quietly hopeful, and, though nobody could have known it, among the last images of a world about to vanish.

As the session ended and they stepped out onto the street, the soft chime of the studio doorbell was swallowed by a rising roar. At that moment, thousands of Nazi troops were marching into Vienna. They were welcomed with jubilation, crowds lining the streets, arms raised in Nazi salute, flags unfurled in celebration. Within days, the city would become unrecognisable to its Jewish residents. By a chain of improbable events, Eva and her family would, thankfully, escape to England.

Across Europe, persecution of Jews was accelerating with terrifying speed, commanding global attention. Chief Rabbi Hertz was by this time an internationally known religious leader. Cognisant that his response would be amplified by media domestically

and internationally, he chose a Shavuot sermon at Golders Green Synagogue, which he would subsequently publish, to deliver his call to action, entitled "The Lesson of Vienna".<sup>1</sup>

He acknowledged that although lamenting the "Churban (destruction) of Austrian Jewry" was not a usual Shavuot theme, it was an urgent communal duty and that the response of Austrian Jewry, "...fills us with admiration of what the human soul can endure; and fortifies us by the example of heroic men and women."

The principal theme was the history of Viennese Jewry, especially its tenacious commitment to Judaism in the face of persecution, religious and otherwise, even in its current suffering. As he spoke, Austrian Jews were incarcerated in concentration camps.

He then addressed the developing refugee crisis before finding a point of resonance with Shavuot:

*"The Shema Yisrael clothes the Jewish Jew with the unconquerable will to endure all things for his Faith and People in strength, dignity and resignation;*

*and at the same time, it fills the heart of his coreligionists the world over with pity and unquenchable charity to help him to some new haven of rest in a land of freedom. And all this is the fruit of Judaism."*

Shavuot, the celebration of the giving of our Torah, "when all Israel, as it were, recites the beracha, 'Blessed are You, O Lord...Who has given us a Law of Truth, and thereby planted everlasting life within us!'", is a time when the significance of this commitment should ring loud and clear, learning from Austrian Jewry.

In a clarion call about teaching children the meaning and significance of the Shema, he reminded his audience of the importance of sustaining Jewish education in the UK and of being "Jewish Jews", active in our dedication to Judaism rather than passive to ensure the continuing existence of the Jewish community, a central theme of his Chief Rabbinate.

Let's return to Aunt Eva. One fulfilment of Rabbi Hertz's exhortation to be "Jewish Jews", is that, thankfully, all her descendants live as such in Israel.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The sermon is available to read online at <https://theus.org.uk/assets/uploads/2026/04/19380506-Shavuot-sermon-on-the-lesson-of-Vienna-CR-Hertz-Golders-Green-Shul.pdf>

In addition, Professor David Latchman provides further context for Chief Rabbi Hertz's messages. See *A Collection for Shavuot: Sermons, Not Artefacts*, *Times of Israel* 25.03.23

<sup>2</sup> My thanks to one of them, Jeremy Maisel, for his assistance with this article.



# FROM LIBERTY TO LIBERATION

BY: **RABBI DR HARVEY BELOVSKI**

Emeritus rabbi of Golders Green Synagogue

This year, on Shavuot – the ‘season of the giving of our Torah’ – we will also find ourselves nearing the 250th anniversary of American independence just over six weeks later. This convergence invites a fundamental question: what does it truly mean for a person, or a nation, to be ‘free’ or ‘independent’?

In the Jewish imagination, independence never equates to licentiousness or the absence of restraint. The preamble to the Ten Commandments describes God as the One who ‘brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slaves’ (*Shemot* 20:2). Liberation may be a *prerequisite* for revelation, yet the Torah insists that the Exodus was not an end in itself. The *Mechilta midrash to Shemot* (*Bachodesh* 1) notes that Israel was redeemed on condition that they accept the Torah. Freedom, in this view, is not a vacuum of responsibility and restraint; instead, it is a vocation.

This nuance is captured in Sir

**“ Independence is discovered not in the rejection of rules, but in the embrace of a structure that gives life direction, depth and meaning.**

Isaiah Berlin’s famous distinction between *negative* and *positive* liberty – freedom *from* external constraint versus the freedom *to* pursue one’s true purpose (Two Concepts of Liberty). Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (in *Kol Dodi Dofek*) articulated a parallel idea in his contrast between the covenant of *fate* and the covenant of *destiny*. The former is imposed by history; the latter is actively chosen by those who seek a meaningful alternative to fate. Sinai represents that moment of positive freedom: we exercise independence not by escaping all authority, but by willingly entering into a covenant with God.

The Sages of the Mishnah expressed this paradox through a striking understanding of an unusual description of the two tablets on which the Ten Commandments were carved. On the phrase, ‘The writing was the writing of God, engraved (*charut*) on the tablets’ (*Shemot* 32:16), the Mishnah teaches: “Do not read this *charut* but *cheirut* (freedom), for there is no free person other than one who engages in Torah study’ (*Avot* 6:2). Law, internalised, does not constrain; it liberates. Independence is discovered not in the rejection of rules, but in the embrace of a structure that gives life direction, depth and meaning.

**“ The truest freedom is the freedom to say *na’aseh ve-nishma*, we will do and we will listen (*Shemot* 24:7).**

Rabbi Professor Abraham Joshua Heschel captured this powerfully when he wrote that ‘freedom is not the power to do what we like, but the right to do what we ought’ (*God in Search of Man*). To be truly free means to move from being an object of circumstance to becoming an active participant in a dynamic covenant.

I vaguely remember the American bicentennial in 1976, when I was a child at primary school. Our teacher paid some attention to the occasion and there was considerable TV coverage, but no sense of deeper ideals at stake. As the 250th anniversary approaches, Shavuot reminds us that political independence is precious, but it finds its fullest meaning when directed toward higher purpose. The truest freedom is the freedom to say *na’aseh ve-nishma*, we will do and we will listen (*Shemot* 24:7) – to choose commitment, and in that choice, to discover what it means to be truly free.



# THE COMMENTATORS: SEFORNO

BY: **SHIRA JACKSON**  
US Education



Rabbi Ovadiah Seforno is one of the most compelling voices in Torah commentary. Living in Italy during the Renaissance, he moved with unusual ease between traditional Torah learning and the broader intellectual currents of his time. He was a physician, a grammarian, a philosopher, a mathematician and a teacher whose students came from across Europe. Yet despite his broad education, his Torah commentary remains deeply rooted in tradition, marked by clarity, brevity and a striking moral vision.

Seforno lived in a Christian society shaped by supersessionist theology – the belief that Judaism’s covenant had been replaced and rendered spiritually outdated. Jews were often portrayed as clinging to an “old” revelation, their spiritual role diminished or dismissed. This cultural pressure forms an important backdrop to his writing. Without engaging in polemic, Seforno consistently insists on the ongoing vitality of Torah and the enduring dignity of Israel’s mission. His commentary can be read as a confident articulation of Judaism’s relevance in a world that often questioned it.

His interpretive style reflects this confidence. Seforno rarely uses more words than necessary, yet each comment opens a

wide conceptual horizon. He reads the biblical text through the lens of *peshat* (the plain meaning of the text), but he is never content with that. Instead, he draws out the ethical and theological implications embedded in the language. A single verb or grammatical nuance becomes the key to understanding the Torah’s vision for human life.

This blend of precision, ethical seriousness, and universal aspiration comes into sharp focus in his reading of God’s charge at Sinai: “*ve’atem tihyu li mamlechet kohanim vegoy kadosh*” - “And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (*Shemot* 19:6). Seforno understands this verse as a sweeping description of Israel’s purpose. To be a *mamlechet kohanim*, he explains, is to become a people who possess deep understanding of God and who use that understanding to guide and uplift others. In his view, Israel is meant to serve as moral and spiritual teachers to all humanity, helping the world come to recognise and serve God together. And to be a *goy kadosh* means to remain an eternal nation, never to disappear; not to withdraw from the world but to live in a way that makes holiness visible – through justice, compassion and integrity.

In a society that questioned

“ **Shavuot is not only about receiving Torah but about becoming the kind of people through whom Torah can illuminate the world.** ”

Judaism’s spiritual relevance, this interpretation becomes a quiet but powerful counter narrative. Far from obsolete, our covenantal identity is active and essential. The Torah is not a relic; it is a living mandate that calls the Nation of Israel to moral leadership.

Shavuot marks the moment when we received the Torah and, with it, our mission. Seforno reminds us that this mission is not inward looking but expansive: to live in a way that elevates others, to embody holiness through ethical action, and to demonstrate that divine wisdom can shape a just and compassionate society. Shavuot is not only about receiving Torah but about becoming the kind of people through whom Torah can illuminate the world.

# THE TRIBE WEEKLY

SHAVUOT

21-23 MAY | 6-7 SIVAN

## WHY ARE THERE NO MITZVOT?



BY: **NATANA SABLE**

Tribe gap year student

If you were asked to name mitzvot associated with Shavuot, how many would you be able to name?

When I was asked, I thought for a bit before realising that I couldn't actually name any!

Just like Pesach and Succot, Shavuot is one of the *Shalosh Regalim* (3 foot festivals) but, unlike Shavuot, Pesach and Succot have many mitzvot associated with them.

On Pesach we don't eat

*Chametz* and we have two *Sedarim*. On Succot we sit in a Succah and shake the *Lulav* and *Eitrog*.

Why are there no mitzvot for Shavuot?

The whole idea is that we can't just focus on one mitzvah. We celebrate receiving all 613 so if we just chose one, or a few, all of the others would be overshadowed!

Another name for Shavuot is *Zman Matan Torateinu*, the time of the giving of our Torah. This shows that we celebrate the day we were given the Torah which focuses on God as the Giver rather than the Jewish people as the receivers.

When we accepted the Torah, we also accepted a responsibility.

As a nation we are responsible to give over knowledge to others and teach Torah to generations to come. We mark the first day of this new responsibility on Shavuot.

Shavuot is 50 days after Pesach - on which the Jewish people are reborn. We are now older and more mature (almost as if we've reached Bar/Bat mitzvah age!) instead of being a newborn. We now have a greater responsibility in our relationship with God and we need to be more aware of our actions.

Shavuot gives us the time to celebrate our responsibility and it also gives us the opportunity to be appreciative, as we know God wants us to be the best we can.

Chag Sameach!

## Parasha Wordsearch

Find these words in the grid. The words can go in any direction and can share letters as they cross over each other.

P	D	R	C	L	C	P	I	Q	V	A	I	X	M	Z
P	L	E	U	P	M	C	X	L	H	I	J	B	M	W
M	U	S	Y	T	C	T	H	G	K	G	Q	Q	P	N
Y	T	P	B	I	H	H	G	Y	H	V	G	W	N	N
J	E	O	H	X	S	R	E	W	O	L	F	G	P	J
V	R	N	U	U	V	V	E	M	S	U	S	K	P	
Y	Q	S	Q	V	I	A	N	I	S	T	N	U	O	M
E	I	I	S	D	A	Z	F	S	S	E	R	Z	F	L
W	B	B	Z	N	W	H	K	D	I	H	C	P	U	O
D	N	I	K	F	A	T	S	E	V	T	S	A	Y	S
C	B	L	G	P	S	C	K	I	A	H	Q	A	K	L
D	A	I	R	Y	X	N	X	H	N	V	A	N	H	E
I	R	T	O	S	L	Y	S	O	X	U	E	R	K	M
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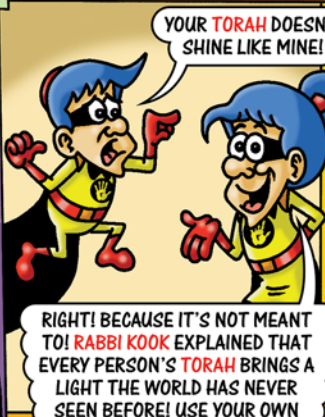
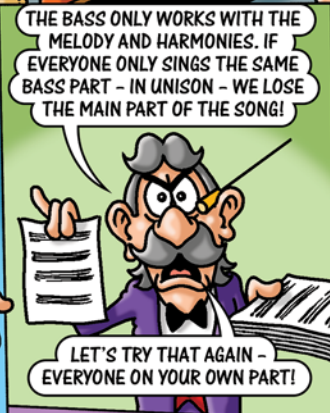
- TIKKUN LEIL
- SHAVUOT
- MOUNT SINAI
- RUTH
- SIVAN
- RESPONSIBILITY
- TORAH
- FLOWERS
- DAIRY
- CHEESECAKE





# THE TRIBE SCRIBE

SHAVUOT: ON A HIGH NOTE!



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Tribe is the Young People's Department of the United Synagogue: Creating a future for our community through engaging, educating and inspiring the next generation.