

# *Shavuot - The Forgotten Holiday*

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Years ago, a Reform Rabbi friend of mine, bemoaned that “Shavu’ot is the forgotten holiday of the Reform Movement”, because it is only one day, usually falls in the middle of the week and has nothing tangible to “capture” people’s attention with.

I remember thinking how symbolic that the holiday celebrating Torah is missing from a movement that does not necessarily believe in its divinity. I’ve felt quite smug about this anecdote over the years but have since come to realize that Orthodox Judaism may very well not celebrate Shvu’ot either. We celebrate a different holiday called Chag Matan Torah:

1. They are different days. Torah was given on the 7th of Sivan. Shavu’ot takes place on the 6th. (In the past – could even be on the 5th!).
2. We do not count 50 days from The Exodus to Matan Torah. This is a misnomer. Nowhere in the Torah are these two events connected by 50 days. We count from the first harvest of grain 7 weeks and then celebrate the Harvest Holiday.
3. In the 5(!) different places the Torah discusses Shvu’ot we find an exclusively agricultural-religious holiday. It marks the new season of harvest in The Land of Israel when we: give thanks for the new harvest, recognize the Divine Providence throughout Jewish History responsible for it and when we share the plenty with the less fortunate.

So how did The Harvest Holiday become Chag Matan Torah?

1. In a post-Beit Mikdash world, what would a Torah based Shavu’ot look like? it has no observances not dependent on living an agricultural life in Israel. The holiday would become irrelevant, possibly even forgotten. Considering its proximity to the date of Matan Torah and the exilic emphasis on detached, “spiritual” Torah – the original holiday was infused with new meaning.
2. But, in truth, it runs deeper. The beauty of Shavu’ot is that it represents – more than any other holiday – what a full Torah life looks like. Megilat Rut is what Hashem had in mind when he gave Torah in the first place: The Jewish People living in The Land of Israel, keeping the Mitzvot of the land while taking care of the less fortunate. All this, while remembering where we came from and where we’re heading.

The Torah does not require we celebrate the day the Torah was given. Remember what our mothers told us about why we don’t celebrate Mother’s Day? - “Every day is

mothers' day...". The giving of Torah isn't a singular event, rather, a continuous, never-ending one.

But when the day Torah life is supposed to appear in its entirety is in danger of being erased from Jewish observance, then because it was no longer relevant it became the most important day to remember – Hashem gave us Torah.

If we're not able to "live the life", let's at least remember to look at the manual to remember what is missing.

May we merit to observe Shavu'ot according to its original, full meaning!

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