



UNIVERSITY OF  
TORONTO

# SHAVUOT IN THE WORKPLACE

Inclusive Employer Guide

**EQUITY · DIVERSITY · INCLUSION**

# WHAT IS SHAVUOT?

Shavuot, also known as the “Feast of Weeks” or “Festival of First Fruits”, is a two-day Jewish holiday commemorating the revelation of the Torah to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai. The holiday takes place 50 days after the start of Passover and falls on the sixth day of the Hebrew month of Sivan. Shavuot is one of the three biblically based pilgrimage holidays in Jewish calendar. The holiday originally began as an agricultural festival to celebrate the beginning of harvest but has evolved to also commemorate the giving of the Torah.

In 2023, Shavuot will begin on the evening of May 25 and end on the evening of May 27.

# HOW IS SHAVUOT OBSERVED?

Shavuot, meaning “weeks”, celebrates the completion of the seven-week harvest period between Passover and Shavuot. The holiday is an opportunity for Jewish followers to honour God’s gifts and reaccept the Torah. On the first day of Shavuot, special morning services take place in local synagogues where followers recite key religious texts including a liturgical poem called “**Akdamut**,” the Book of Ruth and the Ten Commandments. Many in the Jewish community will study the Torah and other Jewish texts all night in a practice called “**Tikkun Leyl Shavuot**” to symbolically prepare for receiving of the Torah.

On the second day of Shavuot, a special “**Yizkor**” prayer is recited in honour of the departed. Shavuot is commemorated by abstaining from work, reciting Shavuot prayers, enjoying traditional meals, and attending special synagogue services. During Shavuot celebrations, many families prepare traditional holiday meals that center around dairy, as there are many symbolic connections between milk and the receiving of the Torah. Popular Shavuot foods include cheesecake, blintzes, kugels, and bourekas.

# HOW CAN WE CREATE AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT?

**1** **Get educated.** Ensure staff who supervise or work alongside Jewish colleagues are aware of Shavuot and how they can be supportive.

**2** **Intentional planning and accommodations.** Update your scheduling tools to reflect religious observance dates and to support the planning activities. Avoid booking meetings and scheduling events during Shavuot if possible.

The University of Toronto recognizes its obligation to prevent discriminatory impacts on members of its community that arise from the failure to accommodate based on religion or creed. It is the responsibility of both the Manager and the individual seeking accommodation to work cooperatively and respectfully to explore and implement appropriate accommodation options. Accommodate requests for time off for religious observances. If shift work is the norm, staff may want to switch shifts to observe Shavuot. Look for solutions that suit all parties.

**3** **Be thoughtful.** You can wish your Jewish colleagues “**Chag Sameach**” (KHAHG sah-MEY-akh) which means “Happy Holiday.”

**4** **Don’t make assumptions.** For personal reasons, not all Jewish colleagues may take time off for Shavuot, but they may still observe in various ways.