

## **SERVICE THEME: Shavuot and Cultural Diversity**

**MUSIC: [In allen meinen Taten BWV 97: Chorus - Versus 1: In allen meinen Taten](#) (04:15 – audio)**

### **Chalice Lighting**

We light this candle as a symbol of our faith.  
By its light may our vision be illumined;  
By its warmth may our fellowship be encouraged;  
And by its flame may our yearnings for peace, justice and the life of the spirit be enkindled.

### **We join together now...**

We join together now to worship as a beloved community.  
Each individual brings to our gathering faith and ideas, but each of us also yearns to share fellowship one with the other.  
May we look beyond any differences to the common bonds that unite us: faith, hope, and love. And may those divine qualities shine through our worship today.

### **HYMN 172: All Are Welcome Here (green book)**

**POETRY (to be read by Caroline?):** The Guest House by Rumi,  
translated by Coleman Barks

This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.  
A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.  
Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still, treat each guest honourably.

He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
meet them at the door laughing,  
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.

**PRAYER:** A Prayer for Global Unity and Harmony (from the Christian tradition)

Dear God, we come before You today, humbly asking for Your divine intervention to bring unity and harmony among all nations. Where there is division, sow seeds of peace. Where there is hatred, bring your love and reconciliation. May Your Spirit move in the hearts of leaders and citizens alike to foster understanding and brotherhood. Heal the wounds caused by conflict and prejudice.

Bind us together as one human family, respecting our differences but embracing our common humanity. Help us to be peacemakers, working tirelessly to break down walls of hostility and build bridges of compassion. We ask for your peace to reign from the highest governments to the humblest homes. Guide us, Lord, to live in peace with one another, reflecting Your Kingdom on earth. Amen.

**SHORT STORY: The Story of Shavuot (by Chabad.org)** – (A simple rendering intended to be read aloud to small children)

Shavuot is a Jewish holiday celebrated every year 50 days after the holiday of Passover. What are we celebrating? Let's go back in time more than 3,000 years. What happened then? As you remember from the Passover story, God took the Jewish people out of Egypt and led them into the Sinai Desert.

After more than a month of walking through the desert, on 1<sup>st</sup> Sivan, the people camped at the foot of a mountain known as Mount Sinai. They could feel that something special was going to happen. Everyone felt happier and calmer, and everyone kindly helped each other settle into their new campsite.

The next morning Moses, the leader, climbed up the mountain. There, he spoke with God who had a very important message for the people waiting below: He would make them His special people. They would do the mitzvot, His commandments, and He would love them and care for them forever.

The people were so excited that they all said, *naaseh venishma*, "we will do and we will hear." As a reward, the angels came down from Heaven and gave each and every Jew two crowns to wear on their heads.

As the days passed, the people became more and more excited.

Finally, the moment arrived. On the morning of 6<sup>th</sup> Sivan, everyone woke up to see Mount Sinai covered with thick clouds. "Look!" they said to each other. "There is thunder and lightning, and the mountain is smoking, with flames shooting out of it."

The people could hear the sound of a shofar that kept on getting louder and louder.

Everyone stood around the mountain. The old people were there, the little babies were there, even the souls of the people, people who were not born yet were there.

Then they heard the voice of God, who told them the first two of the 10 Commandments: "I am the Lord your God" and "you shall have no gods besides for Me."

But the sound of God's voice was too strong. The people asked Moses to act as God's messenger. God would speak to Moses, and Moses would tell them His messages.

Through Moses, God told us the rest of the 10 commandments, each of which gives us a special key to living a holy and good life.

This was a special day, one that everyone would remember forever. It was the day God told them that He loved them and that they would forever be His people.

Every year, on Shavuot [Jews] gather in synagogues to hear the 10 Commandments being read from the Torah scroll. When we do that it is as if we are standing at Mount Sinai, hearing God Himself.

And we also celebrate with dairy treats like ice cream, reminding us that Jewish life is sweet and delicious.

Happy Shavuot!

## **HYMN 126: The Larger View (green book)**

## **READING 1: The Foundation for a Peaceful Society: A Buddhist Perspective – The Five Precepts**

A peaceful society is a society without violence/conflict, but the members of the society live harmoniously helping one another if there is trouble. In Buddhist terms, the foundation for such a society, is the observation of the five precepts. When each and every member of the society can observe these five rules then the foundation for a peaceful society is laid down. These five precepts advocated by the Buddha are as follows: 1. I undertake the precept to refrain from killing/harming life. 2. I undertake the precept to refrain from taking what is not given. 3. I undertake the precept to refrain from sexual misconduct. 4. I undertake the precept to refrain from incorrect speech such as lying. 5. I undertake the precept to refrain from intoxicating drinks and drugs which make our mind unclear.

**READING 2 (to be read by Sheila?): an extract from Karen Armstrong's book "Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life".**

It is important to comment on the traditional method of interpreting the Qur'an, which is an entirely different kind of scripture from the Bible. Instead of being a library of disparate texts composed over a millennium, the Qur'an was created in a mere twenty-three years and must be seen as a homogeneous whole. The word *qur'an* means "recitation." It is not designed to be read from cover to cover; instead, the words, chanted by a skilled reciter, are meant to be listened to. The sound of the words is an important part of their meaning. Themes, words, phrases, and sound patterns recur throughout the text, like variations on a piece of music, pulling widely separated parts of the scripture together so that over the years it forms a cohesive entity in the mind of the individual who spends a lifetime listening to evocative Qur'anic recitations. In the Qur'an, God told Muhammad, "Do not approach the Qur'an in haste, ere it has been revealed to thee in full." On the basis of this text Muslims have traditionally been warned against a "hasty" approach, which draws hurried conclusions from isolated verses taken out of context. They should, rather, allow the whole scripture to take root in their minds before they attempt to interpret the details. Every single recitation of the Qur'an begins with an invocation to the mercy and compassion of God. And the relatively few texts dealing with the conduct of battle are counterbalanced by the far more numerous verses that speak of gentleness, forgiveness, kindness, courtesy, friendship, and forbearance.

**MUSIC: Víkingur Ólafsson – Bach: Concerto in D Minor, BWV 974 - 2. Adagio (04:17 – video)**

## **Reflective Address: Shavuot and Cultural Diversity**

As we gather in a spirit of reflection and shared humanity, let us consider the Jewish festival of Shavuot — a holy day rooted in memory, gratitude, revelation, and responsibility. Though it emerges from the rich soil of Jewish tradition, Shavuot also speaks across boundaries of culture, language, and belief. It raises profound questions for all people of faith, and indeed for all thoughtful people: How do human beings encounter truth? How do sacred teachings shape communities? And how might we live together in a world where holy scriptures are interpreted in a multitude of ways? From a Unitarian and a Jewish perspective, these questions are not threats to faith but invitations to deeper understanding.

Shavuot began historically as an agricultural festival, marking the wheat harvest in ancient Israel. Yet over centuries it became associated above all with the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. In Jewish tradition, this is not merely the remembrance of a law delivered long ago (arguably through synaesthesia); it is the ongoing experience of covenant, moral awakening, and communal identity. The story of Sinai presents a people gathered together at the foot of a mountain, listening for wisdom greater than themselves. It is an image of humanity standing in humility before the mystery of existence and asking: what kind of people shall we be?

That question remains urgently relevant.

The Unitarian tradition has long valued freedom of conscience, the use of reason, and the moral dignity of every person. Unitarians do not insist that revelation happened only once, in one place, through one people, or in one sacred text. Instead, Unitarians recognise that truth often emerges through dialogue, experience, scholarship, compassion, and the accumulated wisdom of diverse cultures. Yet this does not diminish the significance of Shavuot. On the contrary, it allows for the appreciation of the festival as one luminous expression of humanity's enduring search for meaning.

One of the most beautiful aspects of Jewish interpretation is the understanding that revelation is never entirely finished. The Torah is studied, debated, questioned, and interpreted anew in every generation. In rabbinic tradition, disagreement itself can become sacred work. Multiple interpretations may coexist, not because truth is meaningless, but because divine wisdom exceeds the limits of any single human perspective. For Unitarians, this resonates quite deeply.

We live in a world of extraordinary cultural and religious diversity. Sacred texts are read through many lenses: literal and metaphorical, historical and mystical, conservative and liberal. Even within a single faith tradition, believers may differ profoundly in how they understand scripture. Some see holy writings as infallible commandments. Others regard them as poetic records of humanity's evolving encounter with the sacred. Some find certainty in ancient words; others find inspiration in the questions those words provoke.

This diversity can enrich us, but it can also unsettle us. Too often, differences in interpretation become grounds for suspicion, division, or violence. Human history bears painful witness to conflicts justified by competing claims about divine authority. We know how easily scripture can be used not only to heal but also to wound; not only to liberate but also to oppress. And yet festivals like Shavuot remind us that the purpose of sacred teaching is not domination but transformation.

The giving of the Torah is linked in Jewish thought with ethical obligation: care for the stranger, justice for the vulnerable, honesty in public life, reverence for creation, and responsibility within community. These moral insights are not unique to Judaism. Similar values appear in Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Humanism, and many other traditions. The languages differ; the symbols differ; the stories differ. But again and again humanity returns to the same enduring aspirations: compassion, justice, wisdom, humility, and peace.

A Unitarian perspective encourages us to recognise these shared moral currents without erasing genuine differences. Diversity does not require uniformity. Interfaith understanding is not achieved by pretending all religions are identical, nor by reducing sacred traditions to vague generalities; rather, it grows through attentive listening and mutual respect.

Shavuot offers a compelling symbol for this kind of encounter. According to Jewish tradition, the revelation at Sinai was heard (and even seen, according to some Rabbis) by all the people assembled there. (This is why I used the word 'synaesthesia' earlier on.) Some later interpretations even imagine the divine voice dividing into many languages so that everyone could understand according to their own capacity. Whether taken literally or metaphorically, the image is powerful: truth expressed in plurality rather than imposed in sameness. This vision speaks profoundly to our global age.

Today we inhabit societies shaped by migration, technological connection, and cultural interdependence. In our cities and neighbourhoods, people of many faiths live side by side. Children grow up encountering multiple worldviews from an early age. Sacred scriptures, once confined to particular communities, are now accessible worldwide at the touch of a screen. As a result, interpretation has become more visible, more contested, and more dynamic than ever before. Some respond to this complexity by retreating into rigid certainty. Others drift into cynicism, concluding that if interpretations differ, then nothing is true or sacred at all; but perhaps there is another way — a way of humility without relativism, conviction without hostility.

Unitarians have often spoken of truth as a journey rather than a possession, seeking wisdom while acknowledging our own incompleteness. We honour conscience while remaining open to correction. We cherish freedom of belief while recognising the ethical responsibilities that accompany freedom.

In this spirit, Shavuot becomes more than a specifically Jewish celebration. It becomes a reminder that revelation is always relational. Sacred meaning emerges not in isolation but in community — through study, conversation, questioning, memory, and acts of justice. Shavuot calls us to become not merely hearers of wisdom but practitioners of it.

The Book of Ruth, traditionally read during Shavuot, offers another profound lesson for cultural diversity. Ruth is a foreigner, a Moabite woman who becomes part of the Jewish people through loyalty, love, and shared destiny. Her story challenges narrow definitions of belonging. It reminds us that identity can be enriched rather than diminished through encounter with the outsider. In our own time, when fear of difference still shapes politics and public life, this message matters greatly. Cultural diversity is not a problem seeking resolution but a human reality to be embraced thoughtfully and ethically. The challenge is not how to eliminate differences, but how to build communities where differences need not lead to hatred and exclusionary approaches.

Religious traditions have a crucial role to play in this work. As Karen Armstrong would say almost certainly say, when interpreted with wisdom and compassion, scriptures can deepen empathy rather than division. They can teach us to see every human being as worthy of dignity. They can inspire courage in confronting injustice. They can remind us that no single nation, culture, or creed possesses the whole of truth.

Not all Unitarians share the same theology; even the very use of the word 'theology' is problematic in Unitarianism. Some among us speak of God with confidence; others speak of human values, universal spirit, or the sacredness of life itself. Yet many of us can agree on this: truth grows larger when people encounter one another with honesty, curiosity, and compassion. Shavuot invites precisely that spirit.

May we learn from traditions not our own without appropriating or diminishing them. May we read our own sacred texts — whatever they may be — with humility as well as conviction. May we resist the temptation to weaponise belief. May we honour the extraordinary diversity of human understanding while continuing the shared search for wisdom and justice.

In the end, perhaps the deepest revelation is not that all people believe the same things, but that amid our differences we remain capable of listening to one another, learning from one another, and building together a more compassionate world. Amen. So be it.

**MUSIC: [Sufism with Rumi - Meditate "HU" The Zikr Amazing !!](#)  
(03:44 – video)**

**PRAYER:**

Divine Spirit, we lift up every war-torn region to You. Stop the violence, end the bloodshed, bring peace to the streets that have known only pain. Comfort those who mourn, heal the wounded, and protect the innocent. Turn the hearts of leaders away from conflict and towards reconciliation. Let Your mercy flow like a river, restoring what has been destroyed. We pray for peace to rise like dawn after the darkest night. Amen. So be it.

**POETRY: The Harmony of Cultures** (anonymous, to be read by **Ann Kader?**)

In diverse fields where flowers bloom,  
Their colours blend and chase the gloom.  
Each petal whispers tales so sweet,  
A dance of cultures, a rhythmic beat.

A tapestry of lives entwined,  
In this grand garden, peace we find.  
With every hue, there's strength anew,  
In unity, our dreams break through.

### **PRE-OFFERTORY PRAYER**

This church is sustained by what we are able to bring to it:  
Our time and our energy,  
Our love and our resources.  
Today's collection will be gratefully received after the end of this service  
to support the work of this congregation. So, please give generously.

### **HYMN 30: Each Seeking Faith is Seeking Light (purple book)**

#### **Closing Words**

We are blessed with an abundance of good things for we which we are truly thankful, as long as we remember them.  
We are privileged with great freedom and power, for which in return we act with responsibility.  
We are lucky to have shared this time and space together, because we are lucky to have each other.  
May the spirit of this place and these friends go with us into the busy city!

**MUSIC: [ANNA RF - WEEPING EYES](#) (05:15 – video)**

## ORDER OF SERVICE

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**Closing Words**

**MUSIC:** [לשנות את העולם - ודודו פישר - Gad Elbaz, Dudu Fisher Feat Saul Dreier - Change the world](#) (04:35 – video)