

## Mystery of Why Milk Matters: On Shavuot's Obsessions with Blintzes, Ice Cream, and the Awakened Eye

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Why is it that every year as Shavuot rolls around, Jews everywhere begin the annual migration toward dairy with the determination of salmon swimming upstream—only with more cheesecake and fewer bear?!? Why the blintzes, the cheesecakes, the kugels, the milkshakes, and—here in our corner of Ohio—the solemn, holy procession to Graeter's, where revelation arrives in the form of a scoop that melts faster than Moses

could carve a tablet.

The classical explanations are plentiful. Some say that when the Israelites received the Torah, they discovered their cookware was suddenly unfit for kosher use, so dairy was the only thing they could prepare without violating half the commandments before lunch. Others point to the verse comparing Torah to milk and honey, a kind of spiritual protein shake. Still others note that the numerical value of the Hebrew word *chalav*—milk—is forty, the number of days Moses spent on Sinai.

All of these are fine answers, respectable enough to pass the rabbinic equivalent of a county fair inspection. But they miss the deeper, more mischievous truth: dairy on Shavuot is not about milk at all. It is about awakening what the Zohar calls *Eina d'Pekikha* - "the open eye," the inner seeing that notices holiness hiding in plain sight. Or, to put it in Twain's language, it's the difference between looking and truly seeing, between glancing at the world and realizing it's been winking back at you the whole time.

Milk, after all, is the first food a human being receives. It is the taste of being welcomed into the world without needing to earn a thing. To eat dairy on Shavuot is to return, briefly, to that primal truth: you matter simply because you exist. Revelation, the holiday whispers, is not a thunderbolt of information but a reminder that your life is not an accident. You are wanted here. You are part of the story.

This is why the custom endures with such affection. A blintz is not just a blintz; it is a small, edible sermon. A scoop of ice cream is not just dessert; it is a reminder that joy is a legitimate spiritual practice. Before we stand at Sinai trembling with awe, before we

wrestle with commandments and meaning, Shavuot insists that we first taste sweetness. Only then can we receive Torah not as a burden, but as nourishment.

And this is where "the awakened eye" (*eina d'pekikha*)—comes in. It is not a mystical superpower. It is the simple, stubborn ability to notice that your life is threaded with significance. It is the capacity to see that holiness is not hiding in the clouds but sitting right there in your bowl of vanilla bean. When we savor something sweet on Shavuot, we practice paying attention. We practice receiving. We practice remembering that the world is not indifferent to us.

In a culture that measures worth by productivity, Shavuot offers a counter-proposal: revelation begins when you stop trying to earn your place and start noticing that you already have one. The dairy ritual is a spiritual speed bump, slowing us down long enough to remember that we are not machines, but beings capable of delight.

And perhaps this is the deepest meaning of the custom. Milk is relational. It exists because one being cares for another. To taste dairy on Shavuot is to remember that revelation is relational too. We receive Torah not as isolated individuals but as a people, bound together by the radical claim that every life is worthy of care.

So this year, as Shavuot arrives, let the dairy do its quiet work. Let the blintz remind you that your life is ripening toward meaning. Let the cheesecake whisper that joy is a form of wisdom. And when we meet at Graeter's, cones in hand, let the sweetness awaken your *Eina d'Pekikha* - your inner seeing that knows, without needing to be persuaded, that your presence in this world matters.

### Three Challenges for the Days Ahead:

1. *Savor something slowly*—practice noticing the goodness already present in your life.
2. *Offer one act of gentle care*—revelation is relational, so let someone feel seen.
3. *Name one way your life matters*—not to justify yourself, but to awaken your own open eye and share an insight from this way of seeing with others.



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