

SHAVUOS

Waking Up Jewish" or, "Let 'em Eat Cheesecake!

2010 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

Every holiday has its own traditional foods. On Chanukah, Rosh Hashanah, and Purim, we eat oily foods, sweet foods, and Hamentashen, (triangle-shaped filled Danish) respectively. The dieter's delight continues on Shavuos (this Tuesday night through Thursday night) with cheesecake, blintzes, and other dairy products.

There are several reasons given for the practice of eating dairy on Shavuos. One reason is historical.

Imagine the scene: You left Egypt seven weeks ago. Moses has led you to the base of Mt. Sinai where you set up camp. You have been camped here since the first of the month; today is the sixth. You have been awakened by G-d Himself. The earth is quaking and the mountain is shaking. There is lightning and thunder and a cloud hovering over the mountain. You undergo the most frightening experience of your life--G-d is speaking to you!

Two months ago, you received SOME commandments. You learned about the Passover Seder and its Mitzvahs. You've learned about the Sabbath, Tefillin, Mezuzah, and several other commandments, but Jewish Law, to a great extent, has been a closed book.

"But now you know . . . 'the Rest of the Story.'" Along with the Ten Commandments, you have been taught the other 603. Now you know that Jews are not permitted to gossip or overcharge. Now you know that when you enter the Land of Israel, you will have to separate tithes your produce as gifts for the Priest, the Levite, and the poor. Now you've learned the laws of marriage and divorce.

Now you've learned that you have a big problem -- WHAT ARE WE GOING TO EAT?! You go back to your tent and discover that nothing is Kosher! Until today, you never needed to follow the Kosher laws. Your dishes are all "Treif!!"

Whatever meat you have can't be eaten. Preparing new meat according to Kosher laws is going to take a while to accomplish. What are you going to eat RIGHT NOW?

Dairy. You go home and pour yourself a glass of milk. You put some butter on your bread, and eat some cheese. (They were obviously aware that that they had not used any non-Kosher ingredients. -- Most cheese today is made with non-Kosher enzymes; that's why it requires rabbinic supervision.)

Waking up Jewish is not an easy thing to do. The people of Israel suddenly realized that life was going to very different from then on. There were new rules and regulations. There were new values and new expectations. How did they do it?

What happens when a junk-food-aholic finds out that his weight and cholesterol are both north of 300? What happens when he sees a picture of his arteries that are 90% clogged? If he has half a brain in his head, he rethinks everything in his life. He thinks about his wife and children. He thinks about Bar Mitzvahs, weddings, and grandchildren. He thinks about the future and suddenly fish and fiber look a lot better than cake and ice cream. Suddenly walking around the block makes a lot more sense than eating a box of Ring Dings. (Come to think about it, maybe we should go easy on the cheesecake. :-))

When you realize that your future is at stake, you are prepared to totally turn your life around.

Tuesday night, Jews all over the world will stay up all night studying Torah, preparing to re-enact receiving it from G-d on Mt. Sinai. Torah is our life-blood. Torah is what has made us unique and kept us alive throughout the millennia.

Be there. Join your People in accepting G-d's gift. It will change your life.

Have a Good Yom Tov and a Happy Shavuos.

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