

TORAH & HORAAH



Shavuos 5777

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Dear Reader,

The festival of Shavuos is different from other festivals in a surprising way. Whereas concerning other festivals the Gemara cites a dispute over how best to spend the day, on the day of Shavuos there is no doubt that at least part of the day must be spent in physical indulgence. "On Atzeres all agree that the day must also be for you" (Pesachim 68b).

This statement of Chazal appears to be somewhat counterintuitive. Surely Shavuos, on which we commemorate the day of Matan Torah, is particularly fitting for pure dedication to Hashem? Why, of all festivals, is the day of Shavuos specified as having to include an element of physical indulgence?

The answer to this question is alluded to in the words of the Mishnah: "Great is Torah, for it gives life to

In place of our regular article, we send in advance of Shavuos a compendium of laws and customs for Shavuos, including practical rulings related to the various aspects of the day (and the night). We hope this will be useful, and wish all readers a joyous festival of Kaballas HaTorah.

This week's Q & A addresses the question of eating after making the Hamapil berachah.

Laws and Customs of Shavuos Food and Drink on Shavuos

1. Just as it is a *mitzvah* to honor Shabbos, so one must honor all festivals with culinary delights and treats. This is particularly true of Shavuos, on which the Torah was given.¹
2. There is furthermore a *mitzvah* of joy on festival days,² which is performed (for men) by the consumption of meat and wine.³ Therefore, the custom to eat milky foods (see below) should not prevent one from eating meat. One may divide the meals between milky and meaty (milk at night and meat in the day).
3. Even though eating and drinking is a *mitzvah*, one should not spend the entire day in eating and drinking, as the verse states, "It shall be Atzeres for Hashem" (Devarim 16:8). Although the verse also writes that "It shall be Atzeres for you," the Gemara resolves the contradiction by stating that it is "half for you, and half for Hashem."⁴ One must therefore dedicate time to the study of Torah—in particular on Shavuos.⁵
4. It is forbidden to fast on Shavuos, like other festivals. Some maintain

1. See Pesachim 68b; Machazik Berachah 242:2.

2. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 529:2-3.

3. Ibid.; see also Biur Halachah 545, s.v. veim.

4. Pesachim, loc. cit.

5. See Kaf Ha-Chayim 494:9.



those who perform it, in this world and in the next world” (Avos 6:7). The greatness of Torah is that it gives a person life not only in the next world – something that all mitzvos do – but even in this world.

Torah is called toras chaim, the Torah of Life. “It is a tree of life for those who take hold of it.” The Torah is synonymous with life, for it defines not only a religious service, but rather an all-encompassing way of life. As Rabbi Shimshon Refael Hirsch mentions time and again, the Torah was not given as distinct from our everyday lives, but as an integral part of human existence.

When we eat, we eat with the Torah; when we go to work, we do so with the Torah; and when we sleep, we sleep with the Torah. Although the notion of 24/7 is not usually associated with Jewish religious practice, in this case it is an apt code for the thrust of Torah: it is with us always. A Jew is never without the Torah.

Therefore, on Shavuos, as we receive the Torah, we are required not only to serve Hashem, but even to indulge in the physical.

that one may not fast even for a bad dream (*taanis chalom*),⁶ but most authorities agree that it is permitted to fast on account of a bad dream (many Poskim write that today, the general custom is to refrain from fasting for bad dreams).⁷

Eating Dairy Foods

5. It is customary to partake of dairy foods on Shavuos. The principle reason for this is that one should partake of two dishes in commemoration of the “Two Breads” (*shtei ha-lechem*) offering of Shavuos. One therefore starts the meal with dairy products, and mid-way through the meal, one removes the dairy products, and replaces them with meat products. Upon replacing the dairy products with the meat products, one is required to remove the bread eaten during the dairy portion of the meal, and replace it with bread that was not used with a dairy meal.⁸ By using two separate sets of bread, the *shtei halechem* offering is commemorated.⁹ To ensure that a new loaf of bread is used for the meaty part of the meal, some bake dairy bread.¹⁰

6. An additional reason for eating dairy products is that at the time of *Matan Torah* the Jewish people became obligated in all of the *mitzvos* of the Torah. As such, in order to eat meat, they would have had to follow the complex procedure involved in producing kosher meat. Because this procedure required time in order to properly prepare the meat, the only food items available immediately after *Matan Torah* (the giving of the Torah) were dairy products. This state of affairs is commemorated by the consumption of dairy products.¹¹

7. A further reason for the custom is to highlight the difference between Israel and Divine angels. As guests at the table of Avraham

6. Kaf Ha-Chayim 494:38, because of the special joy of Torah.

7. See Mishnah Berurah 429:19.

8. See Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 89:4.

9. Rema 494:3; see, however, Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah 1:38, who notes that the prohibition to eat a meat meal with bread that was eaten with dairy products only applies to the smaller pieces of bread that might have come into contact with dairy products. The loaf of bread on the table may be used during the meat meal. If so, there is no need for two separate sets of bread. Nevertheless, although there is no obligation to remove the bread eaten with the dairy meal, it is certainly praiseworthy, and this might be sufficient to constitute a commemoration of the *shtei ha-lechem* offering.

10. Mishnah Berurah 494:16; milky bread must be baked with a *siman*, a distinctive sign that reminds one that the bread is dairy (and may not be eaten with or after meat).

11. Mishnah Berurah 494:12; however, see Shalmei Todah no. 2, who writes that if the Torah was given on Shabbos (see Shabbos 87a), the need to eat dairy products might be attributed to the prohibition of preparing meat on Shabbos rather than the giving of the Torah on Shavuos.

Avinu, the angels were not particular to separate between meat and milk. When the angels claimed that the people of Israel were unworthy of receiving the Torah, G-d asked them: "Was it not you who descended upon Avraham and ate milk and meat together?"¹² Our meticulous separation of meat and milk demonstrates our worthiness of the Torah.¹³

8. Additional reasons: Milk is a symbol of purity, which the nation of Israel attains over the period of the Omer count;¹⁴ the *gematria* of *chalav* (milk) is forty, corresponding to the forty days that Moshe spent on Sinai to receive the Torah;¹⁵ the consumption of dairy products (and of honey) recalls the verse "honey and milk beneath your tongue" (Shir Hashirim 4:11), which is stated concerning Torah;¹⁶ before the Torah was given it was prohibited to drink milk, because it was considered a limb from a living creature (*eiver min ha-chay*).¹⁷

9. The regular laws of separating between meat and milk apply to the Shavuot meals. If meat and milk are to be consumed in the same meal, one should: 1) Eat the dairy foods first;¹⁸ 2) Clear the table after the dairy foods and change the tablecloth;¹⁹ 3) Wash out one's mouth and eat bread or something that clears the mouth of milk residue;²⁰ 4) One need not recite *birkas hamazon* (though some require it);²¹ 5) One must ensure that one's hands are clean;²² 6) Some state that one should wait half an hour.²³

Decorating the Synagogue

10. It is customary to spread out greenery (leaves and branches) in

12. Midrash Tehillim chap. 8.

13. Be'er Heitev 494:8; Mishnah Berurah 494:12-13; see also Beis Ha-Levi, Parashas Yisro, who writes that the angels did not actually mix meat and milk, but were rather not meticulous in the various laws pertaining to eating meat after the consumption of dairy products. Therefore, on Shavuot, the minhag developed to eat dairy products followed by meat. By doing so with the proper meticulousness, we show that we are not like the angels, and we are indeed worthy of receiving the Torah.

14. Magen Avraham 494:6.

15. See Orach Chaim, p. 247.

16. Mishnah Berurah 494:13.

17. Moadim U-Zemanim 8:319.

18. See Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 89:2.

19. Ibid. 4.

20. Ibid. 2.

21. Mishnah Berurah 494:16.

22. Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 89:2.

23. See Hagahos Maimoni to Rambam, Maachalos Assuros 9:28.

In other words, we are obligated to integrate the Torah we receive into the simple, physical routine that human beings carry out. On Shavuot, and subsequently during the entire year, we are urged to live a life of Torah.

As the Torah was given to the nation of Israel, the Gemara teaches that the souls of the people departed their bodies. Only by means of special dew was the nation resuscitated. If Torah is the Torah of life, how is it possible that the giving of the Torah brought the people death?

The answer, perhaps, is that at the giving of the Torah, the people had to be born again. Our post-Torah lives – physical, simple human lives – could not be the same as our pre-Torah lives. The nation had to die, in order that they could live Torah lives again. This is the life that we live: "And the Life of the World He planted among us."

May the Torah indeed pervade our lives, in the fullest possible sense. And may each of us merit to receive his portion of Torah, and live it the year round.

Staying Up for Studying Torah

our homes and synagogue on Shavuos.²⁴ We may not prepare these during the Holiday itself, but only before; if they were not cut or prepared before the Holiday, it is forbidden to do it during the Holiday.²⁵

11. Several reasons are given for this custom: 1) In order to recall the beauty of Mount Sinai, which was verdant and lush with green even though it was a mountain, as we learn from the Divine warning: “also your sheep and cattle should not graze by this mountain” (Shemos 34:3);²⁶ 2) On Shavuos we are judged concerning the fruit of the trees,²⁷ and we must remember to pray that the trees grow well and healthy; 3) Moshe, who was born on the seventh day of Adar, was hidden by his mother for three months, until the sixth day of Sivan. He was then placed among the river weeds. We therefore spread greens to remember the miracle that was performed for Moses at that time; 4) The Midrash teaches us a parable. A king planted a garden. After some days, the king looked at the garden and found it full of thorns. He was about to destroy the garden, when he saw a rose blossoming in it. The king declared, “For the sake of that one rose, I will not destroy the garden!” So too, although the world is mired in sin and degradation, for the sake of the Torah, and for the sake of the Jewish People, whose purpose it is to fulfill the Torah, the world is not destroyed, but rather, the whole world is saved.

24. Rema, Orach Chayim 494:3; an ancient source for the custom is found in Targum Sheini to Megillas Esther, 3:68, which describes the customs that Haman mentioned in depicting the Jews as being different from all others. One of the customs listed is the throwing of roses in synagogues on Shavuos.

25. It should be noted that the Vilna Gaon objected to this custom, because it has become the way of Christians to decorate their places of worship in this manner (see Chayei Adam 131:13 and Maaseh Rav, as mentioned also by Mishnah Berurah). However, the custom has remained widespread.

26. Levush, *ibid.*

27. Mishnah, Rosh Hashanah 16a.

12. A prevalent custom is to stay awake all night (until dawn) on the first night of Shavuos and study Torah.²⁸ The principle reason for this is that at the time the Torah was given, our forefathers slept throughout the night. Hashem had to awaken the nation of Israel from their slumber so the Torah could be given to them. In order to “repair” this fault in our ancestors’ reception of the Torah, we stay the entire night immersed in the study of Torah.²⁹ Kabbalists place great emphasis on the importance of this custom.³⁰

13. Some begin the night’s study session with the recitation of *Tikun Leil Shavuos*, which consists of representative quotes from every section of the Torah—specifically from the Written Torah according to one *Tikkin*,³¹ and including the Oral Torah according to another.³² But many people simply study any Torah they have the ability and knowledge to learn, and most people attend a lecture or dialogue session.

14. There are a number of *halachos* a person should be aware of when staying up the entire night. The following is a very brief summary: 1) *Bedtime Shema*: The blessing of *hamapil* is not recited; the custom is that *Shema* is not recited either; 2) *Morning Blessings (birkot ha-shachar)*: According to the Sephardi custom, one can recite all the Morning Blessings after midnight,³³ with the exception of the blessings over Torah, which is recited after dawn. According to the prevalent Ashkenazi custom, the Morning Blessings are only recited after dawn, except for *Elokai Neshamah* and *Maavir Sheinah*. These two blessings are recited out loud by one who has slept during the night, who is able to recite them both for himself and for all those

28. Mishnah Berurah 494:1, citing from Zohar.

29. Magen Avraham 494.

30. See, for instance, Ben Ish Chai, Parashas Bamidbar, no. 3 (based on Shaar Ha-Kavanos of Ari).

31. Tikkun of the holy Ari.

32. Tikkun of the holy Shelah.

33. Including *Elokai Neshamah*.

who listen to his blessings. The same applies to the blessings over the Torah. However, is one slept on Shavuos eve (during the day), one may recited the blessings over the Torah for oneself. 3) *Washing Hands (netilas yadayim)*: After dawn one should use the bathroom, following which one can wash *netilas yadayim* and recite the blessing.

Other Customs

15. *Megillas Rus*, The Scroll of Ruth, is publically read on Shavuos morning. In Israel, many have the custom of the Reader reciting two blessings (*Megillah* and *Shehecheyanu*) before the reading. The simple reason for this is that King David was

born and died on Shavuos,³⁴ and we therefore read Ruth in order to honor King David by recalling his ancestry. Another reason is that just as the process leading to our receiving the Torah was filled with pain and trying times, so too the path that Ruth took to receiving the Torah was filled with the same.³⁵

16. Because of the special connection of the day with King David, some have the custom to read the entire book of Tehillim on Shavuos.³⁶

34. See Tosafos, Chagigah 17a.

35. Magen Avraham 490:8.

36. Ben Ish Chay, Bamidbar 6.

Halachic Responsa

to Questions that have been asked on our website dinonline.org



The Question:

If I said Hamapil already and cannot fall asleep, and then I become very hungry and it will keep me up, may I eat something?



Answer:

Although a person has already said the berachah of Hamapil, if he feels hungry and suffers discomfort, it is permitted to eat and of course to make the required Berachos.



Sources:

The Rema (239:1) rules that one should not make a hefsek between reciting the Shema and going to sleep, but he does not specifically address the issue of Hamapil.

However, the Mishnah Berurah (4) writes that one should be careful not to eat, drink, or speak after saying Hamapil, so as to avoid a hefsek between the berachah and actually sleeping.

Nonetheless, it appears clear that the berachah is not a birchas hanehenin: sleep is not a type of “pleasure” over which Chazal enacted a berachah, and the blessing is rather an expression of praise, which corresponds to the blessing of “hamaavir sheina” in the morning (this parallel is drawn by the Mishnah Berurah).

Thus, just as the berachah of “hamaavir sheina” should be made upon waking up, but not necessarily immediately upon waking up, so too the berachah of Hamapil does not have to be made immediately before going to sleep, and where one needs to make an interruption, it is permitted to do so.

The Biur Halachah also adds that according to the Chayei Adam the berachah is made over the general “way of the world,” and not over the individual’s personal sleep, so that even somebody who is not going to sleep at all can still make the berachah. The Mishnah Berurah does not rely on this, but for purposes of an interruption it can be added as another reason for leniency.

For this reason we find a number of authorities ruling that Asher Yatzar can and should be said after Hamapil: see Shut Pri Ha-Sadeh Vol. 1, no. 93; Shut Hitorerus Teshuvah Vol. 1, no. 125; Halichos shlomo Chap. 13, note 14; Shut Tzitz Eliezer Vol. 3, no. 27; Shut Be’er Moshe Vol. 1, no. 62. The same is true for eating where there is a need; see Tzitz Eliezer Vol. 7 no. 27 sec. 3.