

Shavuot
A Holiday As Sweet As Honey and Milk
Cheesecake Bake
Avi Mitzner 5/28/2020

Kol Bo 52:10 (Unknown authorship, late 13-early14th century)

It is also a minhag (custom) to eat honey and milk (dairy) on on the festival of Shavuot because the Torah is compared to honey and milk as it says 'honey and milk are under your tongue.'

Song of Songs 4:11

Sweetness drops From your lips, O bride; Honey and milk Are under your tongue; And the scent of your robes Is like the scent of Lebanon.	נֶפֶת תִּטְפֶּנָּה שְׁפֹתֶיךָ כִּלְה דְּבַשׁ וְחֶלֶב תַּחַת לְשׁוֹנֶיךָ וְרֵיחַ שְׁלֹמֹתֶיךָ כְּרֵיחַ לְבָנוֹן :
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Shir HaShirim Rabbah 4:11:1

The Rabbis say: Anyone who says words of Torah in public, and they are not pleasant to those who hear them like honey and milk mixed together, it would have been better if they had not been said. Rabbi Yochanan and Reish Lakish: Rabbi Yochanan said: Anyone who says words of Torah in public, and they are not pleasant to those who hear them like a bride who is pleasing to all at her chuppah, it would have been better if they had not been said. Reish Lakish said: Anyone who says words of Torah in public, and they are not pleasant to those who hear them like a bride who is pleasing to her husband at her chuppah, it would have been better if they had not been said.

Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe by Ivan G. Marcus, 1996

At age five or six, a Jewish boy living in medieval German or France might begin his formal schooling by participating in a special ritual initiation ceremony. Early on the morning of the spring festival of Shavuot (Pentacost), someone wraps him in a coat or *tallit* (prayer shawl) and carries him from his house to the teacher. The boy is seated on the teacher's lap, and the teacher shows him a tablet on which the Hebrew alphabet has been written. The teacher reads the letters first forwards, then backwards, and finally in symmetrically paired combinations, and he encourages the boy to repeat each sequence aloud. The teacher smears honey over the letters on the tablet and tells the child to lick it off.

Cakes on which biblical verses have been written are brought in. They must be baked by virgins from flour, honey, oil, and milk. Next come shelled hard-boiled eggs on which more verses have been inscribed. The teacher reads the words written on the cakes and eggs, and the boy imitates what he hears and then eats them both.



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The teacher next asks the child to recite an incantation adjuring POTAH, the prince of forgetfulness (*sar ha-shikhehah*), to go far away and not block the boy's heart (*lev*, i.e., mind). The teacher also instructs the boy to sway back and forth when studying and to sing his lessons out loud.

As a reward, the child gets to eat fruit, nuts, and other delicacies. At the conclusion of the rite, the teacher leads the boy down to the riverbank and tells him that his future study of Torah, like the rushing water in the river, will never end. Doing all of these acts, we are told, will "expand the (child's) heart."

