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FIRST DAY SHAVUOS
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Shavuos is the holiday on which we received the Torah. This seems a very strange name to give a holiday which marks such a momentous event. Why should this holiday be called Shavuos? Why shouldn't it be called Chag Yadus or Chag Yisroel, the day upon which we became Jews because, after all, it was the receiving of the Torah which made us all Jews. Why, too, is this holiday celebrated in such a poor fashion? ~~and I am not just speaking about attendance.~~

There are no ceremonies and rituals connected with it as there are with the other holidays. The only thing that is connected with Shavuos are the customs to eat milk foods and to spread a little greenery in the Synagogue. Of course, I like blintzes and I am glad that they do have milk foods on Shavuos, but this does not seem to be much symbolism for this holiday. There are many reasons given why we eat milk foods on Shavuos. One is because the Torah is compared to milk and honey. Another is that this was the day, ^{for Moshe's mother} three months after Moshe's birth ~~that his mother~~ was forced to put him into the river. She could hide him ^{for} the first three months but not anymore. ^{longer.} Moshe was born on the 7th of Adar. Moshe, when he was found by the Egyptian princess, would not nurse from anyone but a Jewish mother so we remember ^{this fact on Shavuos too.} that. The Rabbis also tell us that we eat milk foods to remember that when the Jewish people heard the commandments on Mount Sinai they first learned that they were obligated to keep all the laws of kosher. When they returned home they had no kosher meat and because it was Shabbos they could not kosher anything and so they ate milk foods.

Another explanation is that we had to offer two loaves on the altar on Shavuos and we have milk foods because after a while we are going to have meat and you cannot use the same loaf of bread with meat as milk. Others say that we eat milk foods because it says in the Torah we bring a Mincha Chadasha, a new offering on Shavuos. Others say, and this to me is the most satisfactory reason, that milk foods stand for humility, humbleness. Therefore, we eat them on the holiday we received the Torah. The Rabbis illustrate this graphically by telling us if you put milk in a silver or gold pitcher it will sour. If you put it in a clay pitcher it will stay sweet. In order to study Torah you must have a certain humbleness, an openness. That is why this holiday is called Zeman Matan, the time of the giving of the Torah and not the time of the receiving of the Torah because we receive the Torah everyday. No one should ever feel that he has received all the Torah. That's why, too, I believe, this

holiday is called Shavuos, weeks. In ^{the} ~~the~~ Torah there are two different kinds of hope. There is a hope which says that if you do one dramatic thing everything will be changed for you. You will become a different person. In fact, our advertising world plays fast and loose with this idea. They say that if you use this toothpaste or that mouthwash all your problems will be solved and everyone will love you and care for you. There is another kind of hope, though, which says that the world can be improved, but slowly, step by step. Torah is a goal. No one ever achieves it. We always must work for it. That's why there should not be any big celebration on Shavuos because nobody has gotten the whole Torah yet. The days of the Messiah are not here yet. We are to rise everyday a little higher. Even our solutions will bring other problems, but that does not mean we should not put forth our solutions. The reason there are so many divorces today is that the young people expect too much. It will not solve all your problems. This fact that we have to constantly strive to do better but even achieving certain goals is not going to solve everything was brought home to me vividly after removing my cast. After being in the cast for three weeks, I thought everything would be hunky dory when it was removed, but I could hardly move my arm and it hurt for several weeks before I got back in shape. We must constantly work everyday to achieve more Torah. We have not learned all the Torah yet and until the Mashiach comes we will not. Shavuos teaches us to be humble. We should not think we have learned everything and know everything but that we are all in the process of becoming better and hopefully the Mashiach will come soon and the world will be perfected. I am reminded of a story about a woman who was very nervous and who took a sea voyage. Right near the end the Captain said, "Madam, I want you to know that we have dropped the anchor". The woman said, "Well, I'm not surprised. It's been hanging over the side for weeks." In life, too, if we want to accomplish any goals we have to work at it bit by bit lowering the anchor over the side.