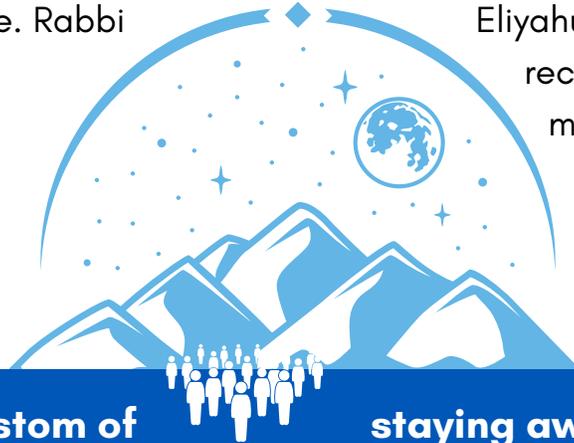




ALL NIGHT, ALWAYS HONEST

One of the core observances of Shavuot is staying up all night, a custom known as Tikkun Leil Shavuot and traditionally justified with a Midrash, which records that the Israelites “overslept” on the morning of the giving of the Torah and presenting a lack of excitement for receiving it. Therefore, the practice of staying up all night learning was instated to serve as a tikkun, or repair, for that blunder. However, while this text seemingly gives a negative atmosphere to the night, one interpretation of the holiday speaks deeply to the human spirit, transforming Shavuot into a holiday of academia and study into radical self-love, honesty and acceptance. Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov in his work, *The Book of Our Heritage*, recasts this mistake as an outcome of, at worst, misapplied self-honesty:



It is said that the custom of staying awake was enacted to repair the wrong of the generation that received the Torah—that many of them slept that night, and God had to rouse them. This is not a criticism of that generation, who were all conscious people who looked forward to hearing the word of God.

**Rather, they were tired and were worried they wouldn't be able to stand in their strength, when they heard God speaking if they didn't sleep. They were all deeply honest people and were not influenced by how others would perceive them. If a person felt sleep would be good for them in order to be at full strength to hear the Word, they did so, since there was no prohibition of sleeping.
(Book of Our Heritage, Shavuot)**



ALL NIGHT, ALWAYS HONEST

This approach gives the evening a different agenda. What otherwise seems like an overly academic holiday spent studying all night should actually be seen as a night of honesty and reflection, progenerated by the Israelite's act of radical self-honesty at the climax of one of the most important moments in our people's history.

People have found a lot of ways to connect to this holiday, spending the night doing everything from studying traditional recitations of specific Torah texts to nights of classes to nights of music and film. But one other aspect of the holiday people have connected to that goes hand in hand with this theme of honesty is the simultaneous love that is shared between us and God.

A friend of mine shared an explanation of the practice of staying up all night which amounts to this: **"When you love someone, you will do crazy things for them."** We stay up all night in order to express our love for God, delving into the gift that we were given- the Torah and our Jewish tradition. And while we may not hear it explicitly, the love we exhibit on Shavuot night is not one sided. **My teacher Rabbi Yaakov Medan has said "prayer is the experience of talking to God, and learning the Torah we were given is the experience of hearing God talk back to us."** In that way, learning can be a form of connection and reflection, emphasizing that despite what can be seen as misapplied honesty still ended in the loving act of our being given the Torah as an avenue to connection with God. Moreover, it affirms the goodness of practice of honesty and reflection, even if it leads to what we still qualify as a mistake.





ALL NIGHT, ALWAYS HONEST

We can see the two aspects of the holiday as connected. There is a radical idea mentioned at the beginning of Genesis – that humanity was created in God’s image. We can derive from here that self-care, self-love and self-honesty are not just a nice thing to do, but also inherent to our connection with God (Also assumed in Sanhedrin 37a and Avot D’Rabbi Natan 2:30). When we connect with our internal selves and do what is in the spirit of love of the self and honesty with the self, we also connect with God and perhaps do what is good on a spiritual, and even divine, level. In that way, the love of God and the act of self-honesty become intertwined on the same night.

On Shavuot night, while we shouldn’t fall asleep, we should consider embodying the value that the Jewish people brought to Har Sinai and spend the night reflecting on growing and being honest with ourselves as a means of connecting with God.

Activity

In advance of the first night of Shavuot, write down a few aspects of your internal experience you wish to reflect on or things you are trying to be more honest with yourself about, and select texts or reflection practices that can best facilitate meditation on those parts of yourself.



1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____