

## RESTING AT THE MOUNTAIN

One of the primary traditions associated with Shavuot, the Jewish holiday commemorating the Jews receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai, is staying up all night learning Torah. This custom is not a direct commandment in the Torah, but a number of sources reveal this has been a long-standing tradition among many Jewish communities. One of the core justifications for this practice can be found in the Midrash, a collection of commentaries on Biblical passages in the form of legends and proverbs:

"For the third day, the Lord will come down in the sight of the people." Israel slept all through the night, because the sleep of Shavuot is pleasant and the night is short. Rabbi Yudan said: Not even a flea stung them. When the Holy One, Blessed Be He, came and found them asleep, he started to get them up with trumpets, as it is written: "And it came to pass on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunders and lightnings." (Exodus 16:16) And Moses roused Israel and took them to meet the King of kings, the Holy One, Blessed Be He, as it is written: "And Moses brought forth the people [out of the camp] to meet God." (Exodus 19:17) And the Holy One, Blessed Be He, went before them, until they reached Mount Sinai, as it is written: "Now mount Sinai was altogether on smoke." (Exodus 19:18) Rabbi Yitzhak said: It was this for which He chided them through [the prophesy of] Isaiah. As it is written: (Isaiah 50:2) "Wherefore, when I came, was there no man? When I called, was there no answer? Is My hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem?"

Essentially, this interweaving of commentary and Biblical passages describes a scenario in which the Jewish people overslept on the morning they would be receiving the Torah. As a result, the practice developed to stay up all night learning Torah to ensure we do not repeat the mistakes of our ancestors as described in the Midrash.

This text may also serve as a jumping-off point for a discussion so many of us, particularly young adults, need to have. [That conversation is about burnout.](#)



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Burnout is defined by the International Classification of Diseases-11 (ICD-11) as:

A syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterized by three dimensions:

- Feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion.
- Increased mental distance from one's job or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job.
- Reduced professional efficacy.

A recent study by the employment website Indeed found that rates of burnout among all age groups have soared in recent years, especially during the pandemic. [Of the millennials surveyed, 59 percent reported experiencing burnout](#), with Gen-Zers facing similar numbers. Even older generations like baby boomers and Gen-Xers have seen increases in burnout. [Of course, the recent increase has had a lot to do with the pandemic, but even pre-pandemic, studies found that 53 percent of millennials reported experiencing burnout.](#)

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Clearly, burnout is a major issue caused by prolonged workplace-related stress — something that is particularly relevant to the circumstances of the Midrash quoted above. The slavery in Egypt lasted hundreds of years, according to the Torah. It was back-breaking and intensive work that ended only a couple of months before the Mount Sinai experience.



Within that context, it is no wonder the Jews were exhausted when they finally had a moment to pause and reflect at the foot of Sinai. [The extensive period of slavery, followed by the intensity and stress of the Exodus, took its toll on the Jewish people, and what they needed more than anything was a break.](#)

Now, as we commemorate the receiving of the Torah and our experience at the base of Sinai, we can pause for a moment and reflect on any recent experiences that have given us reason to rest and recuperate.

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## Activity: Achieving True Rest

We have a number of tools at our disposal to combat burnout, but they all involve truly resting our minds, not just zoning out in front of a television or computer screen. Burnout damages the mind, which can only be repaired with activities that both relax and rejuvenate it. Suggested activities include:

- Going on long walks.
- Exercising: Ride a bike, jog, play a sport, or do some yoga. Physical activities will make you feel better.
- Taking periodic breaks from work.
- Taking in some sun.
- Meditating, practicing mindfulness and doing some deep-breathing exercises.
- Avoiding cell phones and screens before bed to ensure quality sleep.

Identify some activities that truly put your mind at ease and actually help you recover rather than numb the pain of burnout. Once you identify at least three, write them in the thought bubbles below. On the next page, create a plan for how you are going to include them in your day.



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Break Activity



Time



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Quick Reminder

**Breathe**

