

# Celebrate Shavuot with these delicious Farmer Cheese Pancakes

By Carol Goodman Kaufman

Shavuot is just around the corner, and because it's the holiday on which Jews traditionally eat lots of dairy foods, I'm already thinking of ways to milk it for maximum deliciousness. (I know, cheesy line.)

But what does dairy have to do with this spring harvest festival? After all, Shavuot is one of the three biblical pilgrimage festivals that celebrate a harvest. It's also when tradition holds that the Israelites first received the Ten Commandments that turned them from Hebrews into Jews. (Remember Charlton Heston on the mountain?) The rabbis give a plethora of explanations for the custom. Herein are just a few I have chosen to rationalize my indulging in cheesecake.

First, of course, is the most obvious explanation for those of us not heavily versed in Scripture. The Torah tells us in Exodus 3:8 that the Promised Land was "flowing with milk and honey," and in Song of Songs 4:11 that "milk and honey are under your tongue." So, right there we have justification for indulging in an ice cream cone at the very least.

Those looking for signs in the words of the Torah may find a cosmic mandate to eat dairy since the initials of four Hebrew words in Numbers 28:26 that describe the sacrificial meal offering on Shavuot, spell mai-halav (from milk). This, of course, suggests that cheese blintzes are a necessary item for the spring festival menu.

And if you happen to enjoy numerology, finding signs in digits, you will be thrilled to see that the numerical equivalent of the letters that spell halav (milk) is 40. This correlates to the number of days Moses spent on Mount Sinai while awaiting receipt of the Ten Commandments, as well as to the number of years the Israelites wandered in the desert before arriving at the Promised Land. So, this obviously calls for cheesecake, right?

Some scholars like to have a bit of fun with wordplay. In the Book of Psalms (68:16), Mount Sinai itself is also called har gavnunim, or mount of majestic peaks. Gavnunim sounds like g'vinah, or cheese. Hence, more justification for eating dairy on Shavuot.

The most scholarly interpretation is one that explains that the Israelites, once having accepted the Torah and its commandments, could no longer eat meat that wasn't kosher. So, until they could properly prepare some meat,



These pancakes are delicious even without sour cream. EUGENE TOMEV, GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

dairy was all they had.

The irony of all this is that Jews and dairy tend not to get along, intestinally speaking. We of the Tribe are disproportionately missing the enzyme that digests lactose, so we should probably be getting a sponsorship from the Lactaid people to help finance our dairy-laden groaning boards at Shavuot.

## Farmer Cheese Pancakes

This recipe is adapted from one in Darra Goldstein's *Beyond the North Wind: Russia in Recipes and Lore* (Ten Speed Press). Fair warning: these pancakes are addictive.

Ingredients:

2 egg yolks

1 lb. farmer's cheese

Scant 1/2 cup sugar

3/4 cup flour

1/2 teaspoon baking powder

Pinch of salt

Grated rind of an orange

A tablespoon or two of heavy cream or milk

2 tablespoons unsalted butter

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

Sour cream, for garnish\*\*

Preparation:

In a medium bowl, beat the egg yolks

into the farmer's cheese, then stir in the sugar.

Mix together 1/2 cup of the flour, the baking powder, and the salt and add to the cheese mixture. If the mixture seems dry, add a little heavy cream.

Place the butter and oil over medium-low heat in a large nonstick skillet and melt the butter.

Sprinkle the remaining 1/4 cup flour onto a plate and dust your hands with some flour, too.

With your hands or a spoon, scoop out about 2 tablespoons of the batter and set the mound on the floured plate.

Use your hands to gently shape it into a round patty about 2 inches in diameter and coat it lightly on all sides with flour.

Repeat with the remaining batter.

Carefully transfer the patties to the pan and cook them slowly until the undersides are browned, about 3 minutes.

Turn with a spatula and cook until the other sides are browned, 3 to 4 minutes more.

Serve immediately, with sour cream.

\*If you happen to be lactose-intolerant, Friendship Dairies claims that their farmer's cheese is 99% lactose-free.

\*\*We didn't feel this addition was necessary. The pancakes are just perfect the way they are. Except that there are never enough.