

## ❧ NIGHT-LONG TORAH STUDY ❧

### ❧ Tikkun Leil Shavuos

A well-established custom calls for an all-night Torah study session on the first night of Shavuos.

In some communities, especially within the *yeshivah* world, the first night of Shavuos is spent in informal Torah study by independent groups of two or three, each group usually reviewing that which it has been studying since Pesach. And in recent years, the rabbis of some synagogues have taken to lecturing deep into the night, either to accommodate those who are not capable of studying by themselves, or to enable the entire congregation to study the same topic. These are all admirable ways of fulfilling the *minhag* of all-night Torah study.

Nevertheless, perhaps the most prevalent custom is the perusal of the formal course of study known as *תיקון ליל שבועות*, *Tikkun Leil Shavuos*.

The basic structure of the *Tikkun* was formulated by the *Arizal*, as recorded in *Eitz Chaim*, and was subsequently enhanced by *Sh'la*. It contains passages from every weekly Torah reading, each book of *Tanach*, the first and last mishnah of every tractate, a listing of the 613 *mitzvos*, and some sections of the *Zohar*. The Hebrew text of the *Tikkun* has been included in this *machzor* on pages 670-764.

### ❧ The Source in the Zohar

During the month of Sivan the daytime is already considerably longer than the night and the dawn comes quite early. On the day Israel was to receive the Torah, the nation overslept. The sun had already risen, God was waiting atop Mount Sinai, yet the people were still sleeping. Moses went through the camp to arouse them; he cried, 'Arise from your sleep! The Groom [i.e., God] has already arrived. He seeks the bride [i.e., Israel], that He may lead her to the *chuppah*. He is waiting to present her with the Torah. . . ' (*Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer* 41).

Does a bride sleep through the hour appointed for her wedding? Does one remain in bed when he has an appointment with the King? Surely atonement was required. Thus, the *Zohar* (*Emor* 98a) records that certain extremely pious individuals would remain awake the entire night of Shavuos as a means to rectify this lapse. It is proper for the bride's entire company to assist her with her wedding preparations by studying the Torah, Prophets, Writings, Midrashim and Kabbalah, for these are her jewelry (*ibid.*, *Bereishis* 8a). Thus, although the practice arose among the greatest and most pious scholars, all who study Torah customarily remain awake and study Torah the entire night of Shavuos (see *Magen Avraham* 494).

In a novel interpretation, the *Apter Rav* explains how the Jews were able to sleep late on the morning they were to have received the Torah. When they learned that the Torah would be presented to them in three days, the people were overwrought with longing. So great was their desire for the Torah that by the time Shavuos night arrived their emotions reached such a high pitch that they passed out in anticipation. And they remained in their stupor until Moses came through the camp to arouse them (cited in *Likutei Mahariach*).

### ❧ Widespread Acceptance

Although the custom of remaining awake the entire night of Shavuos was first recorded almost two millennia ago, it was observed only by small groups of scholars. Widespread acceptance of this custom was not realized until about four hundred years ago, when it was popularized by the scholars and kabbalists of Tzefas, who were inspired by the following incident that involved at least two of them.

R' Shlomo HaLevi Alkabetz (Salonika, Turkey, 1505 — Tzefas, Eretz Yisrael 1584) was a *paytan* (*Lechah Dodi*), commentator, a leading kabbalist, and member of the circle of R' Yosef Karo, author of the *Shulchan Aruch*. The two had first met in Turkey, where

R' Shlomo became a disciple of R' Yosef. R' Shlomo's account of a Shavuos night Torah study session while he and R' Yosef were together in Turkey, is recorded by the *Sh'la* (*Maseches Shavuos*):

Let it be known that the *Chassid* [pious man -- R' Shlomo called R' Yosef Karo by this title] and I, his servant, along with some of our colleagues, decided to remain awake the entire night of *Shavuos*. Thanks to *Hashem* we were able to do so. We did not cease [our studies] for a moment . . .

R' Shlomo then lists the portions of Scriptures that they studied. After that, they began learning *Mishnayos*. They had completed the first two tractates exactly at midnight, and the following took place:

A voice was heard from the *Chassid's* mouth, a great voice which spoke very clearly. All who were present heard it, but nevertheless, could not understand what it said. The voice was very melodious and grew ever stronger. Out of great fear we covered our faces, and were unable to raise our eyes to see what was happening. Then the voice said:

'Harken, my beloved friends, who are very scrupulous about observing the *mitzvos*; *Shalom* to you, my beloved comrades. You are praiseworthy and your parents are praised for having borne you. You are fortunate in this world, and fortunate in the World to Come, for you have devoted yourselves to crowning me on this night. . . The words of your Torah study and the breath of your mouths have split the very heavens and have ascended through them all, directly to God. The *Malachim* are silent, the *Seraphim* are quiet, the *Chayos* are standing still, and the entire heavenly array as well as the Holy One, Blessed is He, is listening to your voices.'

[After saying this, the voice identified itself as the *malach* that represents the very soul of the Mishnah:] 'I am the Mishnah. I have come to speak to you as a mother who admonishes her son. Had there been ten of you here tonight, you would have been exalted even higher. Nevertheless, you have risen extremely high. . . Do not pause in your Torah study for it draws a thread of grace upon you, and your Torah study is sweet unto God. . . Return to your studies, do not pause for a moment. [After *Yom Tov*] go up to *Eretz Yisrael* where you will eat of the exalted land's bounty . . . Do not worry about your possessions for . . . I shall support you. Peace unto you. Peace unto your families. And peace unto all that is yours. *Hashem* will give strength to His nation; *Hashem* will bless His nation with peace.'

R' Shlomo then adds that the soul of the *Mishnah* taught them much from the wellsprings of wisdom and promised them great rewards. Their eyes streamed with tears of joy at all they had learned from the voice.

For the remainder of the night our lips did not cease from speaking words of Torah. In the morning we went to immerse in the *mikveh* . . . There we met three of our colleagues who had not been with us during that night. When we told them of the wonderful things that *Hashem* had done for us, their hearts melted within them, they broke out in weeping. . .

Then and there the ten of us decided to remain awake the second night and repeat our learning session of the night before . . . We followed the same order of study as the night before. This time, since there were ten of us present, the soul of the *Mishnah* did not wait until midnight. . . As soon as we concluded reading the *Aseres HaDibros* (Ten Commandments) and we began to read the portion of *Shema* that follows soon after, we heard the beloved voice:

'Harken, my beloved friends, who are very scrupulous about observing the *mitzvos* . . .'

Then the *malach* of the *Mishnah* revealed even more of the secrets of the Torah to them than on the previous night, and bestowed even greater blessings than on the night before, for now they had a full *minyán* of ten.