

Tue 14 June 2005 (Erev Shavuot)  
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Tikkun Lel Shavuot

## The Traditional Tikkun Lel Shavuot

### Shavuot celebrates the giving of the Torah

-Zohar: Time between Passover and Shavuot is the "courting days of the bridegroom Israel with the bride Torah."

### Custom: Stay up all night on the first night and study until dawn

-Custom called Tikkun Lel Shavuot (Improvement of the night of Shavuot)

### Standard readings

-3-7 verses from the beginning and the end of every Torah portion

-Some important sections are read in full:

-The days of Creation [Gen. 1:1-2:3]

-The Exodus and the song at the Red Sea [Ex.14:1-15:27]

-The giving of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai [Ex. 18:1-20:26, 24:1-18, 34:27-35; Deut. 5:1-6:9]

-The historical review and part of the Shema [Deut. 10:12-11:25]

-3-7 verses from the beginning and the end of every book in the Prophets, but:

-Ch. 1 of Ezekiel (the "Merkavah") is read in full

-The readings from the Minor Prophets (considered as one book) are:

-Hosea 1:1-3

-Habakkuk 2:20-3:19

-Malachi 3:22-24

-Ruth is read in full

-Psalms 1, 19, 68, 119, and 150 are read

-Next, the excerpts from mishnayot are read, the beginning and end of each of the 63 tractates, with some important chapters in full

-The "Sefer Yetzirah" (Book of Creation - oldest kabbalistic text, maybe 2000 years old)

- The 613 commandments as enumerated by Maimonides
- Excerpts from the Zohar bearing on the subject, with opening and concluding prayers.
- The whole reading is divided into 13 parts, after each of which a "Kaddish di-Rabbanan" is recited.
- In the synagogue the scroll of Ruth is read:
  - Story of Ruth embracing Judaism and the harvesting scene are appropriate to the festival (Law and harvest).
  - King David, a descendant of Ruth, died on Shavuot ["Sha'are Teshubah" to Orat Hayyim, 494].

### **Why do we stay up all night studying?**

- Midrash: When Israel was to receive the Torah, they were sleeping and God had to awaken them with noise and thunder:

#### **Song of Songs Rabbah 1:57**

...For the third day the Lord will come down in the sight of all people (Exodus 19:11). Israel slept all that night, because the sleep of Shavuot is pleasant and the night is short. R. Judan said: Not a flea worried them. -God came and found them sleeping, so he began to rouse them with trumpets, as it says, And it came to pass on the third day... that there were thunders and lightnings (Exodus 19:16), and Moses roused Israel and brought them out to meet the supreme King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, as it says, And Moses brought forth the people... to meet God (Exodus 19:17), and then God went before them till He reached Mount Sinai, as it is written, Now mount Sinai was altogether on smoke (Exodus 19:18).  
It was for this that He taunted them through the mouth of Isaiah, saying, "Wherefore, when I came, was there no man? When I called, was there none to answer?" [Isa. 50:2].

- Therefore we stay up studying this night to make amends for our forefathers and show how anxiously we anticipate receiving the Torah
- Custom seems to be based on Zohar [Parshat Emor 98a] which states that the original pious ones would not sleep this night, and they toiled in Torah.

### Zohar, Vayikra, Section 3:

When Israel drew near to Mount Sinai, that dew that descends from the supernal Point came down in its fullness and purified them so that their filth left them and they became attached to the Holy King and the Community of Israel and received the Torah, as we have explained. Observe that any man who does not count those seven complete weeks so as to qualify himself for purity is not called 'pure' and is not in the class of 'pure', nor is he worthy to have a portion in the Torah.

**But if a man has reached this day in purity and has not lost count, then it behooves him on this night to study the Torah and to preserve the special purity to which he has attained on this night.**

We have learnt that the Torah which he ought to study on this night is the Oral Law, and afterwards in daytime the Written Law can come and he can attach himself to it, so that both may be interlocked above. Then proclamation is made concerning him, saying, 'And as for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; my spirit which is upon thee and my words which I have put in thy mouth', etc. (Isa. 59:21). Therefore the pious ones of old used not to sleep on this night, but they used to study the Torah and say, Let us acquire a holy inheritance for ourselves and our sons in two worlds. On that night the Community of Israel is crowned above them, and comes to join the Holy King, and both are crowned above the heads of those who are worthy of this.

-Zohar [Introduction, page 8a] also says that all those who adhere to the Tikkun this night and rejoice with it are blessed by God:

### **Zohar, Bereshit 1** (emphasis mine)

"IN THE BEGINNING". R. Simeon opened his discourse with the text: "And I put my words in thy mouth" (Is. 51:16). He said:

'How greatly is it incumbent on a man to study the Torah day and night! For the Holy One, blessed be He, is attentive to the voice of those who occupy themselves with the Torah, and through each fresh discovery made by them in the Torah a new heaven is created.

Our teachers have told us that at the moment when a man expounds something new in the Torah, his utterance ascends before the Holy One, blessed be He, and He takes it up and kisses it and crowns it with 70 crowns of graven and inscribed letters.

When a new idea is formulated in the field of the esoteric wisdom, it ascends and rests on the head of the 'Zaddik, the life of the universe', and

then it flies off and traverses 70,000 worlds until it ascends to the 'Ancient of Days'.

And inasmuch as all the words of the 'Ancient of Days' are words of wisdom comprising sublime and hidden mysteries, that hidden word of wisdom that was discovered here when it ascends is joined to the words of the 'Ancient of Days', and becomes an integral part of them, and enters into the 18 mystical worlds, concerning which we read 'No eye hath seen beside thee, O God' (Is. 64:3).

From thence they issue and fly to and fro, until finally arriving, perfected and completed, before the 'Ancient of Days'. At that moment the 'Ancient of Days' savors that word of wisdom, and finds satisfaction therein above all else. He takes that word and crowns it with 370,000 crowns, and it flies up and down until it is made into a sky. And so each word of wisdom is made into a sky which presents itself fully formed before the 'Ancient of Days', who calls them 'new heavens', that is, heavens created out of the mystic ideas of the sublime wisdom.

As for the other new expositions of the Torah, they present themselves before the Holy One, blessed be He, and ascend and become 'earths of the living', then they descend and become absorbed into one earth, whereby a new earth emerges through that new discovery in the Torah. This is implied in the verse, 'For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I am making, rise up before me, etc.' (Is 64:22). It is not written 'I have made', but 'I am making', signifying continual creation out of the new ideas discovered in the Torah.

Further, it is written, 'And I have placed my words in thy mouth, and with the shadow of my hand have I covered thee, to plant a heaven and to lay the foundations of an earth' (Is. 60:16). It does not say 'the heaven', but 'a heaven'. ' Said R. Eleazar: 'What signifies 'with the shadow of my hand have I covered thee'? ' He replied: 'When the Torah was delivered to Moses, there appeared myriads of heavenly angels ready to consume him with their fiery breath, but the Holy One, blessed be He, sheltered him. Similarly now when the new word ascends and is crowned and presents itself before the Holy One, blessed be He, He covers and protects that word, and also shelters the author of that word, so that the angels should not become aware of him and so be filled with jealousy, until that word is transformed into a new heaven and a new earth. That is the meaning of the passage 'and with the shadow of my hand have I covered thee, to plant a heaven and to lay the foundations of an earth'.

From this we learn that each word of which the purpose is not obvious contains some lesson of special value, as it is written: 'And with the shadow of my hand have I covered thee.' Why is it covered and hidden

from our view? For an ulterior purpose, to wit, 'to plant a heaven and to lay the foundation of an earth', as already explained.

The verse continues: 'And to say to Zion thou art 'Ami, my people' (Ibid.). This means, to say to those gates of study and those words of Zion (distinction) 'thou art 'Ami'. The word 'Ami (my people) may be read 'Imi (with me), meaning 'to be a collaborator with Me'; for just as I made heaven and earth by a word, as it says: 'By the word of the Lord the heavens were made' (Ps. 33:6), So dost thou. Happy are those who devote themselves to the study of the Torah!

You should not think, however, that all this applies even to one who is no true scholar. Not so. When one who is a stranger to the mysteries of the Torah makes pseudo-discoveries based on an incomplete understanding, that 'word' rises, and is met by the perverse One, the Demon of the false tongue, who emerges from the cavern of the great abyss and makes a leap of 500 parasangs to receive that word. He takes it and returns with it to his cavern, and shapes it into a spurious heaven which is called Tohu (chaos). That Demon then traverses in one swoop the whole of that heaven, a space of 6,000 parasangs. As soon as that heaven is formed, the Harlot emerges, and lodges herself in it, and joins forces with it, and issuing from thence she slays thousands and tens of thousands. For as long as she is lodged in that heaven she has authority and power to swoop through the world in the twinkling of an eye. This is implied in the words, 'Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity' (Is. 5:18). The word for 'iniquity', 'Avon, being of the masculine gender, designates the Demon. In the next part of the verse, 'and sin, as it were, with a cart rope', the word for 'sin', hattaah, being of the feminine gender, signifies the female, the Harlot who rushes to execute slaughter on the sons of men. Concerning her we also read, 'For she hath caused to fall many deadly wounded' (Prov. 7:26), namely, that hattaah (sin) who slays the sons of men.

And the ultimate cause is the unripe scholar who is not qualified to teach and yet does so. May God save us from him!' Said R. Simeon to the colleagues: 'I beseech you not to let fall from your mouth any word of the Torah of which you are not certain and which you have not learnt correctly from a 'great tree', so that you may not be the cause of that Harlot slaying multitudes of the sons of men.' They answered in unison, 'God forbid, God forbid!'

R. Simeon proceeded: 'See now, it was by means of the Torah that the Holy One created the world. That has already been derived from the verse, 'Then I was near him as an artisan, and I was daily all his delight' (Prov. 8:30). He looked at the Torah once, twice, thrice, and a fourth time. He uttered the words composing her and then operated through her. That

is a lesson for men, how to study the Torah properly. This lesson is indicated by the verse, 'Then did he see, and declare it; he established it, yea, and searched it out.' (Job 28:27). Seeing, declaring, establishing and searching out correspond to these four operations which the Holy One, blessed be He, went through before entering on the work of creation. Hence the account of the creation commences with the four words Bereshith Bara Elohim Eth ('In-the-beginning created God the'), before mentioning 'the heavens', thus signifying the four times which the Holy One, blessed be He, looked into the Torah before He performed His work.'

(Read Sefer Yetzilah)

-Tikkun Leil Shavuot occupies the pious till morning; others finish it at midnight.(!)