



נבואה נצחית...

The Night of Shavuos

Rabbi Shlomo Alkavetz (composer of *Lecha Dodi*) relates how the Schina revealed itself on the night of Shavuos.¹ Rabbi Yosef Karo (author of the Shulchan Aruch), Rabbi Alkavetz and several others had resolved to stay awake the entire night and learn Torah without interruption. In the midst of the learning, as midnight fell, a heavenly voice resounded through the mouth of Rabbi Yosef Karo. All fell on their faces in fear and trembling. The voice said, “Fortunate are you in this world and the next, *mehadrin min hamehadrin*, for banishing sleep from your eyes, unlike those who are at this very moment sunk in slumber which is one sixtieth of death. You have raised me from the dust and restored me to my former glory. You have earned a place in the palace of the King. The sound of the Torah you learn has broken through the heavenly firmaments and ascended to HaKadosh Baruch Hu, the angels are hushed, and the entire heavenly host is listening to your words.” The second night of Shavuos they assembled a *minyan*, and the voice returned at the very beginning of the night’s learning session, again speaking through Rabbi Yosef Karo, praising the group for their sacrifice of the night’s sleep, and spurring them on to even greater spiritual heights.

¹ Quoted in Rabbi Yeshiyahu Horowitz Ztz”l: *Shnei Luchot Habris, Perek Ner Mitzvah* (5).



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The Zohar also discusses the importance of sacrificing one's sleep on Shavuos night in order to learn Torah.² Why did Rabbi Yosef Karo not mention the practice in his Halachic work the *Sulchan Aruch*?

The Ari Za"l, following the Zohar, also tells us how important it is to dedicate the entire night of Shavuos to learning Torah. He writes, "He who learns Torah the entire night of Shavuos and does not sleep even for a moment, is promised to live out the year without any harm befalling him. That is the basis of the custom observed throughout the Jewish world of spending that entire night occupied with Torah."³

The guarantee of wellbeing for those who learn the entire night of Shavuos raises a serious difficulty: it is on Rosh Hashana that a person is judged for life and wellbeing in the next year, and not on Shavuos.

The answer to our questions is as follows. There are two levels of providential reward and punishment. The lower level is that of past-based justice and the right: the "heavenly court" metes out judgment for those who choose to live by the strict letter of the law. The higher level is that of future value and the good: HaKadosh Baruch Hu himself judges the cases of those who choose to live above and beyond the letter of the law. Just as HaShem acts within nature, and on occasion does miracles that break the laws of nature, so too, He judges us by standards that are rigid and inflexible, yet

² Zohar: *Hakdama Leparshat Bereishis; Parshat Emor*.

³ From *Shaar Hakavanot Derush Alef (Daf 89)*.



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sometimes breaks those patterns for a higher purpose. Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai expressed the idea of there being two levels of Divine judgement at the beginning of the *Idra Zutah*: “I will be judged by HaKadosh Baruch Hu alone, and not by the heavenly court.” Rabbi Shimon, who lived his entire life above and beyond the letter of the law, knew that he deserved to be judged according to a higher standard, by HaKadosh Baruch Hu alone.

Indeed, on Rosh Hashana HaKadosh Baruch Hu convenes the heavenly court to judge each person on his strict merits. However, by self-sacrifice a person can push himself into the higher, “extra-legal” category of those judged by HaKadosh Baruch Hu alone.

The legal discussions of the Talmud and the case law of the *Shulchan Aruch* represent the lower level of obligation, which applies to ordinary individuals. The Zohar and the Kabbalah point the way to the higher standard of commitment, reached by the few through uncompromising diligence and self-sacrifice.

Rabbi Yosef Karo Ztz”l Zy”a⁴ upheld the higher standard of the Zohar and stayed awake the entire night of Shavuot in order to learn Torah. The author of the *Shulchan Aruch* went beyond the strict letter of the law and accepted upon himself a higher level of commitment than required by the Talmud.

⁴ Acronyms: *Zikaron Zadik Vekadosh Levracha* (Righteous and Holy of Blessed Memory); *Zechuso Yagen Aleinu* (Whose Merits Protect Us).



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Likewise, the Ari Za"l, following the Zohar, revealed to us that a person who chooses to sacrifice his sleep on Shavuos night in order to learn Torah without interruption, in total dedication to HaShem's will, will push himself into the higher category of those judged by HaKadosh Baruch Hu alone. For those who chose to live above and beyond what the law requires, HaKadosh Baruch Hu likewise goes above and beyond the law, to suspend the strict judgment decreed on Rosh HaShanah.

Rabbi David Daniel HaCohen