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 **Tikkun Leil Shavuot**

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**In lieu of** an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

## Tikkun Leil Shavuot<sup>1</sup>

*Morris M. Fierstein (bio)*

The term "*tikkun*" has three meanings. The first is the most common meaning—repair of something that has been damaged. The second and third meanings are mystical. The second meaning is to decorate or

prepare the *Shekhinah* for her union with the male aspect of the sefirotic world and also relates to mystical rituals that relate to this event. The third meaning refers to the editing or preparation of texts that are studied during these mystical rituals. The texts consist of passages from the Bible, rabbinic literature and the *Zohar*. The booklets that were published with the appropriate texts to be read during these rituals also came to be called "*tikkunim*." There are also *tikkun* rituals for other occasions, like Hoshanah Rabbah and the seventh night of Passover. These will be discussed elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

The textual basis for the ritual of "*Tikkun Leil Shavuot*" is the following passage from the *Zohar*:

"Rabbi Simeon would sit and study Torah all night when the bride was about to be united with her husband. As we have learned that the companions of the household in the bride's palace are needed on that night when the bride is prepared for her meeting on the morrow with her husband under the bridal canopy. They need to be with her all that night and rejoice with her in the preparations with which she is adorned, studying Torah, from the Humash to the Prophets, and from the Prophets to the Writings, and then to the midrashic and mystical interpretations of the verses, for these are her adornments and her finery. And she enters with her maidens and stands above their heads, and she is made ready by them, and rejoices with them throughout the night. And on the morrow she does **[End Page 76]** not enter the bridal canopy without them, and they are the ones called "the sons of the bridal canopy." When she enters the bridal canopy the Holy One, blessed be He, inquires after them, and blesses them, and crowns them with the bridal crowns. Blessed is their portion.

And Rabbi Simeon with all his companions would sing the song of the Torah, and they would produce, every one of them, new interpretations of Torah, and Rabbi Simeon and all his companions would rejoice.

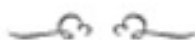
Rabbi Simeon said to them: My children, blessed is your portion, because tomorrow the bride will not enter the bridal canopy without you, for all those who concern themselves with her adornments on this night and rejoice with her will be listed and inscribed in the Book of Remembrance, and the Holy One, blessed be He, will bless them with the seventy blessings and crowns of the supernal world.<sup>3</sup>

The kabbalists drew on the midrashic imagery of Shavuot as the "marriage" of God and Israel and in particular, Rabbi Akiva's assertion that the Song of Songs was composed at Sinai and speaks of God and Israel. The union of the *Shekhinah* with the *Kadosh Barukh Hu (Tiferet)* is the sefirotic parallel of these events. Some kabbalists even composed mystical Tena'im, read on the Shabbat before Shavuot, and Ketubot, read on Shavuot before taking out the Torah, to solemnize the "marriage" of God and Israel.<sup>4</sup>

There is some debate about when the "*Tikkun Leil Shavuot*" was first practiced as an actual ritual, as opposed to a literary concept.<sup>5</sup> However, the first universally recognized celebration of a "*Tikkun Leil Shavuot*" is mentioned in a letter written by R. Solomon Alkabetz. The purpose of the letter was to describe how Joseph Karo acquired his Heavenly Maggid.<sup>6</sup> This event occurred on the first night of Shavuot, in Adrianople, Turkey, in 1534. Alkabetz begins by describing the "*tikkun*." He writes:

"Know that the saint [i.e. Karo] and I, his and your humble servant, belonging to our company, agreed to stay up all night in order to banish sleep from our eyes on Shavuot. We succeeded, thank God, so that as you will hear, we ceased not from study for even a moment. This is the order I arranged for the night. First we read the Torah with a pleasant...

## Kabbalistic Customs: A Series



### Tikkun Leil Shavuot<sup>1</sup>

MORRIS M. FAIERSTEIN

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