



# SIMCHAT SHMUEL

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Perhaps the most well known tradition associated with the *Yom Tov* of *Shavuot* is the custom to stay awake the entire night, in symbolic anticipation and preparation for the reenactment of *Kabbalat HaTorah*. As we recall this seminal event in Jewish History each year, we may actually be fulfilling a fascinating mystical concept as well.

There is a teaching in the *Mishna, (Pirkei Avot 1:15)* which introduces to us the concept of the frequency of *Torah* study. The text teaches us in the name of *Shammai*: “*Asei Toratcha Keva*”- *Make your study of Torah a kviut- an established, regular part of your daily life.*

On the simplest of levels-this is very obvious, in order for a Jew to live life as a Jew, to fulfill all aspects of Jewish ritual and living, one must be engaged in the on-going pursuit of knowledge, and continue to address all of life’s issues through the lens and guidance of the eternal wisdom of the *Torah HaKedosha*.

The *Talmud, (Masechet Shabbat 31 a)* echoes this sentiment: “*Amar Rava: beshaa shemachnisin adam ladin omrim lo:...kavata*

*itim latorah?*” “*Rava said: When a soul appears before the Heavenly tribunal to be judged, he will be asked: ‘Did you set aside time for the study of Torah?’*”

The **Rambam**, in the opening chapter of the laws of *Talmud Torah*, spells out in specific terms the importance of regular *Torah* study and some of its parameters. In the eighth entry he writes:

“*Kol Ish MiYisrael chayav b’talmud torah, bein ani, bein ashir, bein shalom b’gufo, bein baal yisurin, bein bachur, bein shehaya zakein gadol shetashsash kocho. Afilu ani hamitparneis min hatzedaka umchazer al hapetachim, v’afilu baal isha uvanim-chayav likboa lo zeman letalmud torah bayom uvalaylasheneemar-“V’hagita bo Yomam Valayla (Yehoshua 1:8)...”*

“*Every Jew is required to study Torah, whether impoverished or wealthy, healthy or ill, young or old and weak. Even a beggar who is dependent on charity, and who must go door to door, and a man with a wife and family to support must devote time to study Torah day and night, as stated in the verse: “and you shall discuss it day and night... (Joshua 1:8).”*

It seems the **Rambam** adds an additional stringency to this idea of regular *Torah* study-that one must set aside time to study regularly **both bayom**-during the daytime as well as *balayla*- in the evening.

There is a fascinating statement which might help us better understand this idea, in the first comments of the **Magen Avraham**, the important legal work and commentary on the *Shulchan Aruch* written by

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the 17th Century Sage Rabbi Avraham Abele Gombiner.

In the very first entry in this work, he wrote: *“Beshelah Katuv: sod lechibeir yom velayla betorah oh betefilla, bein baboker, bein baerev...”* *“It is written in the **Shnei Luchot HaBrit** (two tablets of the law written by the 16th Century Kabbalist Rabbi Yeshayahu Horowitz, of Prague): it is a mystical fundamental to join together day and night with Torah study or with prayer, both at daybreak, and at nightfall...”*

What exactly is the *Kabbalistic* significance that the **Shnei Luchot Habrit** refers to, in joining the day and night or night to day, through either *Torah* or *Tefilla*?

*Shlomo HaMelech in Mishlei (Proverbs) wrote- “Ki Ner Mitzva, v’Torah Ohr”-‘Each mitzva is like a candle and the Torah is light.*

The Chasidic Masters often speak of the analogy of the light of *Torah* outshining the darkness in the world. When a Jew brings a little bit of *Torah* into the twilight zone at the end of each day, or from the night into the early hours of the morning, symbolically, mystically they are contributing to bring the light of the Divine into this world which is often seen as being full of darkness and confusion.

Perhaps this is another possible reason for the custom to stay awake studying *Torah* the entire night on *Shavuot*. On the very day we anxiously and joyously prepare ourselves to once again symbolically stand and accept the *Torah* at *Sinai*, we simultaneously and symbolically help to bring the light and perspective of *Torah* into this world of confusion. On *Shavuot* we rejoice that we have received the gift of *Torah* as a source of guidance and inspiration which helps to bring light, clarity and meaning to our lives, and to the world around us.... Chag Sameach! ■

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