

TIKKUN CHATZOT: THE MIDNIGHT PRAYER

Everyone who mourns over Yerushalayim merits seeing her joy

(Taanit 30b)

How precious it is to rise at midnight in order to pray and meditate and study Torah. Try to make it a regular practice. Then you will be worthy of succeeding in the task of separating the good from the evil in the world. You will also develop a good memory - which means always to remember your purpose in life and to keep in mind the enduring life you are destined for in the end. You must recognize that everything you do in this world only has meaning in relation to the World to Come. You should reflect on every experience which G-d sends you: consider all the different situations you find yourself in each day. The only purpose of all of them is to offer you hints as to how you can draw closer to G-d at every moment. This is the only true and enduring goal in the world. The entire purpose of man's being sent into this world is only to come closer to G-d. All the days of his vanity, all the experiences he has on each one of them are only for this

(Likute Moharan 1, 54).

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS THE FEELING OF ONE'S HEART

It is true that mourning over the destruction of the Holy Temple is something that should be expressed in outward actions, especially during the Three Weeks, when one should put ashes on one's head at the place where one lays tefillin and sit by the doorway day and night to recite Tikkun Chatzot. Still, the main thing is not the outward actions but the feelings one has in one's heart. One should feel brokenhearted, shed bitter tears and sigh mournfully over the pain of Heaven. This depends on one's level of knowledge and insight, one's love of G-d and the purity

of one's soul It may be true that we today have fallen to a very low level, and no one understands the full extent of what we are missing and what we have lost, what we have caused because of our sins and what the "exile of the Shechinah" really means. Our very lack of understanding and sensitivity should fill us with anguish. Even so, each person is only obliged to do what he is capable of. One should imagine how he would feel if his mother was swathed and garbed in black, and was crying bitterly and shrieking, "The pain in my head! the pain in my arm! I brought up children... I raised them... and they rebelled against me! One should focus one's mind and heart on bitter images and pour out one's soul in a bitter cry and then maybe one will be worthy of seeing the consolation of Tzion and the building of our Holy Temple in all its glory soon in our days (Pele Yoetz, Aleph).

Everyone who mourns over Yerushalayim merits seeing her joy (Taanit 30b). It is a fact that all of a person's faculties are drawn after his thoughts. Wherever his thoughts are, that is where his very essence is drawn. Accordingly, when a person has holy thoughts and mourns over Yerushalayim, his thoughts and very essence are bound up with holiness. The expression - "he merits" (Zoche)- has the connotation of purification. Through mourning over Yerushalayim one becomes purified, and then, even today, one can see and experience something of the joy of Yerushalayim as it will be in time to come (Kedushat Levi).

You may say, "Who am I to pray over the exile and Yerushalayim? Will the ingathering of the exiles and the ultimate salvation come about through my prayers?' The answer is the same as we have learned (Sanhedrin 37): "The reason why each person is created as a unique individual is so that each one will say, 'The world was created for me.' " It gives G-d great delight when His children pray and entreat Him about this, even if their request cannot be granted because the time has not yet come or for some other reason. Even so, they have done their part, and G-d rejoices over this (Mesilat Yesharim 19).

R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi, author of the Tanya said: The time of favor in Heaven is in fact beyond earthly space and time. However, it radiates to the lower worlds at the appropriate time in each given location (Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Hashkamat HaBoker 1:8)

The way to come to repentance is through Tikkun Chatzot. Someone who is unable to do this every night should still be sure to do so at the very least once a week (Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Iggeret Ha Teshuvah 10).

"Bless G-d, all G-d's servants who stand in the house of G-d in the nights"(Psalms 134:1). Rabbi Yochanan said. Those who study Torah at night are considered as if they were engaged in the Temple service (Menachot 110a).

Everyone who gets up at midnight to delight in the Torah of the Holy One has a thread of mercy drawn down upon him to give him constant protection in this world, as it is written (Psalms 42:9), "By day G-d will command His mercy, and at night His song is with me" (Zohar 1, 82a).

Torah study after Chatzot subdues the forces of evil (see Zohar 1, 248). The forces of unholiness are defeated and one's sins are forgiven. One's mind and thoughts become purified and one can grasp G-d's unity without confusion. Everyone who wants to come close to G-d should drive sleep from his eyes at night and devote himself to Torah study and prayer in order to overcome the "husks" This will certainly help him come closer to G-d (Reshit Chochmah, Shaar HaKedushah 7).

A person who gets up regularly for Tikkun Chatzot is a tzaddik. A thread of mercy is stretched over him to save him from all accusers. He is considered a member of the Court of the King. His livelihood is assured. He is called 'G-d-fearing, a 'lover of the King, a son of the Holy One. No one speaks out against him. It is to him that the dictum that "G-d is close to all who call out to Him' applies. He is bound to the World to Come, and the Holy One and all the tzaddikim in the Garden of Eden hear his voice. Since the Zohar writes that at midnight G-d's favor is revealed to cancel all harsh judgments, his reward is that his soul will ascend at a time of favor (Siddur of to Shne Luchot haBrit)

If the Jewish People were careful to get up for Chatzot their enemies would be subdued and would not impose any decrees against them. All our suffering in this bitter exile is caused because of not getting up to study Torah and sing songs of praise after Chatzot (Zohar Chai, Bereshit 77).

TIKKUN CHATZOT IS MENTIONED IN THE FIRST SECTION OF THE SHULCHAN ARUCH

If one is able to rise at midnight and perform Tikkun Chatzot, there is nothing more meritorious than this; as it is said (Lamentations 2:19): "Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches;" just as the Holy One, blessed be He, laments at that moment, as it is written (Jeremiah 25:30): "The Lord will roar from on high, and from His holy habitation utter His voice; He will roar mightily because of His fold." And our Sages tell us (Berachot 3a) that the Almighty then says: "Woe to My children on account of whose iniquity I destroyed My house, burnt My Temple, and exiled them among the nations." But if one is unable to rise at midnight, let one at least make an effort to rise before dawn; as King David said (Psalms 57:9): "I will awake the dawn," which means, I awake the dawn, but the dawn does not awake me. One may perform the midnight rite (Tikkun Chatzot) even past midnight, and then engage in the study of the Torah, according to one's knowledge. The study of the Mishnah is preferable to any other thing. But if one is not a scholar, one may read the Psalms, Maamadot, or some book of ethics. A little with devotion is better than much without devotion. Rabbi Chiyya taught (Tamid 32b): "The Divine Presence is in the presence of him who studies the Torah at night; as it is said (Lamentations 2:19): "Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches; pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord;" which signifies that the Divine Presence is then before us. Our Rabbis, of blessed memory, said again: "He who engages in the study of the Torah at night, is called 'a servant of the Lord;' as it is said (Psalms 134:1): 'All ye servants of the Lord who stand by night in the house of the Lord.'" When the nights are short and it is impossible to rise so early, he should at least try to rise early enough to have sufficient time to prepare himself to go to the synagogue to pray together with the congregation. (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 1)

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO START SAYING TIKKUN CHATZOT

The saintly Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian (1876-1970) started getting up regularly for Tikkun Chatzot in his later years. When one of his students asked him why, Rabbi Lopian said, 'When I leave this world and come before the Heavenly tribunal, they will ask me if I kept the Shulchan Aruch, and presumably I will say I did. They're sure to say, 'Let's check,' and they will probably start going through the Shulchan Aruch section by section, law by law. If they catch me on some detail after about two hundred sections, I might be able to come up with an answer. But what am I going to

say if they catch me on the very first section?" (Rabbi Moshe Aaron Stern, Mashgiach, Kaminetz Yeshiva, Jerusalem)

G-d is now ready and waiting to rebuild our Holy Temple. For our part, we should be very careful to do nothing that might delay the rebuilding. Indeed, we ourselves should make an effort to rebuild it - by getting up at Chatzot each night to mourn over the destruction. One should say to oneself, "Maybe in a previous incarnation I was the cause of the destruction of the Temple. And even if not, it could be that my sins are holding up the rebuilding, and that is as bad as if I caused the actual destruction." One should shed tears over this at Chatzot each night, and then it will be as if one were trying to rebuild the Temple. Tikkun Chatzot brings a person to the truth. His eyes are opened and he sees himself and his life clearly. He cleanses himself of all negative traits and comes to know and understand the holy Name of G-d (Likutey Moharan 11, 67).

A WHOLE CITY SAYS TIKKUN CHATZOT IN RECENT TIMES

Rabbi Avraham Entebi was rav of the city of Aram Tzova (Aleppo) in Syria during the 18th century. He writes: "In my youth there was a rabbi in the town called R. Yedidiah ben Dayan, who took it upon himself to rise before Chatzot and walk through the streets together with the synagogue sextons. They would knock on the doors of the houses of all the Jews telling them to get up and come to the synagogue. G-d was with him, and practically no one let him down. I can safely say that the majority of our community used to get up after Chatzot and come to the synagogue. The people sat in groups. There was a group of young scholars who used to sit learning Talmud... Some studied Shulchan Aruch. Some studied Zohar, while others studied mussar works... Every Thursday night there were some who spent the entire night in the synagogue. Before Shabbat R. ben Dayan would bring sufficient oil to light up the whole synagogue, and practically the entire community would come during the night and recite all of the Book of Psalms in unison, followed by the Song of Songs.. "I can testify that the entire time they abided by this practice, 'the Children of Israel had light in their dwellings' (Exodus 10:23). Throughout those years there were no tragedies, and not a single Jew came to any harm... It was a period of plenty and prosperity. People were free of worry. No one died before his time. Of that generation, I say, And Your people are all tzaddikim' (Isaiah 60:21)" (Korban Isheh, Introduction).

**FORTUNATE THE ONES WHO STUDY AFTER
MIDNIGHT THEY ALWAYS HAVE A PORTION
IN THE WORLD TO COME**

At midnight, when the cock crows, a wind blows from the North, but at the same time a current from the South arises and strikes against it, causing it to subside. Then the Holy One, blessed be He, rises as is His wont to disport himself with the righteous in the Garden of Eden. Happy the portion of the man who rises at that hour to study with zest the Torah, for the Holy One, blessed be He, and all the righteous listen to his voice; for so it is written, "Thou that dwells in the gardens, the companions hearken for Your voice, cause me to hear it" (S. S- VIII, 13). Nay more, G-d draws round him a certain thread of grace which secures him the protection both of the higher and the lower angels, as it is written, "By day the Lord will command his grace, and at night I shall chant his song" (PS. 42, 9).' R. Hizkiah said: 'Whoever studies the Torah at that hour has constantly a portion in the future world.' Said R. Jose to him: 'What do you mean by "constantly"?' He replied: 'I have learnt that at midnight, when the Holy One, blessed be He, enters the Garden of Eden, all the plants of the Garden are watered more plentifully by the stream which is called (gab] "the ancient stream" and "the stream of delight", the waters of which never cease to flow. When a man rises and studies the Torah at this hour, the water of that stream is, as it were, poured on his head and he is watered by it along with the other plants of the Garden of Eden. Moreover, because all the righteous in the Garden listen to him, he is given a right to be watered by that stream, and in this way he has a portion constantly in the future world.

ZOHAR HA KADOSH LECH LECHA 92B

**THE TRUE SERVANTS OF G-D ARE THOSE THAT GET
UP AT MIDNIGHT TO STUDY THE TORAH**

But when Jacob R. Judah discoursed on the verse - Behold, Bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, etc. (Ps. 134, 1). 'This verse tells us', he said, 'that only those are truly worthy to bless the Almighty who are the servants of the Lord. For although it is true that every Israelite is regarded as fit to bless the Almighty, yet only the servants of the Lord are worthy to offer those blessings from which is diffused blessing in the upper and lower worlds. And who, then, are those servants of the Lord? "They that stand in the house of the Lord in the nights" (Ibid.), those who rise at midnight and keep vigil in the study of the Torah: these do "stand in the house of the Lord in the nights', as at that time the Holy One, blessed be He, comes to disport Himself with the righteous in the Garden of Eden.

ZOHAR HA KADOSH TOLDOT 136

THE TRUE BELIEVERS ARE THOSE WHO STUDY THE TORAH AT NIGHT

When R. Hizkiah was studying with R. Isaac, they once rose at midnight to study the Torah. R. Isaac discoursed on the verse- "Behold, bless you the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, which by night stand in the house of the Lord" (Ps. 136, 1). 'This verse', he said, 'is a tribute to all true believers. And who are the true believers ? Those who study the Torah and know how to unify the Holy Name in the fitting manner. 1'3a] When a man rises at midnight to study the Torah and the North Wind awakes, then a certain Hind? arises and praises the Holy One, blessed be He. And with Her arise thousands and myriads [of angels] who all commence to praise the holy King. But they all fall into silence in order to listen to those who study the Torah, and they proclaim: "Behold, bless ye the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord", as much as to say, "You bless the Lord, you praise the holy King, you crown the King." And that Hind adorns herself with that man and stands before the King and says: "See the son with whom I am come before thee, with whom I approach thee." Their blessing is a real blessing, as it says, "Lift up your hands in (to) holiness" (Ibid.)

ZOHAR HA KADOSH VAYIKRA 12B

A STORY FROM THE TIME OF THE ARIZAL

Rabbi Avraham HaLevy, who composed the Tikkuney Shabbat, lived in Safed in the time of the ARI (Rabbi Yitzchak Luria 1534-72). Every night Rabbi Avraham would get up at Chatzot and go around the Jewish quarter of the town crying out bitterly, "Jewish brothers, you surely know that the Shechinah is in exile because of our many sins, and our Holy Temple has been burnt down. Rise up and let us cry out to our G-d, who is a loving and compassionate King! Perhaps G-d will hear our cries and prayers and have mercy on the remnant of Israel" Rabbi Avraham gave no rest to anyone in town, and they all used to get up and go to the study houses, where they would recite Tikkun Chatzot. Afterwards everyone studied at his own level, or recited songs and prayers until the light of day. The ARI was filled with praise for Rabbi Avraham's saintliness, and said that he was a reincarnation of the prophet Yirmiyahu. Once the ARI said to him, 'You should know that your days are ended and the time has come for you to leave the world.. unless you undertake the following mission - and if you do, you will live another twenty-two years. You must go to Yerushalayim and pray at the Western Wall. Pour your heart out, and then you will merit to see the Shechinah". The saintly Rabbi Avraham closed himself up in his

house for three days and nights and sat fasting in sackcloth and ashes. He then went to the Western Wall and poured out his heart in prayer, weeping profusely. Afterwards he noticed the form of a woman near the wall. She was swathed in black. Rabbi Avraham was so afraid that he fell down on his face crying and sobbing, "Oy! That I should see you like this OY! My poor soul" He cried and cried, pulling at his hair, until eventually he fainted and fall into a deep sleep. He dreamed that a holy spirit clothed in beautiful garments came to him and said, "Be comforted, my son Avraham, for there is hope for you in the and the children will come back to their land, for I will free them from their captivity and have pity on them. " Rabbi Avraham woke up and journeyed back to Safed. When he came to the ARI, the latter immediately said: "I see from your appearance that you had the privilege of seeing the face of the Shechinah. You can now be sure that you will live another twenty-two years." Rabbi Avraham did indeed live for twenty-two more years, and he should be an example to everyone to rise at Chatzot, or at least before the light of day, to mourn over the destruction of the Holy Temple...

...Regardless of whether one recites many prayers or just a few, the main thing is to direct one's heart to Heaven, and one will then be worthy of seeing the rebuilding of Zion and Yerushalayim. Amen (Kav HaYashar 93).