

## Capturing the Wall: The Story of Shavuot 1967

By Aaron Hirsh

A brilliant flash shattered the darkness. The lonely climber saw in that blink of an eye that he was almost at the top of the peak, and around him a gorgeous valley spread with lakes reflecting the awesome mountain. And then it was dark again. Life flashes with those moments where everything is clear. So does Jewish history. I'd like to tell you about two of them.

As the taxi started driving I asked, "Can you please turn off the radio."

Usually you only see the back of the driver's head. This one turned around smiling: "Only if you sing to me," he answered in Hebrew.

"Simin Tov u Mazal Tov" I began happily.

"V simin tov u Mazal Tov," he joined in. Now he, my wife and I were all smiling.

I guess the song transported him back to a memory because he asked suddenly: "Have you ever heard about the liberation of the Western Wall in 1967?"

"Sure" I answered.

"I was there. I was a soldier in a unit fighting the Jordanians in the Old City. Our troop advanced into a section of the Old city. Although I had never been there before, and the Arabs had animals grazing and manure scattered between their houses and the ancient walls of the Old City, I seemed to recognize where I was. Suddenly I realized I was standing at the Western Wall.

I went to a school that was not religious. I remember we only had one textbook with anything religious in it. It had three religious pictures: the Tomb of Rachel, the Cave of Machpella where Avraham, Sara and the other forefathers are buried, and the Western Wall.

This was the picture of the place from my schoolbook. I was standing at the Western Wall. Suddenly I couldn't move. My entire body was tingling, and I became overwhelmed by the holiness of where I was. Over my head I felt the presence of the "Shehina" (the Presence of G-d which is said to always dwell at the Western Wall), and I became completely paralyzed.

Meanwhile the Jordanians were shooting at us from the building tops. So when my fellow soldier ran up to me he thought I had been shot. He started checking me for bullet wounds, but he found none. No blood was flowing. Finally he realized I was in shock. He started shaking me till I came to."

I could not believe the story I was hearing, but it got even better.

"Out of nowhere a Rabbi appeared. Rabbi Goren. We were soldiers ready for battle, but he was only a civilian. We ran to cover him. He was carrying a shofar, and was headed straight for the Wall.

As he reached the wall he said the Shehechianu prayer, and then took his shofar and began to blow. Then I heard him radio: 'The Kotel Ma'arvi is in our hands, I repeat the Kotel Ma'arvi is in our hands'."

As he told me his story I could not help but wonder why the Rabbi seemed to be more informed than the soldiers. How did he know to be there? Shouldn't the soldiers have been radioing that they had captured their target? I understood as he continued:

"We had no orders to capture the Kotel. We just ended up there."

As I heard his story it was as if it had been prophesized. It mirrored the words and events of the 3rd Jew to visit the place of the temple and his reaction over three thousand years earlier:

"Jacob...encountered (bumped into) the place...and behold G-d was standing over him and He said: ...I will guard you wherever you go and I will return you to this soil...Jacob ...said: "Surely G-d is in this place and I did not know! And he became frightened and said: "How awesome is this place!...this is the gate of Heaven."  
(Genesis 28 vs. 10-17)

"You heard of Yitzak Rabin?" the driver then asked. I couldn't tell if he meant the question seriously. "He arrived next, and soon after him Moshe Dayan, and realized they'd captured the Kotel. Maybe you have seen two of the posters from that moment?" He asked pointing to his hair. "I am balding now, but I am in one of them, the one in the helmet," he told me, and I did recognize him.

I thought to myself that the patriotic textbooks that feature that picture probably wouldn't sequence the events in the order he was telling me.

"We bumped into the Kotel, and the Rabbi blew the shofar, and then the Generals showed up," but Jacob, after whom we call ourselves Israel, is described by the Torah as "bumping into the place, and he is described as "the man of truth".

The beauty of the taxi driver's story was what he told me next. "It was summer time. After the liberation, first we invited all the yeshivas, and the rabbis to visit the Kotel. The next week was Shavout, and we opened it for all of Israel to come and visit."

Even though the taxi driver was not wearing a kippa, he turned around and the words of a Gemara flowed from his mouth:

"If you weren't there to see the joy of the Simchat Beit Sho'eva (the water drawing festival in the temple on Succas) then you have never seen true happiness"

I nodded, waiting to hear what he'd tell me next.

"If you were not there to see the joy of the Jews coming back to the Kotel, then you have never experienced true happiness."

You could see that he had experienced true celebration, and that its joy was alive within him now as it was when he experienced it forty years earlier.

"People were bawling, embracing, falling to their feet. For six months after you could not get an airplane ticket to Israel from abroad. Everyone was coming to see the Western Wall."

Every Shavout in Jerusalem, a few hours before sunrise from distant hills from every edge of the city the deserted streets begin to fill with Jews until from every direction Jews of every kind stream towards one central point-- the Western Wall. You can hear the roar of people moving - old men, kids, groups of teenage girls, yeshiva students with their rabbis, and voices singing. And then in a single moment-at

sunrise, the moment at which G-d gave His beloved Jewish people his beloved torah, all these different Jews step into prayer, as one man with one heart, and all is silent. I wondered if that tradition started that Shavout in 1967 with the story of our taxi driver.

As he spoke the rest of the ride home I was thinking about all the holy men who wept bitterly to merit to see the Kotel and died with their dream unfulfilled. I wondered what it was about him that he had been chosen. I remembered the story that I heard when showed the picture of the Kotel being liberated, the picture of our driver:

As soldiers ran to the Kotel, one of the non-religious soldiers who ran to the Wall saw the religious soldiers crying. He too began to cry.

The religious soldier looked at him surprised and asked: "I know why I am crying, but why are you crying?" The nonreligious soldier answered back: "I am crying because I don't know what I am supposed to be crying about."

Interesting how the moment of the giving of the torah ripples through the millennia to re-emerge in the subconscious of every type of Jew, all leading their own separate lives, to again be like one man with one heart at the Kotel on Shavout. We all have two identities-the person we identify with day to day and the picture of ourselves we see within the critical moments of life that flash with clarity. At those moments we know who we are.

The moment in the history of the Jewish people when we saw ourselves as Israel, one man with one heart, was at the giving of Torah. I did not have to ask the driver his name to know that he, for me and everyone else who has seen his picture, is Israel.

Perhaps out of all the people in the world, G-d had chosen a 19 year old boy from Haifa, our taxi driver, to redeem the Wall so that the flood of Jewish people could stream there again, in order to give us all a broader vision of who we are in essence. The torah is for all of us. It is our heart, and connects us even when we see ourselves as very far from it.

Each one of us is like a lone climber through the darkness of exile struggling to cling to whatever Judaism we have left. The flash of light that puts us back in touch with our mission, and how close we are to achieving it was the light that flashed for our driver and the whole Jewish world in 1967. It is the lightning that lit up our souls with a sense of who we truly are-the light of the giving of the Torah.

## Everyone Had a Chance

The day drew near when G-d desired to give the Torah to His chosen people, the children of Israel, whom He saw now cleansed of the impurities that had filled their lives in the slavery of Egypt.

But G-d decided that it would only be fair to offer the Torah to the other nations of the earth (although He knew that they would reject it) before offering it to the children of Israel. And so He first approached the Edomites, descendants of Esau, and offered them the Torah with these inviting words:

"Ye, Edomites, sons of Esau, I bring you a gift - My holy Torah. Accept it and ye shall be blessed with long life, you and your children also."

"What is written in Your Torah?" questioned the Edomites.

"It is written in My Torah: `You shall not murder!' "

"But that is ridiculous!" protested the Edomites.

"We are soldiers, men of war who live by the sword! How do you expect us to accept a Torah that preaches against our chosen way of life? No, thank you. Your Torah is no use to us at all."

G-d then took the Torah to the children of Ishmael and offered it to them:

"Children of Ishmael, accept the Torah which I bring you this day, and if you keep its commandments you shall be blessed with all good!"

"What does Your Torah demand of us?" the Ishmaelites asked cautiously.

"My Torah says 'You shall not steal!' " replied the Almighty.

"That wouldn't suit us at all," replied the sons of Ishmael. We are men of commerce, and such a law would interfere with our business transactions. We are sorry, but we have no use for Your Torah."

The next people that G-d approached were the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon and all the people of Canaan, to whom He said

"I bring you a most precious gift - My Torah. Take it and you shall all be blessed with many days upon your land!"

The Canaanites spoke up, saying: "First tell us what is written in Your Torah."

"In My Torah it is written: 'You shall have fair scales, correct weights, and give full measure,' " replied the Almighty.

"We do not want to accept Your Torah which is so finicky about such matters. Your Torah is not for us!" answered the Canaanites emphatically.

And thus, after G-d had taken the Torah to all the other nations of the world, who lacked sufficient understanding to estimate its worth, He went to the children of Israel. He was confident that His chosen people would appreciate the Torah and accept it eagerly.

## MEGILLAT (SCROLL OF) RUTH

The Story of Ruth begins with a famine in *Eretz Yisrael*. Elimelech and his wife Naomi and their two sons, Machlon and Kilion, leave from Bethlehem in Judah to live in Moab.

Elimelech fled from Bethlehem not because he was hungry — he had more food than he needed. He was very wealthy. He was afraid that the poor and hungry would come knocking on his door for help. He was more concerned with his fortune than the plight of his people. Responsibility to his fellow Jews came last in his list of priorities, and for that he was punished. Elimelech died in Moab, leaving his righteous wife Naomi a widow.

His two surviving sons, Machlon and Kilion, should have seen the hand of *Hashem*, and returned to Bethlehem, but they did not. They stayed in Moab and married Orpah and Ruth, two Moabite princesses, elevating their status in their comfortable, self-imposed exile. The two men also died, and then there were three widows. Having lost her family and her fortune, the righteous Naomi turned her sights back to Bethlehem where she had belonged all along.

Both daughters-in-law wanted to accompany her, but Naomi said no.

Why go to a strange land, to a life of loneliness and poverty? Orpah kissed Naomi good-bye and went back to Moab, but Ruth clung to Naomi with a fierce loyalty and the immortal words:

*Wherever you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people are my people and your G-d is my G-d; where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried (1:16-17).*

Naomi and Ruth went back to Bethlehem where they lived as paupers.

Young, vigorous Ruth cared for her aged, broken mother-in-law, begging and scrounging in the fields. There she met Boaz, who, according to the Sages (*Bava Basra 91a*), was the Judge Ivtzan (*Judges 12:8*), who had just lost his wife. His extensive properties were managed and run by his many employees.

He saw Ruth gathering neglected sheaves in the field, and he admired her honesty and modesty, not to mention her devotion to Naomi, his relative. Boaz recognized his responsibilities, not only to help the two women but to preserve their self-respect while doing so.

During the harvest, while Ruth spent her time gleaning in Boaz's field and had at least limited access to him, Naomi hoped that Ruth's 'chance

encounter' with Boaz was providential and that Boaz would 'redeem' Ruth by marrying her, thus perpetuating Machlon's memory.

But then the harvest was over and Boaz made no such move. The prospect that Ruth might meet Boaz again was remote, and Naomi feared that since Boaz had not taken the initiative when Ruth was near, he could hardly be expected to respond to more conventional suggestions of marriage when she was out of sight. For all they knew, Boaz might even be offended at the mere suggestion of a marriage to Ruth. After all, Naomi was destitute, Ruth was of Moabite stock, and Boaz was a man of substance, the Judge and leader of the generation. Could Naomi expect simply to ask him to redeem and marry this girl?

Naomi realized that she had to take a bold initiative. She therefore decided that the best course - however daring and unconventional — was for Ruth herself to approach Boaz very privately and remind him of his responsibility to the family of his dead uncle, Elimelech. In a personal confrontation - convinced that her motives were sincere his compassion for her bitter plight might be evoked. It was.

As an outgrowth of these events, Boaz married Ruth and she conceived on the last day of his life. Their child was Oved, grandfather of King David, first of the royal family of Israel—the House of David. The *Talmud* calls Ruth *Ima Shel Malchut*, (mother of royalty), because her progeny included David and Solomon, and the future *Moshiach* who will end all exiles, return Israel to its greatest glory, and lead all the world to the destiny for which it was created.

## **A story and discussion questions for parents and kids about Shavuot and the importance of unity.**

Shavuot is one of the most important days of the Jewish year.

On Shavuot the whole nation stood together at Mount Sinai and God gave them the Torah. The same Torah we have today!

A wonderful thing happened when they stood together at that mountain. They felt an awesome unity. In the presence of God, everyone forgot their selfish feelings and they all cared about each other just as much as they cared about themselves. They were like "one person with one heart."

Every year since then, for over 3000 years, we try to recreate these feelings of unity on Shavuot. We try to appreciate the special gift of the Torah, and remember that when we all look out for each other, amazing things can happen.

In our story, a group of individuals become a team and reach the highest heights.

### **STORY**

"All Together Now"

"Coach, I think we should just give up now," sighed Barry, the center of the Rams basketball team.

His team-mates nodded in agreement.

It was half-time of the championship game and the Wolves were ahead of the Rams by 20 points.

"What are you talking about?" answered the coach confidently.

"But coach, they're killing us." groaned Barry. "Each one of them is a superstar. We just can't compete!"

Coach Manhig wiped his brow and said "I know how you guys feel. They are a bunch of stars. But that's just why I think we can beat 'em."

The boys' perked up a little and waited for the coach to go on.

"We might not be as talented as they are, its true. But we have one advantage over them, we know how to play as a team. I can see that the Wolves are all out for themselves and that they have no teamwork. In the end its gonna backfire. If you all get back out there and try not to be selfish, work together and help each other out, you' ll win. So go out there and DO IT!"

The coach slapped each one of the boys on the back as he sent the team onto the court for the second half of the game.

Sure enough the Rams played with togetherness and with a minute left in the game the score was tied!



Now the Wolves had the ball. Each one of them was screaming to his team-mate to pass him the ball so that he could be the hero. But the player with the ball took the shot himself and it was a wild shot that missed by a mile.

Barry, the Rams' center caught the ball, and was about to take a shot. But then he thought of his coaches words, "try not to be selfish" and decided to pass the ball to his team-mate, Jonny who was closer to the basket.

Jonny scored an easy hoop just as the buzzer sounded, ending the game. The Rams had won!

After the game coach Manhig asked the team to vote for the "star of the game award." But he cracked a big smile when everyone gave him the same answer: "We all were!"

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

### **Age 3-5**

**Q.** If there was something big and heavy that had to be moved, do you think it would be easier to move it by yourself, or if you and some of your friends moved it together? Why?

**A.** It would be easier if we did it all together. When we work together we can really get things done that would be much harder to do alone.

**Q.** How would you feel about your friends after you finished working together and got the job done?

**A.** We would feel very close and friendly to each other since we had all worked together.

### **Age 6-9**

**Q.** What do you think makes people feel united with each other? What makes our family united?

**A.** When people feel like they have something in common with each other, and they have similar goals, they feel united. When people love and care for each other, they feel united. When God gave the Torah to the Jewish people, they all felt like they were one family and had the same special goal of keeping the Torah.

**Q.** What causes disunity and fights between people or countries?

**A.** One big cause is selfishness. When people are only concerned with what they want and don't care about the other guy's needs there are likely to be bad feelings and fights.

### **Age 10-13**

**Q.** What does it mean that "the whole is greater than the sum (total) of its parts"?

**A.** Often when things or people come together, something more comes out than would if they were separate. For example: bread, cheese, and tomato sauce all taste pretty good by themselves, but when you eat them together as pizza, it all tastes much better. With people also, when they unite and work together there is the potential for much greater things than even the combined efforts of each of them working separately.

**Q.** Do you think a person should be willing to give up some of his own good or comfort for the common good of a larger group such as a) his family, b) community, or c) the world? Why or why not?

## The Best Merchandise

Onkelos was the son of Emperor Hadrian's sister. Being a clever, handsome, well-mannered young man, he had grown up to be one of the most promising future leaders of the mighty Roman Empire. His uncle looked forward to the time when Onkelos would be ready to make his formal debut on the stage of public Roman life.

By chance, Onkelos had become acquainted with some of the noble Jewish families who had settled in Rome. Through them, he was introduced to the Jewish religion, and was very much attracted to it.

Onkelos had to remember, however, that he was the noble son of the most eminent family of the Roman Empire. It was unwise for him to be observed associating with Jews. Still more dangerous would it have been, had he openly stated his intention of changing to the Jewish religion. It would have been sheer suicide. On the other hand, Onkelos felt increasingly drawn to the Jewish faith.

After long deliberation, he worked out a solution to his problem. He visited his uncle, Emperor Hadrian. During their conversation he casually mentioned that he had become interested in the world of commerce, and that he would like to dedicate some time and effort to becoming fully acquainted with the principles and workings of this most important field of public endeavor.

Hadrian, who was very fond of his nephew, was highly pleased at this show of interest in such complicated matters as the theory and practice of economics. He gave Onkelos this advice: "The basic approach to commerce is the discovery of merchandise of a highly marketable product which has yet to come before the public. This type of merchandise is the most profitable kind of business."

This is exactly what Onkelos wanted to hear. Now he was given a free hand to travel about and to associate with merchants, many of whom were Jews, without attracting unwanted attention and giving cause for suspicion. In the course of extensive trips he visited the Holy Land, and remained there to study Torah.

Gifted with an extraordinary and keen mind, he easily overcame the difficulties of the Hebrew language, law and lore. After a while he was ready to adopt the Jewish religion and to abide by the commands of the Torah. Secretly, he became a ger, a convert to Judaism.

Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua were the spiritual leaders of the Jewish people in those days. Onkelos visited them and begged them to accept him as their disciple.

The Sages saw the deep change that had taken place in the attitude of the young, noble Roman. Instead of haughtiness, he now showed humility and a readiness to study, like all other students of Torah.

They finally agreed to the urgent request of the young ger, and spent much time and effort on his Jewish education.

The time came when Onkelos could no longer delay his return to Rome. Confident in G-d's help, he parted from the Sages who had become his revered teachers, and embarked on his trip home.

After his arrival in Rome, he paid his due visit to the Emperor Hadrian, who quickly noticed the deep change that had come over his nephew during his long absence. It was a more humble, yet wiser Onkelos, who now stood before him, than the one who had left to study commerce.

"What has happened to you, my dear nephew? Did you meet failure in your business ventures, or did any one dare to harm you?" the emperor asked him.

"Who would harm the nephew of the mightiest man in the world?" replied Onkelos with a smile.

"Why then do I see such humility in your countenance, my nephew?"

Onkelos decided to be straightforward. "I cannot but tell you the full truth, my dear uncle. The reason for the change in me is the fact that I spent much time and effort in the study of Torah, the Law of the Jewish people. What is more, I even went so far as to adopt the Jewish religion as my own."

Emperor Hadrian's face grew red with fury over his nephew's confession. This spelled the end of Onkelos's political career and deprived him, his uncle, of the one on whom he had counted heavily in his future political plans.

When his fury abated, Hadrian felt that he should give his nephew a fair chance to explain his behavior before doing anything to punish him. "You have thoroughly disappointed my high hopes and expectations of you. Yet I am curious to know what caused such unbelievable foolishness on the part of such a clever young fellow as you. Perhaps there was some young woman who trapped you against your will?"

"My dear uncle and friend, to be frank, I must state that no such reason was at the root of my change of religion. What prompted me to take such a weighty step was none other than your sound advice before I parted from you."

Angrily, Hadrian retorted: "I would be the last man to advise you so stupidly."

"Yet remember, dear uncle, before I left, you advised me to search for merchandise that had the promise of being a best selling article. On my extensive trips and thorough study of many countries and conditions, I did not discover any merchandise that, at the present time, is considered lowlier or cheaper than the Jewish religion and the Jewish people.

Yet, there is also no doubt in my mind that it will become the most valuable merchandise of all in the future. As the Prophet Isaiah said: `Thus said G-d, the Redeemer of Israel, the Holy One, to him who is despised by men, to him who is abhorred by nations, to the servants of rulers; kings shall see it and rise up; princes, and they shall prostrate themselves.' I should think no reasonable businessman would miss the chance of such great profit."

Hadrian recognized his nephew's conviction, and despite his regret and sorrow, he let him go. He did nothing to interfere with Onkelos's open conversion to the Jewish faith, and his life as a pious and observant Jew.

## The Day of Days

Those were solemn days in the camp of Israel in the desert of Sinai. Walking among the tents, one saw no idlers. Everyone was busy washing clothes, cleaning the camp, and preparing for the great event. No idle conversation or vain laughter was to be heard. Young and old alike were preoccupied with the great event about to take place.

Day of all days! Never has the sun risen so gloriously! Never has the sky been so blue or the air so fresh! A holy light filled the whole world, as Moses led his people out of camp, while G-d raised Mount Sinai, its peak lost in the heavens.

As the people stood below respectfully at a distance, Moses fearlessly ascended the mountain until he too was engulfed by the heavens, and could no longer be seen. Then G-d said to Moses:

"Now I will give Israel the Torah. Today, the wonders of Heaven shall be revealed to My chosen people. But since you are here on the mountain with Me, how will the people know it is I who speak and not you? Therefore, go down and join the people!"

At that instant, just as Moses turned to descend once again, the heavens opened for the children of Israel, and the glories of Heaven were revealed to a spellbound Israel for one unforgettable and awe-inspiring moment.

Then Moses brought G-d's words to the people:

"I am not like earthly kings, the rulers and princes of the nations. I need no servants to clear the way for Me nor attendants to lay carpets for Me to tread upon. I need no candles to brighten My palace, nor purple tapestries to hang over My walls!

"I have spread the blue heaven under Me, and the entire world is My palace, brightened by My own brilliant light. The green grass and fragrant flowers are My royal carpet, and the sun is but one of My torches. The world is Mine, and I am its King!

"Now, therefore, if you will listen to My voice and obey My commandments, I will make you a kingdom of priests and a holy nation - worthy subjects of the King of Kings!"

And Israel knew that true indeed were the words of G-d; that upon this earth never breathed a king who could compare with Him, for G-d is all-powerful, His wisdom

boundless, and His mercy unending.

When Moses had concluded delivering the Divine message to his people, Israel replied as one man: "We will do and learn!"

At that moment, six hundred thousand angels descended from Heaven, addressing each Jew: "You have made a wise choice. G-d rejoices that you are prepared to obey His every command, the smallest as well as the greatest. And because you have chosen to do so, behold the beautiful gifts we bring unto you!"

Then the angels gave each Jew two beautiful crowns of glory. One for promising "to do," and the other for promising "to learn" the words of G-d.

The dawn of the sixth day of Sivan found all Jews assembled around Sinai, expectantly trembling with the excitement. A great silence descended upon the earth. All movement ceased and everything stood still. No birds twittered and no ox lowed in the meadow. The waters of the seas lay still, not a wave rose or fell. No leaf fluttered in the wind, for no wind blew. The whole world was breathless with suspense. Bird, beast, and man - all were under the spell of the great event about to take place.

And then in the midst of this unbroken silence, the words of G-d burst forth like thunder:

"I AM G-D YOUR G-D."

How these words shook the world to its very foundation! They completely filled the universe and resounded throughout the earth. The smallest child and the oldest of men trembled alike before so much glory and holiness. The mountains trembled and the sea rumbled. Lightning flashed in the heavens and thunder rang out.

And the words G-d had spoken became burning flames that floated in the air. The flame issuing from G-d's words grew brighter and brighter, blinding the people with its brilliance and filling their hearts with terror. When the Torah looked down and saw them standing nearly lifeless with terror, she turned to G-d and said, "What good will it do to give me to lifeless corpses? I am to be a source of life for them, not the cause of their death! Revive them, O G-d, so that they be able to rejoice with Your great gift."

Then a sweet dew fell upon the people, reviving them and giving them courage and strength to hear the rest of G-d's word. As the people of Israel stood in awe before Mount Sinai, the angels descended from Heaven, bearing G-d's Commandments. As one lovingly presents precious jewels, the angels presented the Commandments to

the Jewish people, showing them the beauty of every law, the reward for keeping it, and the punishment if it be disobeyed.

## The Man Who Celebrated Tikkun-Night

Many years ago there lived in Tunis a worthy Jew named Matzliach. He was a great lover of Torah, though not an outstanding Torah scholar. He was not very rich, but generous in his charity contributions, and he was a G-d fearing man.

Matzliach the Antique Dealer, as he was known, for he was a dealer in old wares and antiques, was well respected in the community. He was particularly praised for his special custom in connection with Shavuot, the Festival of the Giving of the Torah. Every year he would invite ten Torah scholars to his home on the first night of Shavuot, for whom he prepared a fine feast. After the feast they would all recite *tikkun* and study Torah all night, in honor of the great festival that celebrates the Jewish people's receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai.

It all started many years before, when Matzliach learned for the first time about the origin of the Jewish custom to stay awake on the first night of Shavuot. He was greatly surprised to learn that on the night before that great day when G-d was to give the Torah to the Jewish people, they did not stay awake.

Indeed, they slept soundly, so that when G-d descended on the mountain early in the morning to give the Torah to His chosen people, they were not there!

So G-d let loose thunder and lightning which woke them up and sent them hurrying to the mountain. Not that the people were not eager to receive the Torah. On the contrary, they had been counting the days -forty nine days, seven full weeks -from the day after they departed from Egypt, eagerly awaiting the great day of when the Torah would be given to them. Yet the night before that great event, when one would have expected them to be too excited even to think of sleep, they slept more soundly than ever! Did they want to be well rested, refreshed and wide-awake for the great moment of the divine revelation?

Be it as it may, it was a letdown. And so it became the custom of Jews everywhere to make up for it and stay awake the night of Shavuot, and in this way "correct" the wrong impression. This is what *tikkun* means -"correction."

Well, Matzliach and his guests certainly observed this custom in a fine way, and it impressed and inspired the whole community. There was not a Jew in Tunisia who



did not stay up that night. Old and young gathered in the synagogues to recite *tikkun* and learn Torah all night, and special refreshments were served to help keep them awake.

There came a time, however, when Shavuot approached and Matzliach found himself in a difficult situation. Business had not been good, and Matzliach simply had no money, not only for his usual feast, but not even for the needs of his own family in the way of food and wine for the festival. Sadly he told his wife Mazal about his predicament, and she was greatly distressed.

"It is not so much our own need that distresses me," the good woman explained, "but the fact that you cannot keep your fine custom. It is sad to think about it."

"But what can we do?"

"Well, I still have my precious earrings," Mazal said, taking them off from her ears. "Here, take them to the pawnbroker and get a loan till things will improve. You should be able to get enough for the the festival meals and for your usual feast."

"G-d bless you," Matzliach said gratefully. He took the earrings to the pawnbroker and obtained a tidy sum of money against them.

As he was walking home cheerfully, Matzliach met the venerable Rabbi Hai Tayeb, Chief Rabbi of Tunisia. Matzliach greeted the rabbi respectfully, and the rabbi returned the greeting, obviously pleased to have met him in the street.

"You saved me a trip," the rabbi said. "I'm going around collecting for our poor, so they, too, can celebrate the festival of Shavuot with joy."

Without hesitation, Matzliach put his hand in his pocket and gave the rabbi the money he had just received from the pawnbroker. The smile with which Matzliach gave the money pleased the rabbi no less than the donation itself.

"G-d bless you to do many mitzvot and good deeds," the saintly Rabbi said, as they parted.

Slowly Matzliach continued his way homeward. "What am I going to tell my wife?" he wondered.

Suddenly he heard his name called. "Ya, Matzliach! You're just the man I want!"

The caller was one of the royal servants of the Bey of Tunis.

"His Majesty sent me out to buy a set of antique coffee-cups. I have no idea where to get them. But you are an antique dealer. Get them for me, and you will be amply rewarded," the courtier said.

"I will try my best," Matzliach promised. If there were such cups, Matzliach knew where to find them, and find them he did. The dealer Matzliach went to was pleased to get rid of them; he had had them too long and despaired of ever selling them. Now he was pleased to sell them to Matzliach on credit, for he knew the Jewish antique dealer as a trustworthy man.

Walking through the market place, Matzliach met the courtier again, for he was shopping for other things. "Did you manage to find the right cups for me?" the courtier asked eagerly.

"Thanks to the One Above, I did." The courtier took Matzliach with the cups to the Royal court and introduced him to the Bey.

The king was very pleased with the cups. "Just what I wanted," he said. "I know that the Jews are now busy with preparations for their festival. I am pleased that you took time out to find me these lovely cups. By the way, how are you doing with your preparations for the Festival?"

"The truth to tell, your Majesty, I have not yet bought a thing."

The king immediately ordered one of his servants to send to Matzliach's house two sacks of fine flour, a jug of olive oil, and two choice live lambs. Then he asked Matzliach what he owed him for the cups.

Matzliach told the king what he paid for them and his usual commission.

"What? That's all you paid for these precious cups?" the king said, much surprised. "Well, the ruler of Tunisia is not looking for bargains. You shall be paid their full value!"

Matzliach left the king's palace with a very large sum of money. Walking briskly home, whom should he meet if not the Chief Rabbi, again.

"I can now afford to double my donation," Matzliach said happily, as he handed the Rabbi an amount equal to his first generous donation.

"Rabbi, your blessing was fulfilled," Matlizach said, and told him how G-d was kind to him.

"Thank G-d, we both did very well today," the Rabbi said. "Have a happy Yom Tov."

And a happy festival it was indeed for Matzliach and his good wife Mazal. And what made them happiest of all was that this year, too, they were able to observe their custom of celebrating *tikkun*-night as ever before.

## The Story of Shavuot

Dawn of the sixth day of Sivan, in the year 2448 after the creation of the world.

Thunder and lightning rent the air, and the sound of the shofar was heard growing strangely louder and louder. All the people in the camp of Israel trembled.

Then all was quiet again. The air was very still. Not a sound was to be heard. No bird twittered, no donkey brayed, no ox lowed. Every living thing held its breath. Even the angels interrupted their heavenly praises. Everybody and everything kept silent . . . waiting.

Suddenly G-d's mighty words were heard from one corner of the earth to the other:

"I AM G-D, YOUR G-D!"

One after another, G-d proclaimed the Ten Commandments.

During the next forty days and nights, Moses was G-d's disciple, learning all the Commandments, along with the proper meaning of the Torah which was to be handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation. Afterwards Moses wrote down on parchment all the five books of the Torah, word for word, from the "Bet" of Bereshit to the "Lamed" of Yisrael (the last word of the Pentateuch), as it was dictated to him by G-d Himself.

### Millions of Witnesses

G-d gave the Torah in the presence of all Israel - six hundred thousand male adults, aged 20 to 60, many more older men, and, of course, women and children, together with a multitude of other peoples (erev rav). In all there were several million living witnesses who saw the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai!

Present also were all the Jewish souls who were ever to come down to live upon this earth. Every one of us then solemnly proclaimed *naaseh v'nishma* - we shall do and

learn. Each one of us was made a party to that sacred covenant between G-d and His people Israel.

The Midrash tells us:

Said Rabbi Yitzchak: The children of Israel should have received the Torah immediately upon their departure from Egypt, but G-d said, "My children have had no convalescence after their bondage in Egypt from which they have just been freed, and cannot receive the Torah so soon." It is like a king whose son had just recovered from a serious illness, and his tutor said,

"Send your son to school." To which the king retorted, "My son has not convalesced at all, and you want him to immediately return to school? No, let him be on a healthy and plentiful diet for two or three months, recover his color and strength, and then he will return to school."

So said the Holy One, blessed be He: "My children have not recovered yet their color and strength from their bondage. Let them convalesce for a few weeks with the manna, the well and the quails, And then I shall give them the Torah."

Here is a beautiful parable telling us of the tender mercies of our Father our G-d who cared for us tenderly as a king cares for his only son recuperating from an illness.

But there is something more than that in this beautiful parable. It wasn't so much our physical condition that had to be considered as our spiritual state. Hundreds of years of Egyptian bondage, enslaved to a people that, despite their architectural prowess and military might, had no feelings, no consideration for human beings, no true ethical teachings or morals - such slavery must have made a deep scar upon our ancestors' moral standards. They had to be cleansed from the "bricks and mortar" of Egypt before they could receive the holy Torah.

The children of Israel understood their situation. They had been told that fifty days after their departure from Egypt they would receive the holy Torah and they knew they had to become worthy of that Divine gift -the most wonderful thing in the world. So they impatiently counted each day, trying to better themselves every day, to improve their conduct and moral standards, to rise higher and higher as the time of the giving of the Torah drew closer.

And G-d Himself helped them to better themselves, as He always does. G-d gave them a wonderful diet that was both a physical and spiritual diet. He rained bread from Heaven in the form of manna. He opened a fountain in the hard rock. He rained meat from the skies - the quails, and He showed them many other miracles any wonders. The children of Israel learned to recognize G-d they saw that He can alter the course of nature for their sake; they realized that they were the chosen people to receive that wonderful gift - the Torah.

For forty nine days, or seven weeks, the children of Israel eagerly prepared themselves for that great event But the last three days before the giving of the Torah were days of the most careful self-examination and preparation. When the great moment of the giving of the Torah finally came, they were clean, pure and holy in body and soul, and ready to receive the Torah. Unanimously they proclaimed:  
*"naaseh v'nishma!* - We shall do and we shall hear!"

So must we be pure and clean, in body and soul, if we are to be worthy of the Torah, if we are to appreciate its sacredness and live up to our name - "a kingdom of priests (G-d's servants) and a holy nation."