

Zohar 1:8 : The surprising origin of the *Tikkun Leyl Shavuot*

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2. Diagram of the Sephirot
3. Our text

Background:

Where does the custom of *Tikkun Leyl Shavuot* come from? Many people will tell you that it comes from a midrash (*Midrash Rabbah Shir haShirim* 56) that the people of Israel overslept on the morning the Torah was given on Sinai and missed it! To make up for this, we are told in a 17th century (I think) source that we now stay up *Erev Shavuot*, the night before the Torah was given, and study.

The passage from the Zohar we're going to look at dates, according to modern scholarship, to the late 13th century, although the author(s) were trying to attribute it to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, the great mystic, in the 2nd century. THIS is the source of the *Tikkun Leyl Shavuot*. Traditionally, by the way, there is a fixed course of study for the *Tikkun* which covers almost all of the written and oral Torah.

For those of you who haven't seen the Sephirot before, the ten aspects of the inner workings of God that are the central theme of the conversations of the *Hevraya* (Companions) of the Zohar, who wander around and present new mystical teachings to each other: take a look at the attached diagram of the Sephirot. For this passage, you need to know just a little about the sephira of *Tiferet*, at the center of the picture, and *Malchut*, at the bottom. The flow of the divine, God's *shefa*, flows from the top of this system (notice the funnel on the top!!) through *Tiferet*, concentrating in *Yesod*, which can be viewed as an extension of *Tiferet*, and then flows into *Malchut* and then into this world. *Tiferet* is viewed as male in much of the Zohar (hence often referred to by the code word "King"), and *Malchut*, also called *Shechinah*, is viewed often as female (hence "Queen"). *Malchut* is also called "Assembly of Israel", the people Israel. The Song of Songs is viewed as being about their love and yearning for each other. (Sorry for the heteronormativity for all this – this is written by males in the 13th century. Also, the text always goes somewhere completely beyond gender...)

On to the text. You'll find that almost all the questions I ask below are answered in Danny Matt's excellent footnotes, but try to puzzle through the questions yourself. I've given a lot of hints in the paragraphs above.

Questions for Study

First paragraph

1. "on the night when the Bride is joined with her Husband"
 - a. What night is this?
 - b. Who is the Bride? Who is the Groom?
 - i. Who do we normally think of as the Bride and Groom? (in the Midrash)
 - ii. Who does the Zohar mean? (see the paragraph above)
 - iii. How does the fact that *Malchut* is called "Assembly of Israel" bridge these?
2. Who are the Companions? (hint: hint in the paragraph above)

3. (Easy) What does the text say the Companions are doing (from the text before footnote 366)? (Surface meaning)
 - a. And what are they doing from the text *after* footnote 366? (Surface meaning)

Following paragraphs

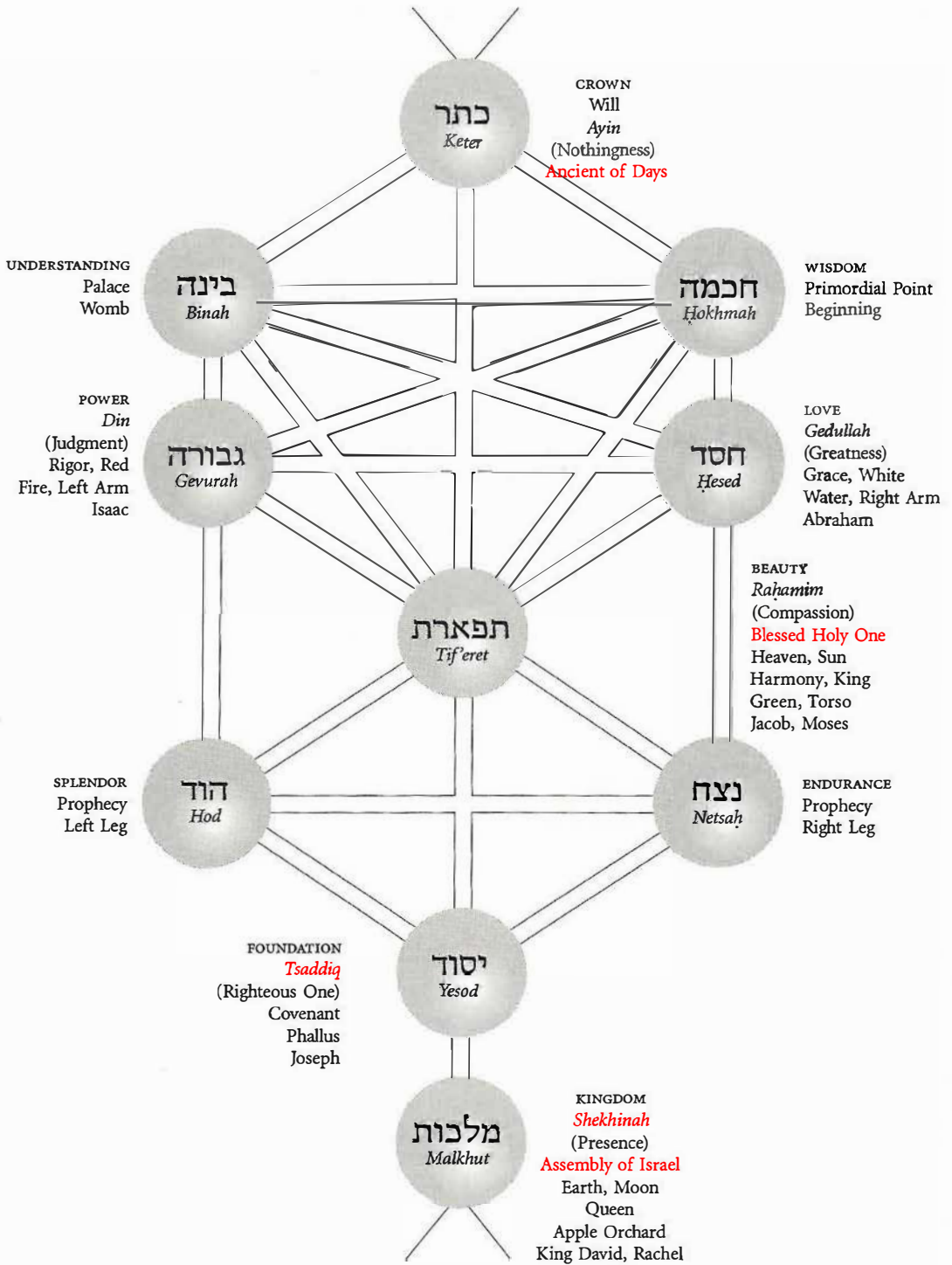
1. Who are her maidens? (major hint: forget gender)
2. What is the *chuppah* – oops, “canopy”?
3. Who/what is the Blessed Holy One? (hint: look at the Zohar chart)

The rest fills this out, but should be accessible.

4. (Harder) and why does it say near the beginning of the first paragraph “For we have learned”? What does the text before that have to do with the text after that?

Big hint: *Tikkun* in the Zohar sometimes means “adornment”, and forms of that root in the first paragraph are translated by Matt as “adornment” and the verb form “arrayed”. So: How is Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai’s study connected to the *Hevraya*, the Companions, adorning Malchut?

(If this remains hidden to you, and you want to know, just email me after Shavuot! Enjoy!)



The Ten Sefirot

Haqdamat Sefer ha-Zohar

Rabbi Shim'on was sitting engaged in Torah on the night when the Bride is joined with Her Husband.³⁶³ For we have learned: All those Companions initiated into the bridal palace³⁶⁴ need—on that night when the Bride is destined the next day to be under the canopy with Her Husband³⁶⁵—to be with Her all night, delighting with Her in Her adornments in which She is arrayed,³⁶⁶ engaging in Torah, from Torah to Prophets, from Prophets to

363. on the night when the Bride...
On the eve of *Shavu'ot* (Festival of "Weeks"), the celebration of the revelation of Torah, *Shekhinah* prepares to join Her groom, *Tiferet*. See *Zohar* 3:97b–98b; Moses de León, *Sod H̄ag ha-Shavu'ot*, 87a–b.

364. Companions initiated... The *חברייא* (*havrayya*) who accompany *Shekhinah*.

365. next day... The marriage between the masculine and feminine takes place on the day of *Shavu'ot*, when the Torah was actually given at Mt. Sinai. *Tiferet* is symbolized by the Written Torah, while *Shekhinah* is alluded to by the Oral Torah, and together they convey revelation.

366. all night... On other nights, the Companions rise at midnight and study Torah until dawn, chanting to *Shekhinah*. On this night of *Shavu'ot*, they adorn Her all night long. This all-night study ritual

Writings,³⁶⁷ midrashic renderings of verses and mysteries of wisdom.} these are Her adornments and finery.³⁶⁸

She enters, escorted by Her maidens,³⁶⁹ standing above their heads. Adorned by them, She rejoices with them the whole night. The next day She enters the canopy only with them, and they are called “members of the canopy.”³⁷⁰ As soon as She enters the canopy, the blessed Holy One inquires about them,³⁷¹ blesses them, and crowns them with bridal crowns. Happy is their share! }

Rabbi Shim'on and all the Companions were singing the song of Torah,³⁷² innovating words of Torah, each one of them. Rabbi Shim'on and all the other Companions rejoiced.

Rabbi Shim'on said, “My children, happy is your share! For tomorrow the Bride will enter the canopy only with you. For all those arranging Her adornments tonight, rejoicing with Her, will be recorded and inscribed in the Book of Memory.³⁷³ The blessed Holy One blesses them with seventy blessings³⁷⁴ and crowns of the supernal world.” }

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became known as *tiqqun leil Shavu'ot*, “the *tiqqun* of the eve of *Shavu'ot*.” See Wilhelm, “*Sidrei Tiqqunim*,” 125–30.

The root *תקן* (*tnn*) appears throughout the *Zohar*, ranging widely in meaning: “mend, restore, correct, perfect, prepare, arrange, array, adorn, establish, institute.”

Philo (*On the Contemplative Life*, 10:75–90) describes a similar night vigil of study and song practiced by the Therapeutae. Cf. the account of revelation through the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in Acts 2, and Revelation 21:2: “I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” See Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, 74–82.

367. from Torah to Prophets... The three divisions of the Bible. See *Vayiqra Rabbah* 16:4: “Ben Azzai was sitting and expounding, and fire was blazing around him. They [his disciples] came and told Rabbi Akiva... He went to him and said, ‘Perhaps you are engaged in the chambers of the Chariot [the secrets of Ezekiel’s vision of the Chariot].’ He replied, ‘No, I am stringing words of Torah to the Prophets, and words of the Prophets to the Writings, and the words of Torah are as joyous as on the day they were given from Sinai.’”

368. Her adornments and finery See *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* on 4:11, in the name

of Rabbi Shim'on son of Lakish: “Just as a bride is adorned with twenty-four ornaments [see Isaiah 3:18–24] and lacking one of them, she is considered worthless, so a disciple must be fluent in twenty-four books [of the Bible]—lacking in one of them, he is worthless.”

See *Tanḥuma*, *Ki Tissa* 18; *Zohar* 1:4b–5a; *ZḤ* 63d–64a (*ShS*); *OY*, where Cordovero lists the biblical and rabbinic passages read on the eve of *Shavu'ot*; and Vital’s list in *Sha’ar ha-Kavvanot*, 2:202a–203b. It became customary to read this passage from the *Zohar* (“Rabbi Shim'on was sitting... sealed in a man’s flesh”) as part of the *tiqqun*.

369. She enters... *Shekhinah* enters the Companions’ house of study with Her attending angels.

370. members of the canopy A rabbinic phrase meaning “members of the wedding party.” The Companions participate in the divine union.

371. inquires about them See *Zohar* 3:98a: “Happy is the share of the Companions when the King asks the Consort who adorned Her in jewelry, polished Her crown, and arrayed Her adornments.”

372. singing the song of Torah Torah is referred to as song in *BT Eruvin* 18b; *Ḥagigah* 12b. Cf. *BT Megillah* 32a; Targum to Lamentations 2:19; *Zohar* 3:23b; *KP*.

373. Book of Memory The celestial book in which all human actions are recorded. Later in this passage, it is identified with *Yesod*. See *Ezra* 4:15; Targum to *Esther* 6:1; *Zohar* 1:62b; 2:70a, 200a, 217a, 246a.

374. seventy blessings Corresponding to the seven *sefirot* from *Hesed* to *Shekhinah*.