

House of Sages

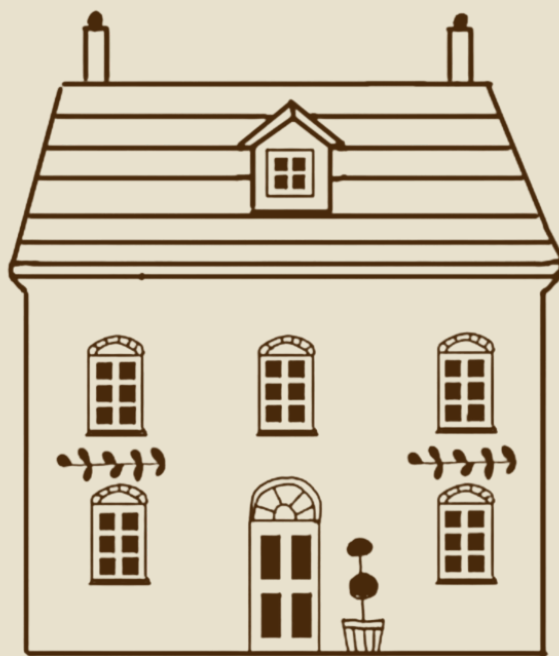
STAYING AWAKE

SHAVUOT 5786

COME & LEARN

The introduction of coffee brought with it... the emergence of a new perception of the night in which the hours of darkness could be shaped and manipulated by human initiative rather than condemn man to passive repose

Elliott Horowitz



House of Sages

STAYING AWAKE

House of Sages

STAYING AWAKE

SHAVUOT 5786

SOURCE 1 – PIRKEI DERABBI ELIEZER 41:7

Rabbi Chanina said : In the third month the length of daytime is double the length of nighttime, and the Israelites slept until two hours of the day, for sleep on the day of the (feast of) Atzeret (Shavuot) is pleasant, the night being short. And Moses went forth and came to the camp of the Israelites, and he aroused the Israelites from their sleep, saying to them: Arise ye from your sleep, for behold, your God desires to give the Torah to you. Already the bridegroom wishes to lead the bride and to enter the bridal chamber. The hour has come for giving you the Torah, as it is said, "And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet God " (Ex. 19:17). And the Holy One, blessed be He, also went forth to meet them; like a bridegroom who goes forth to meet the bride, so the Holy One, blessed be He, went forth to meet them to give them the Torah, as it is said, "O God, when thou wentest forth before thy people" (Ps. 68:7).

ר' חנינא אומ' בחדש השלישי היום כפול בלילה וישנו ישראל עד שתי שעות ביום ששינת יום העצרת עריבה והלילה קצרה ויצא משה ובא למחנה ישראל והיה מעורר ישראל משינתם ואמ' להם עימדו משינתכם שהרי אלהיכם מבקש ליתן לכם את הא"ר התורה כבר החתן מבקש להביא את הכלה להכניס לחופה כדי ליתן לכם את התורה באה השעה שנ' ויצא משה את העם וכו' ואף הב"ה יצא לקראתן כחתן היוצא לקראת כלה כן הב"ה יצא לקראתן ליתן להם את התורה שנ' ה' בצאתך משעיר וכו'

SOURCE 2 – “THE TIKKUN OF VIGILANCE: AWAKENING FOR SINAI”

"The Magen Avraham (494:1) explains the custom of staying awake by citing this Midrash — that when God came to give the Jews the Torah, He found them in a deep slumber and had to rouse them. This is alluded to in the verse 'Why did I come [and there was no one]...' The staying-awake is framed as a tikkun — a repair of that collective failure.

Tikkun means 'correction,' while 'Leil Shavuot' means 'night of Shavuot.' As a correction for having overslept, rather than sleeping late, Jews would not sleep at all".

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Based on these classical sources, why do you think people started staying up all night for shavuot? What is the purpose?

House of Sages

STAYING AWAKE

SHAVUOT 5786

SOURCE 3 – SHENAI LUCHOT HABERIT, ASERET HADIBROT, SHEVUOT, NER MITZVA 13-14

Know - that the pious one (R. Yosef Karo) and I agreed to make a great effort on the night of Shavuot, and to keep sleep from our eyes. Praise to God, so it was. We didn't stop one moment - listen, and your soul will be revived...

The moment that we began to learn the Mishnah, and we learned two mesechtot, our creator graced us and we heard a voice speaking from the mouth of the pious one. A great voice, with clear enunciation, and all around us heard but did not understand. It was very pleasant, and the voice gained strength. We fell on our faces, and none could raise their eyes from fear. The voice speaking to us began and said - "Hear my beloved ones, most beautiful, cherished, beloved, peace to you, fortunate are you and those that bore you, fortunate in this world and in the world to come, in that you took upon yourselves to crown me this night. It is many years that my crown has fallen from my head, and I have no one to comfort me, and I am cast to the dirt clutching waste. But you have returned the crown to its former glory..."

דעו לכם כי הסכמנו החסיד נר"ו ואני
עבדו ועבדכם מהחברים לעמוד על
נפשינו ליל שבועות ולנדוד שינה
מעיינינו, ותהלות ליי כן עלה בידינו כי
לא הפסקנו רגע רק אשר תשמעו
ותחי נפשכם...

ובעת שהתחלנו ללמוד המשנה
ולמדנו שתי מסכתות, זיכנו בוראנו
ונשמע את קול המדבר בפי החסיד
נר"ו קול גדול בחיתוך אותיות, וכל
השכנים היו שומעים ולא מבינים, והיה
הנעימות רב והקול הולך וחזק, ונפלנו
על פנינו ולא היה רוח באיש לישא
עיניו ופניו לראות מרוב המורא
והדיבור ההוא מדבר עמנו והתחיל
ואמר, שמעו ידידי המהדרים מן
המהדרים, ידידי אהובי שלום לכם
אשריכם ואשרי ילדתכם, אשריכם
בעולם הזה אשריכם בעולם הבא אשר
שמתם על נפשכם לעטרני בלילה
הזה אשר זה כמה שנים נפלה עטרת
ראשי ואין מנחם לי, ואני מושלכת
בעפר חובקת אשפתות, ועתה
החזרתם עטרה ליושנה...

SOURCE 4 – “COFFEE, COFFEEHOUSES, AND THE NOCTURNAL RITUALS OF EARLY MODERN JEWRY”, PROF. ELLIOTT HOROWITZ

"R. Joseph Karo... who came to Safed from Turkey in 1536... shows no signs in the relevant sections of [his early] work... of any familiarity with coffee. Yet Karo would have had good reason to be interested in a stimulant which could effectively promote wakefulness. For he, together with his brother-in-law R. Solomon Alkabetz, introduced the custom of observing an all-night study vigil on the festival of Shavuot".

"By the middle of the sixteenth century coffee had spread to such urban centers as Mecca, Cairo, Istanbul, and Damascus... Before the century's end... coffee 'had installed itself virtually throughout the Muslim world'"

House of Sages

STAYING AWAKE

SHAVUOT 5786

THE CASE STUDY: ITALIAN DEVELOPMENT OF TIKKUN LEI SHAVUOT

Excerpts from Prof. Elliott Horowitz, "Coffee, Coffeehouses, and the Nocturnal Rituals of Early Modern Jewry"

The Problem: Why Italy Resisted

"By the middle of the sixteenth century coffee had spread to such urban centers as Mecca, Cairo, Istanbul, and Damascus... Before the century's end... coffee 'had installed itself virtually throughout the Muslim world'"

-

"R. Jacob Alperon of Lodi [in Southern Italy]... was looking for an acceptable excuse to avoid implementing it in northern Italy, especially during the short summer nights"

-

"Geographical factors... must be taken into consideration. Venice... is considerably farther north than Safed... its summer nights could be shorter by as much as two hours, leaving precious little sleep on either side of midnight... it is unlikely that geography alone can account for the difference"

-

Instead of staying up all night, Italians preferred the Shomrim la-Boker societies, which involved rising shortly before dawn for prayer, a ritual they found much more manageable

The Coffee Gap

"The period in which the predawn rite of Shomrim la-Boker emerged in Italy... was thus one in which coffee was at first unavailable in that country and then exotically rare"

-

"The cooler reception given the rite in the Italian communities... would seem, therefore, to have stemmed in no small degree from the fact that in Italy... the night had not yet been conquered with the aid of coffee"

The Turning Point

"The coffeehouse made great progress in Italy... The Venetian ghetto, according to a survey conducted in 1713, contained at least two coffeehouses"

-

"Rather than fading away, Tikkun Hazot [and Shavuot vigils] gathered strength in the eighteenth century and achieved what would appear to be unprecedented popularity... [the Shavuot vigil] eventually was able to overtake and then supplant the [predawn rituals]"

-

By 1726, the consumption of coffee during these vigils was so essential that it was formally regulated:
"the Roman community in 1726 limited the consumption of coffee on such occasions to the members of the confraternity dedicated to nightlong study and prayer... The link between coffee and nocturnal wakefulness had thus achieved official recognition"

Is coffee a prerequisite?

"The widening popularity of coffee in eighteenth-century Italy seems to have breathed new life into the observance not only of Tikkun Hazot, but also of the Shavuot and Hoshana Rabbah vigils"

-

"The beverage had not only risen in status, but had come to be recognized as a necessary prerequisite for the observance of nocturnal vigils"

STAYING AWAKE
