



## Shavuot and the Lecha Dodi Connection By Rabbi Avi Weinstein

In the sixteenth century, Rabbi Yosef Caro, one of the most prominent jurists and Jewish mystics of all time, was spending Shavuot with Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz. A renowned Kabbalist, Alkabetz authored the poem “Lecha Dodi,” which is sung during the traditional Friday night service. That night Rabbi Alkabetz reports in a letter that he and Rabbi Yosef Caro were visited by Rabbi Caro’s “Magid,” a celestial messenger who called herself the “Mishnah.” They stayed up all night with the “Magid” and studied the secrets of creation. From this experience, the Tikkun Leil Shavuot—Shavuot night repair—was born.

Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz was a Safed Kabbalist of the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. When he wrote Lecha Dodi, he arranged the initial letters of the first eight stanzas acrostically to form his name, Shlomo ha-Levi. The song Lecha Dodi begins, “Come my friend, to meet the bride; let us welcome the presence of the Sabbath.” The song responds to the practice of Safed kabbalists who used to go on Friday afternoons into the fields to meet the “Queen Sabbath” in meditation and song. In this practice, the Sabbath is compared to the Shekhinah, the feminine presence of God, and the relationship between Shabbat and the Jewish people is compared to the relationship between a bride and a groom.

Because Shlomo Alkabetz wrote Lecha Dodi, and because he also began the practice of Tikkun Leil Shavuot, why not study Lecha Dodi on Shavuot?

לְכָה דוּדֵי לְקִרְאֵת כְּלָה. פְּנֵי שַׁבָּת נִקְבְּלָה:

Come my beloved to welcome the bride, the Shabbat presence, let us receive

שְׁמוֹר וְזָכוֹר בְּדַבּוּר אֶחָד, הַשְּׁמִיעֵנוּ אֵל הַמְּיַחֵד. יי אֶחָד וְשִׁמוֹ אֶחָד. לְשֵׁם וּלְתַפְאֳרָת וּלְתִהְלָה:  
“Safeguard” and “remember” said in a single utterance, the one and only God made us hear. The Lord is One, His Name is One, for renown, for splendor and for praise.

לְקִרְאֵת שַׁבָּת לָבוּ וְנִלְכָה. כִּי הִיא מְקוֹר הַבְּרָכָה. מִרֵּאשׁ מְקֻדָּם נְסוּכָה. סוּף מַעֲשֵׂה בְּמַחְשָׁבָה  
תְּחִלָּה:

To greet shabbat, come let us go, for it is a source of blessing. From the beginning from antiquity she was honored. Last in deed but first in thought.

מְקֻדָּשׁ מְלֶךְ עִיר מְלוּכָה. קוּמִי צְאִי מִתּוֹךְ הַהֶפְכָּה. רַב לָךְ שַׁבָּת בְּעַמְּק הַבְּכָא. וְהוּא יַחְמוּל  
עֲלֶיךָ חֲמֵלָה:

O sanctuary of the king of the royal city, arise and go forth from the upheaval, too long have you dwelled in the vale of tears, for He will shower compassion upon you.

הַתְּנַעֲרִי מֵעָפָר קוֹמִי. לְבָשִׁי בְּגָדֵי תִפְאָרְתְּךָ עִמִּי. עַל יַד בֶּן יִשִׁי בֵּית הַלְחָמִי. קִרְבָּה אֶל נַפְשִׁי  
גְּאֻלָּה:

Shake off the dust, arise, don your splendid clothes My people, through the son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, draw near to my soul to redeem it.

הַתְּעוֹרְרִי הַתְּעוֹרְרִי. כִּי בָּא אֹרֶךְ קוֹמִי אֲזוּרִי. עוֹרִי עוֹרִי שִׁיר דְּבָרִי. כְּבוֹד יְיָ עָלֶיךָ נִגְלָה:

Awaken, awaken, for your light has come, rise and be bright, awake awake utter a song, the glory of the Lord is upon you revealed

לֹא תִבּוֹשִׁי וְלֹא תִכְלָמִי. מַה תִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וּמַה תִּתְקַמֵּי. בְּךָ יִחְסוּ עַנְיֵי עַמִּי, וְנִבְנְתָה עִיר עַל תְּלָה:

Feel not ashamed or mortified. Why are you downcast? Why are you disconsolate? My people's afflicted will find shelter in you and the city will be built on its hilltop.

וְהָיוּ לְמִשְׁפָּחָה שְׂאֵסִיף. וְרַחֲקוּ כָּל מְבַלְעֵיךָ. וְשִׂישׁ עָלֶיךָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ. כְּמִשׁוֹשׁ חַתָּן עַל כַּלָּה:

May your oppressor be downtrodden, and my those who devoured you be cast off. Your God will rejoice over you like a groom's rejoicing over a bride.

יָמִין וּשְׂמָאל תִּפְרוֹצֵי. וְאַתְּ יָיִךְ תַּעֲרִיצֵי. עַל יַד אִישׁ בֶּן פֶּרֶצִי. וְנִשְׂמַחָה וְנִגְלָה:

You will burst forth to the right and to the left, and you will extol the power of the Lord, through the man, the progeny of Peretz. and we will be glad and joyous.

בּוֹאִי בְּשָׁלוֹם עֲטֹרַת בַּעֲלָה. גַּם בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְצִדִיקָה. תּוֹף אֲמוּנֵי עַם סִגְלָה. בּוֹאִי כַלָּה, בּוֹאִי כַלָּה:

Enter in peace, the husband's crown, even in gladness and good cheer, amid the faithful of a chosen people. Enter O Bride! Enter O Bride!

### **Your *Lecha Dodi* Navigator**

1. Why is Shabbat compared to a bride?
2. What qualities does a bride have that Alkabetz seeks to attribute to Shabbat?
3. What does this relationship teach us about how the Jewish people and God relate to one another? How do you respond to this imagery?
4. Why would we study Lecha Dodi on Shavuot?

### **A WORD**

Lecha Dodi helps us anticipate the arrival of Shabbat each week as we would anticipate the arrival of an honored guest. Just as we await a good friend or companion, so too can we eagerly await the coming of the Sabbath, a partner and companion of the Jewish people for all time.

On Shavuot this anticipation is heightened as we celebrate the relationship between God and the Jewish people. Sometimes the relationship is difficult between us. We experience moments of anger, frustration, or even doubt God's presence in our lives. But as Lecha Dodi suggests, at the root of our relationship with God is the love and understanding of a partner or a friend. May we all find comfort, love, and stability in knowing that God and Shabbat are present in each of our lives.

Chag Sameach!