

Shavuot, 5771 / 2011

When a person sees 600,000 (or more) Jews gathered in a single place s/he recites the following blessing: **Blessed are You**, G-d, Sovereign of the Universe, **Knower of Secrets**.

It is no coincidence that 600,000 is the approximate number of Israelite families who experienced the revelation at Sinai.¹ It is also the number of root souls in the universe, according to the Ari. Every person and creature is hooked up to one or another of these 600,000 spiritual dynasties who received the Torah at Sinai. A searing revelation of presence engraved the souls of an entire nation with the truth-of-the-universe compressed into a single burst of light. Its impact continues to impel their generations to be seekers and servants of G-d and will do so until the end of time. The midrash states unequivocally, that if even one person had been missing, the Torah could not have been revealed.²

This blessing seems to suggest that whenever 600,000 Jews are convened in a single place, it resonates with our Sinaic experience, and a certain aspect of Hashem becomes revealed through the vessel created by the fusion of this critical concentration of Jewish souls. And what is this new glimmer of HaShem that only appears when 600,000 landsmen gather in one place? It must be that we can finally grasp the mysterious truth that our G-d is a *Knower of Secrets*.

Now the fact that Hashem knows secrets is not a *chidush*. The Bible is full of declarations of Divine omniscience: "Can you hide yourself in a secret place where I cannot see you? Says HaShem...I who fill the heavens and earth?"³ So why is the blessing that dubs HaShem a "knower of secrets" reserved for this lone circumstance that recreates a seemingly arbitrary feature of the Torah's revelation...the number of families participating in that event.

The idea, says R. Tsadok HaKohen,⁴ is that just as there are 600,000 root souls in the spiritual community of Israel, so are there 600,000 letters in the Torah.⁵ Each individual that comes into the world embodies some unique piece of one of these sixty myriad letters. Just as there is a scroll of ink on parchment, so is there a scroll of souls that includes the entire unfolding of generations. The sum-total of the soul-sparks of Israel comprise a single and complete Torah...the *real* Torah...the one that HaShem studies on His side of the heavenly curtain.⁶

And so, whenever 600,000 Jewish souls gather, a semblance of this Torah of souls reconstitutes as a semi-tangible reality perceptible to the inner senses of all present. Just as a quorum/minyan of ten creates a collective entity greater than the sum of its parts that draws down a level of soul and power of prayer that individuals cannot attain on their own, so is this true for the Sinaic quorum of 600,000.

What changes, metaphysically, when this criterion is met and a "scroll of souls" reconstitutes for a moment? How does this blessing express that change? The idea, says R. Tsadok, is that each one of us has a secret, at the root of our soul.⁷ Since we are simply facets of those 600,000 founding dynasties we each experienced the Torah's revelation from a particular distance and angle that was absolutely unique. No others saw it quite that way. Consequently, we each know something about G-d and truth and Torah that no one else fathoms...and that is our secret. Yet sometimes it is even hidden from us.

But when 600,000 landsmen gather a paradigm shift occurs—their souls fuse into a gigantic vessel that draws down the higher (collective) levels of soul that only descend when a space appears to hold them (which in this case means one that merges sixty myriad *neshamot*). And now, with our newly integrated lights everyone becomes a seer—a kabbalist—delighting in the beauty (previously hidden) of everyone around them. Finally we appreciate the profusion of secrets Hashem had hidden in plain sight—in every single letter of his precious scroll of souls.

When glimpsing yet another proof of HaShem's unfathomable greatness we express our awe: Blessed are You, God...Knower of secrets.

As we prepare to celebrate the day that we received our precious Torah, I pray for us to integrate those lights into our heart, bones, cells and spaces so that we become, each and every one of us, a *mekubel* (kabbalist) of the Torah of souls. A *mekubel* of the written Torah unearths the highest teachings in the most boring and technical passages of the text (the parts that most people skip when studying the parsha).⁸ A *mekubel* of the Torah of souls, beholds the God-glorifying beauty that is the secret truth of every Jew, even (or especially) the most unseemly among us.

גל עיני ואביטה נפלאות מתורתך:

Open my eyes that I will behold the wonders of your Torah.

Or, as the Komarna Rebbe interprets this verse by splitting the word for wonders (נפלאות) in half so that it reads as two words, נפל אות, which means literally fallen letter. The translation of the verse now becomes:

גל עיני ואביטה נפל-אות מתורתך:

Open my eyes that I will behold the fallen letters of your Torah [that are hidden within the people that comprise your mysterious scroll of souls].

¹ Exodus 12:37 (about 600,000); Exodus 38:26 (603,550); Numbers 1:2 (603,550/625,850 w/ Levites); Numbers 26:1 (601,730). Each male over twenty is presumed to be the head of a household. And since, Biblically, men could be married to more than one wife, there was a one-to-one correspondence between men and family units, which was not so with the women. And so, the counting of men is also the counting of family units.

² BR 70:9.

³ Jeremiah 23:24.

⁴ R. Tsadok HaKohen, Pri Tsadik, Parshat Shekalim, 1; Tsidkat HaTsadik, 196 (end).

⁵ Zohar Chadash, Song of Songs: 74b; Megala Amukot (186) corresponds the 60,000 letter to the 600,000 roots souls in Israel (יש (ששים ריבו אותיות לתורה). Yet, actually there are only 304,805 letters. In a Torah scroll. One reconciliation is to say that many of the letters are constructed from several sub-letters, like for example an alef, that is built from two yuds and a vav. Ari, Eitz haDaat Tov, Parshat Yitro.

⁶ R. Shlomo Elyahiv, Sefer HaKlalim, klal 18, anaf 10, siman 3, ot 12..

⁷ R. Tsadok HaKohen, Pri Tsadik, Parshat Shekalim, 1.

⁸ For example the passage about the kings that ruled and died in the land of Edom is the source for the kabbalistic teachings about the breaking of the vessels.