

From the Book Maran Bet Yosef

The Biography of Rabbi Yosef Karo May his merit shield us

**The Voice of the Maggid
(The Angel who would teach Torah to Rabbi Yosef Karo)**

**THE MAGGID OF THE BEIT YOSEF, RABBI YOSEF KARO
EXHORTED THE TALMIDE CHACHAMIM WHO STUDIED
TOGETHER WITH THE BET YOSEF TO GO UP TO ERETZ
ISRAEL AND NOT TO WORRY ABOUT MATERIAL THINGS**

On Shavuot the sages gathered in the study hall of Rabbi Yosef Taitazak, planning to study the entire night. Rabbi Yosef and Rabbi Shmuel were there, along with Rabbi Shiomo Alkabez, Rabbi Yosef Karo, and other scholars. They read from the Torah, the haftarot, Psalms, the Song of Songs, the Book of Ruth, the last verses from the Book of Chronicles. They learned with a special melody. They studied the entire Order of Zeraim in the Mishnah. An atmosphere of holiness filled the air. The greatest scholars of the generation were studying together. After they completed two tractates of the Mishnah, the air resounded, and the light dimmed. A great sound was heard in the study hall, as if the very letters were breaking open. The voice became stronger, and a great fear fell upon those in the study hall. The words of the voice were perfectly clear. This is what it said to them:

“My friends, the finest of the fine, my friends and lovers, greetings to you, happy are you and happy is the one who has given birth to you. Happy are you in this world, and happy are you in the World to Come, who have taken upon yourselves to adorn me this night. For many years my head has fallen and there is no solace for me. I am cast in the dust, and embrace refuse heaps, and now you have returned my former glory. Be strong, my friends, be of good courage, my lovers. Be joyous and glad, know that you are the very best of humans. You have merited to be in the castle of the King, and the sound of your Torah and your speech has risen before the Holy One, blessed be He, and have split several heavens and several open spaces until it rose, and the angels were silent, and the serafim were quiet, and the kayo! stood still, and all the heavenly host and the Holy One, blessed be

He, hears your voice, and I, the Mishnah, the mother who chastises man, have come to speak to you. If you had been ten together, you would have ascended further. But for all this you have ascended. Happy are you and happy are your children, my friends, who have ascended and kept sleep from your eyes, and through you I have ascended this night, and through the friends in this great city, a mother of Jewish communities.”

The voice continued to speak until it called on all those present to stand up and call aloud, “Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever.”

The members of the group called aloud, and when they finished reciting this, the voice told them: “Happy are you, return to your studies and do not stop for a single moment.”

They continued to study the Mishnah, and once again they heard the voice speaking to them:

“Go up to Eretz Israel, because not all times are equal, and there is no hindrance to saving, whether many or few. Do not care for your possessions, because you will eat of the bounty of the upper earth. Therefore make haste and go up, for I provide your livelihood and I will continue to provide your livelihood, and all will be well with you, with your homes, and with all that is yours.”

When the voice ceased speaking, silence reigned, and then all those assembled burst into tears of joy. They continued to study Torah until the light of dawn, in exultation and trembling. Before they prayed Shaharit, they went to immerse themselves in a mikveh, just as they had immersed themselves two days earlier. In the mikveh they met the other scholars who had not been with them during the night. They told them of the night’s voices. The others were astounded to hear this. “How did you manage to withstand such an experience?” they asked.

They included some of the leading Kabbalists in the study hall, great scholars who knew the secrets of the hidden Torah.

Some of them spent all their days in fasts and in mortification, having abandoned all the affairs of this world. How sorry they were that they had been absent from the study hall on Shavuot night. They beat themselves for having missed this great night. They agreed among themselves to gather again at night in a minyan of ten and study together, even though they had not closed their eyes all the previous night, nor had they had time to sleep during the day, since they had gone to the sermon delivered by the

head of the yeshivah, Rabbi Yosef Taitazak, which had lasted for hours. Nevertheless, they agreed to assemble an additional night, and they determined the order of study for the night.

They began by reading the commandments in the Book of Deuteronomy. When they came to Shema Yisrael, they heard a loud knocking, and a voice began to speak. It spread throughout the study hall. They could clearly hear each word, as if the speaker were standing before them.

“Listen, friends, the finest of the fine,” the voice began. It spoke many words of wisdom to them, and then it called to them: “Happy are you, friends, happy are you that you bring me up. How much have I risen! Now that you are ten, a sufficient number for any holy thing, happy are you and happy is the one who has given birth to you. Do not fear the reproach of men, nor recoil from their scorn. For you are the ones ascending to the oneness of Israel. Know that you are among the chosen ones. You who adhere to me, glory covers your heads and a thread of lovingkindness is drawn over you. If permission had been given your eyes, you would see the line of fire which surrounds this house. Therefore be strong and be of good courage, and do not break the link raising me up -- calling in a loud voice, ‘Shema Yisrael’ and ‘Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever.’

The ten scholars in the study hall listened to the words of the voice and did not utter a sound. They stood agape. The books remained open before them. The voice spoke to them for about half an hour, in a loud, clear voice, until it ceased. The ten scholars returned to their studies until midnight. When midnight arrived, the voice returned and began to speak in the chamber of the study hall. The scholars sat, amazed.

The voice began to speak, and it grew louder and louder.

“Ask your father and he will tell you, your elder, and they will say to you. From now on let your eyes be open to your way, and each man will help his fellow, and to his brother he shall say, ‘Be strong!’ and the weak will say, ‘I am strong.’ Account yourselves as great ones, because you are dwellers of the castle of the King, who has caused you to enter the vestibule. Attempt to enter the banquet hall, without leaving the vestibule, because whoever leaves the entrance of the vestibule does so at his own risk. Awaken, my sons, and see that I speak to you. Awaken, my friends, be of good courage and be men of valor. And now do not make light, strengthen yourselves and rejoice; a thread of lovingkindness is drawn about you every day. You will see that you are intoxicated from the delights of the world;

Awaken, you intoxicated ones, because behold, a day is coming when man will remove the idols of his money and the delight in the pleasures of this world and the idols of his gold, the joy of money, and go up to Eretz Israel, for it is within your power, only you are stamped with the clay of the joy of the world and its vanities, and whoever leaves you does so at his own risk. See what you have merited, which others have not merited."

The voice continued to speak of moral instruction and knowledge and about returning to the L-rd with all one's heart and all one's soul, and gave signs about the mystical meanings of words.

Since then the voice returned and spoke to those who occupy themselves with mystical kavanot in the yeshivah of the Kabbalists. This was known only to a very few Jews in Salonika, who kept this secret.

A new spirit filled the band of scholars and Kabbalists ever since they had heard the words of the spirit of the Mishnah which had appeared at midnight. **They intended to do as it had commanded and go up to Eretz Israel.** On Shabbat eve they gathered once again to study. They did not expect the appearance of the voice this night. But when midnight approached, once again the voice was heard.

It said: "Those who have entered the vestibule must try to enter the banquet hall. Whoever goes outside does so at his own risk, while we shall not be accountable."

The voice praised what the members of the group had studied and done on the other nights.

After the morning Shaharit prayer, before they went to eat breakfast, the head of the study hall, Rabbi Yosef Taitzak, gathered them and ordered them to accept upon themselves whatever they had heard from the Maggid these past nights.

"We will do and heed," they responded after him. The members of the group gathered and established many regulations. One of them was to sanctify every Wednesday in memory of the destruction of the Temple. It was forbidden to eat meat or drink wine on Wednesdays, except at a religious celebration or if one were traveling. They accepted these regulations and observed them.

The Maggid continued to speak to those in the study hall at nights. He warned them lest the pleasures of the world blind them, for "the time of singing has come," and not all times are equally right. He repeated his message to open their eyes, that the weak will say that he is strong, that man must help his fellow. The Maggid instructed them that they should not

eat any cooked food, not even of lentils, on the entire day before Tisha BeAv, and at the concluding meal before the fast they should eat dry bread and a cup of water.

“Have consideration for the honor of your Creator,” it told them, “give him honor, and take care not to be consoled.” It concluded by saying, “May I merit to be united with you on the Holy Land, to serve Him together with you, Amen.”

The words of the Maggid accompanied them day and night. Each night that they gathered to study Torah, Mishnah, and Gemara, they expected the Maggid to come through the door. When he began speaking silence reigned in the study hall. From the first night that the Maggid had appeared in the study hall before all those assembled there, he continued to appear to Rabbi Yosef Taitazak and Rabbi Yosef Karo.