



NECHAMA
JEWISH RESPONSE
TO DISASTER

Seeds of Action, Harvest of Hope: A NECHAMA Shavuot Tikkun

Welcome to this *Tikkun Leil Shavuot*, a night dedicated to immersive Torah study as we commemorate *Z'man Matan Torateinu* (the season of the giving of our Torah at Mount Sinai). Jewish tradition encourages us to stay awake through the night, engaging with sacred texts, a custom born from the ancient tale that the Israelites overslept on the morning of revelation and had to be awakened by God. By dedicating ourselves to learning, we demonstrate our eagerness and readiness to receive Torah anew. This guide is specially curated to connect our study with the core values that animate the vital work of NECHAMA: Jewish Response to Disaster.

As we delve into texts and reflections, we will explore how the principles of *Tikkun Olam* (Repairing the World), *Rachamim* (Compassion), *Chesed* (Loving-Kindness and Active Service), *Achrayut* (Responsibility), *Chossen* (Resilience), *Tikvah* (Hope), and upholding *Kavod HaBriyot* (Human Dignity) are not only deeply embedded in our tradition but also find profound expression in NECHAMA's mission to provide comfort, hope, and help to communities impacted by disaster. May our learning tonight inspire not only our minds but also our hearts and hands towards meaningful action.

Theme 1: Receiving Torah, Accepting Responsibility – The Foundation of Service

Shavuot is *Z'man Matan Torateinu*. The people of Israel famously responded, "Na'aseh V'Nishma" – "We will do, and we will understand" (Exodus 24:7). This commitment to action, even before full understanding, is the bedrock of service.

- **Textual Exploration 1.1: Exodus 24:7** "Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient (na'aseh v'nishma)."
 - **Connecting to NECHAMA:** NECHAMA's volunteers embody Na'aseh V'Nishma by their willingness to act first in disaster zones, trusting that understanding and impact will follow. Their work is an acceptance of communal Achrayut (Responsibility).
 - **Reflection:** How does Na'aseh V'Nishma challenge us to act even when outcomes are uncertain?
- **Textual Exploration 1.2: Leviticus 19:16** "You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, nor shall you stand idly by the blood of your neighbor: I am the LORD."



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- **Connecting to NECHAMA:** This is a direct command against inaction when others are in peril. NECHAMA's work is a refusal to "stand idly by," fulfilling a core tenet of Jewish responsibility.
- **Reflection:** What are modern forms of "standing idly by," and how can we counter them?
- **Textual Exploration 1.3: Pirkei Avot 2:16** "He [Rabbi Tarfon] used to say: It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you at liberty to neglect it."
 - **Connecting to NECHAMA:** Disaster recovery is immense. This teaching encourages sustained effort, acknowledging that while no single person or group can "finish the work" of Tikkun Olam, everyone has a responsibility to contribute.
 - **Reflection:** How does this text help us avoid feeling overwhelmed by the scale of need in the world?
- **Textual Exploration 1.4: Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5** "...Whoever saves a single life from Israel, Scripture regards them as if they had saved an entire world." (Note: Many versions extend this to "a single life," emphasizing Kavod HaBriyot - the dignity of every human being.)
 - **Connecting to NECHAMA:** Every home mucked out, every survivor comforted, every community assisted, affirms the infinite value of each individual and the profound impact of focused aid.
 - **Reflection:** How does focusing on the impact of saving one life change our perspective on service?

Theme 2: Rachamim (Compassion) & Chesed (Loving-Kindness) – The Heart of Response

The Torah urges compassion (Rachamim), a deep, nurturing care, and Chesed, active loving-kindness and service.

- **Textual Exploration 2.2: Leviticus 19:18** "...You shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD."
 - **Connecting to NECHAMA:** This foundational commandment underpins NECHAMA's commitment to helping all people, recognizing our shared humanity and dignity, especially in times of vulnerability. This is Chesed in its purest form.



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- **Reflection:** In a disaster context, what does it practically mean to "love your neighbor as yourself"?
- **Textual Exploration 2.3: Proverbs 3:27** "Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act."
 - **Connecting to NECHAMA:** When disaster strikes, NECHAMA acts because it is "in their power" to provide specialized help. This text urges proactive goodness (Chesed) when ability and need align.
 - **Reflection:** What "good" is within our power to do for our wider community today?

Theme 3: Tikkun Olam (Repairing the World) – Our Sacred Partnership

Shavuot, a harvest festival (Chag HaKatzir), reminds us we are co-creators, responsible for tending to and perfecting the world (Tikkun Olam).

- **Textual Exploration 3.2: Genesis 2:15** "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to take care of it."
 - **Connecting to NECHAMA:** NECHAMA's work often involves environmental cleanup and responsible rebuilding, reflecting this primordial directive to be stewards of creation (Achrayut), restoring order and safety after nature's destructive force.
 - **Reflection:** How does our responsibility "to work and to care for" the earth extend to disaster recovery?
- **Textual Exploration 3.3: Aleinu Prayer** (Excerpt) "...to repair the world under the sovereignty of God..."
 - **Connecting to NECHAMA:** This is the ultimate goal of Tikkun Olam. Each act of service, each home made habitable, each bit of Tikvah (Hope) restored by NECHAMA, contributes to this larger vision of a repaired and perfected world.
 - **Reflection:** What does a "repaired world" look like, and what is our specific role in achieving it?
- **Textual Exploration 3.4: Isaiah 58:6-7** "*Is it not* this the fast I have chosen: to lose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? *Is it not* to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover them, and that you hide not yourself from your own flesh?"



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- **Connecting to NECHAMA:** The prophet's powerful call for active justice and Rachamim (Compassion) defines true piety. NECHAMA responds directly to the needs of the "poor who are cast out" by disaster, providing shelter, aid, and presence.
- **Reflection:** How does this passage challenge purely ritualistic observance without corresponding social action?

Theme 4: Resilience (Chossen) and Hope (Tikvah) – From Sinai's Fire to Tomorrow's Dawn

Disasters are terrifying, but they also reveal incredible human resilience and the capacity for hope and renewal.

- **Textual Exploration 4.1: Psalm 30:5-6** "For God's anger is but for a moment, God's favor is for life; weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes in the morning."
 - **Connecting to NECHAMA:** NECHAMA (comfort) works to help survivors see that a "morning" of joy and normalcy, though perhaps different, is possible, planting seeds of Tikvah (Hope) amid despair.
 - **Reflection:** How can we be messengers of hope when others are experiencing their "night of weeping"?
- **Textual Exploration 4.2: Psalm 23:4** "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."
 - **Connecting to NECHAMA:** In the darkest "valleys" caused by disasters, NECHAMA volunteers offer a human presence that can be a source of comfort (Nechama) and a reminder that one is not alone, fostering Chossen (Resilience).
 - **Reflection:** How can the power of community act as a "rod and staff" for those going through trauma?
- **Textual Exploration 4.4: Lamentations 3:21-23** "This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; God's mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness."
 - **Connecting to NECHAMA:** Even amidst profound loss (as in Lamentations), the text calls for a conscious turning towards *Tikvah* (Hope), rooted in faith in enduring Rachamim (Compassion). NECHAMA's presence aims to be a tangible



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sign that compassion is alive and that new beginnings are possible.

- **Reflection:** How can we actively "recall to mind" reasons for hope even in bleak situations?

Concluding Kavannah (Intention):

As this night of learning unfolds, may the wisdom of our tradition, the spirit of Sinai, and the inspiring work of organizations like NECHAMA deepen our commitment to action. May we always be ready to say Na'aseh V'Nishma – to do, to serve, to comfort, and to repair – bringing light, Tikvah (Hope), and healing to a world in need. May the Torah we study tonight be a living Torah, guiding our hands and hearts towards justice, Rachamim (Compassion), and the building of a Chossen (Resilient) future for all, always upholding the Kavod HaBriyot (Dignity) of every individual.

Support the Work of NECHAMA:

We encourage you to translate the inspiration from this Tikkun into action. You can support NECHAMA's vital disaster relief and recovery efforts by visiting our website at [NECHAMA.org](https://www.NECHAMA.org). To learn more about educational programs, engagement opportunities, or how your community can partner with NECHAMA, please feel free to contact Rabbi Scott Klein: Jewish Education and Engagement Consultant, at scott@nechama.org . Your support, in any form, helps bring comfort and hope to those impacted by disasters.