

## לְכָה דוֹדִי

לְכָה דוֹדִי לְקִרְאָת פֶּלֶה, פָּנֵי שַׁבָּת נִקְבְּלָה.

שְׁמוֹר וְזָכוֹר בְּדַבּוֹר אֶחָד

הַשְּׁמִיעֵנוּ אֶל הַמִּיחָד.

יְהוָה אֶחָד וְשִׁמוֹ אֶחָד,

לְשֵׁם וּלְתַפְאֶרֶת וּלְתִהְיֶינָה.

לְכָה דוֹדִי לְקִרְאָת פֶּלֶה, פָּנֵי שַׁבָּת נִקְבְּלָה.

לְקִרְאָת שַׁבָּת לָבוֹ וְנִלְכָה

בִּי הִיא מְקוֹר הַבְּרָכָה.

מֵרֹאשׁ מְקֻדָּם נְסוּכָה

סוֹף מַעֲשֵׂה בְּמַחֲשָׁבָה תִּחְלָה.

לְכָה דוֹדִי לְקִרְאָת פֶּלֶה, פָּנֵי שַׁבָּת נִקְבְּלָה.

מְקֻדָּשׁ מֶלֶךְ עִיר מְלוּכָה,

קוֹמֵי צְאֵי מִתּוֹךְ הַהִפְכָּה.

רַב לָךְ שַׁבָּת בְּעֵמֶק הַבְּכָא,

וְהוּא יִחְמוֹל עָלֶיךָ חֲמָלָה.

לְכָה דוֹדִי לְקִרְאָת פֶּלֶה, פָּנֵי שַׁבָּת נִקְבְּלָה.

*continued*

L'KHA DODI became a favorite Friday night hymn almost as soon as it was written. Its author, Shlomo Halevi Alkabetz (d. 1576), was a participant in the mystic circle in Safed, associated with the great master, Moses Cordovero. The poem is one of many written by Safed poets in which Shabbat, God, and Israel are intertwined and related through love. The depiction of Shabbat as bride and as queen has a long history of talmudic origin. The stanzas form an acrostic spelling out the author's name, Shlomo Halevi.

L'kha Dodi juxtaposes two simultaneous movements: reaching toward the Divine and the Divine reaching toward the human. Thus, we are invited to go and greet Shabbat as she comes to us. The mystics added that this drawing close was not only between God and the human, but described an inner process of Divinity.

The poem serves as an introduction to Psalm 92, "The Song of the Day of Shabbat,"

which was the start of the Friday evening service in many rites, before the introduction of Kabbalat Shabbat.

**COME, MY BELOVED** לְכָה דוֹדִי. The "beloved" who is invited here may refer to the soul, to others within the community of Israel, or to an aspect of the Divine. The first half of this refrain contains fifteen letters and the second half contains eleven, which are respectively the numerical equivalents of *yod-hei* and *vav-hei*, spelling out the name of God.

**"OBSERVE" AND "REMEMBER"** שְׁמוֹר וְזָכוֹר. The Decalogue appears twice in the Torah, with minor differences of wording. In Exodus (20:8), the fourth commandment opens with the verb *zakhor*, "remember" the Sabbath day; the Deuteronomy (5:12) version begins *shamor*, "observe" the Sabbath day. Harmonizing them, a midrash states that God uttered both words at once (Mekhilta, *Bahodesh* 7). Evoking that midrash here, the poet thus alludes to the unity established by Shabbat; for God, thought and action are one. And on Shabbat we, too, may feel as if who we are and how we behave are more unified.

**LET US GO OUT TO GREET SHABBAT** לְקִרְאָת שַׁבָּת לָבוֹ וְנִלְכָה. This verse alludes to the practice of leaving the synagogue and going out into the fields to welcome Shabbat, the custom followed by the mystics of Safed, based on their interpretation of the Babylonian Talmud (Shabbat 119a).

**SHRINE OF OUR SOVEREIGN** מְקֻדָּשׁ מֶלֶךְ. This verse and the next five all build on the theme of Israel's exile and her promised redemption. Shabbat is seen as a manifestation of the Shekhinah (God's presence in the world), which is in exile with Israel. At the same time, Shabbat is also a foretaste of the redemptive time.