

Talmud Tour

Berachot 4a-5a

וְחֻכָּמִים אוֹמְרִים עַד חֲצוֹת: חֻכָּמִים כְּמֵאן סְבִירָא לְהוּ, אִי כְּרַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר סְבִירָא לְהוּ — לִימְרוּ כְּרַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר.

The Gemara returns to explain what we learned in the mishna: **And the Rabbis say:** The time for the recitation of the evening *Shema* is **until midnight**. The Gemara asks: **In accordance with whose** opinion **do they hold** in explaining the verse: “When you lie down”? **If** they explain this verse **in accordance with** the opinion of **Rabbi Eliezer**, who says that “when you lie down” is the time when people customarily go to sleep, then **let** the Rabbis also **say** that the time for the recitation of *Shema* extends, **in accordance with** the opinion of **Rabbi Eliezer**, until the end of the first watch.

4b

וְאִי כְּרַבֵּן גַּמְלִיאֵל סְבִירָא לְהוּ — לִימְרוּ כְּרַבֵּן גַּמְלִיאֵל.

And if they explain this verse **in accordance with** the opinion of **Rabban Gamliel** who says that “when you lie down” refers to the entire night, then **let** the Rabbis also **say** that one may recite the evening *Shema* until dawn, **in accordance with** the opinion of **Rabban Gamliel**.

לְעוֹלָם כְּרַבֵּן גַּמְלִיאֵל סְבִירָא לְהוּ, וְהָא דְקָא אָמְרִי “עַד חֲצוֹת”, כְּדִי לְהַרְחִיק אֶת הָאָדָם מִן הָעֵבֶרָה. כְּדִתְנִיָא, חֻכָּמִים עָשׂוּ סִיג לְדַבְרֵיהֶם, כְּדִי שְׁלֹא יִהְיֶה אָדָם בָּא מִן הַשָּׁדָה בְּעֶרְב, וְאוֹמֵר: “אֵלֶּךְ לְבֵיתִי וְאוֹכֵל קִימָעָא וְאַשְׁתָּה קִימָעָא, וְאִישׁן קִימָעָא, וְאַחֲרַיָּךְ אֶקְרָא קְרִיאַת שְׁמַע וְאַתְפַּלֵּל”, וְחוֹטְפִתּוּ שִׁנָּה וְנִמְצָא יוֹשֵׁן כָּל הַלַּיְלָה. אָבֵל אָדָם בָּא מִן הַשָּׁדָה בְּעֶרְב, וְנִכְנס לְבֵית הַכְּנֻסֶת, אִם רָגִיל לְקִרְוֹת — קוֹרָא. וְאִם רָגִיל לְשִׁנּוֹת — שׁוֹנֶה, וְקוֹרָא קְרִיאַת שְׁמַע וְמִתְפַּלֵּל, וְאוֹכֵל פֶּתוֹ וּמִבְרֵךְ.

The Gemara answers: **Actually**, the Rabbis **hold in accordance with** the opinion of **Rabban Gamliel**, and the fact **that they say until**

midnight is in order to distance a person from transgression. As it was taught in a *baraita*, the Rabbis created a “fence” for their pronouncements with regard to the recitation of *Shema* in order to prevent a situation where a person comes home from the field in the evening, tired from his day’s work, and knowing that he is permitted to recite *Shema* until dawn says to himself: **I will go home, eat a little, drink a little, sleep a little and then I will recite *Shema* and recite the evening prayer.** In the meantime, **he is overcome by sleep and ends up sleeping all night.** However, since one is concerned lest he fall asleep and fail to wake up before midnight in order to recite *Shema* at the appropriate time, **he will come from the field in the evening, enter the synagogue,** and until it is time to pray, he will immerse himself in Torah. **If he is accustomed to reading the Bible, he reads. If he is accustomed to learning *mishnayot*, a more advanced level of study, he learns. And then he recites *Shema* and prays** as he should. When he arrives home, **he eats his meal** with a contented heart **and recites a blessing.**

וְכָל הָעוֹבֵר עַל דְּבָרֵי חֲכָמִים חַיִּיב מִיתָה.

The *baraita* concludes with a warning: **Anyone who transgresses the pronouncements of the Sages is liable to receive the death penalty.**

The Maharal discusses this passage and explains that the extra stringency provided by the Sages for many Mitzvot is the true ‘border’ of that Mitzva. This provides the ‘form’, as opposed to the ‘matter’ of the Mitzva. Without that stringency, it would be easy to cross the border of the Mitzva and end up not keeping it, as in this example. If so, why didn’t the Torah itself provide these borders? Because there is no limit to where the border might be needed. The Torah presents the basic law, the ‘matter’, *chomer*, and the Sages provide the form, the *tzurah*, the border.¹

מֵאִי שָׁנָא בְּכָל דּוּכָתָא דְּלֹא קִתְּנִי “חַיִּיב מִיתָה”, וּמֵאִי שָׁנָא הָכָא דִּקְתְּנִי “חַיִּיב מִיתָה”?

¹ Aharon Lopiansky, *Peirushei Maharal al Masechet Berachot* (2012), p.23-4, from B’er Hagola 1.

This is a startling conclusion. **What is different in all other places that it is not taught that one is liable to receive the death penalty and what is different here that it is taught that he is liable to receive the death penalty?** There is no unique stringency apparent in the rabbinic restriction on the recitation of *Shema*.

איבעית אימא משום דאיכא אונס שינה. ואיבעית אימא: לאפוקי ממאן דאמר
 "תפלת ערבית רשות", קא משמע לן דחובה.

The Gemara offers two answers, explaining that the conclusion of the *baraita* essentially stems not from the magnitude of the transgression, but rather from concern that the “fence” created around this particular mitzva may be neglected. **If you wish, say** that one returning from work is quite anxious to go to sleep, and due to the risk that he will be **overcome by sleep**, he must be particularly vigilant in the recitation of *Shema*. **And if you wish, say** instead that strong language is employed here in order **to exclude** the opinion of **he who says that** although the morning prayer and the afternoon prayer are mandatory, **the evening prayer is optional**. Therefore, **it teaches us** that the evening prayer **is mandatory**, and anyone who transgresses the pronouncement of the Sages in this regard is liable to receive the death penalty.

Why is there the concept that the Evening Prayer, Maariv, is optional? Rabbi Shneur Zalman explains that Avraham established Shacharit, the morning prayer, a flow of Kindness, Chesed, into the world. Yitzhak established Mincha, a flame of love to G-d, reaching upwards, away from the world. But Yakov established Maariv. This is the true ‘dwelling for the Divine in this world’, which is a mixture of light and dark. The flow which can reach so low, extends from a very exalted realm, so exalted that one cannot speak of it, following the Kabbalistic teaching that one may not speak of the realms beyond Atzilut [in fact Chabad teachings do sometimes speak of these higher realms]. That is why it is called ‘optional’, it is from an exalted realm beyond simple polarities².

² Discourses of R. Shneur Zalman, Ketuvim, p.91, on Psalms 102:1.

אמר מר, קורא קריאת שמע ומתפלל. מסייע ליה לרבי יוחנן. דאמר רבי יוחנן: איזהו בן העולם הבא — זה הסומך גאולה לתפלה של ערבית. רבי יהושע בן לוי אומר: תפלות באמצע תקנום.

In this *baraita*, **the Master said** that when one returns from work in the evening, he enters the synagogue, **recites *Shema*, and prays**. From this *baraita*, we see that at night, just as during the day, one first recites *Shema* and then prays. This **supports** the opinion of **Rabbi Yohanan, as Rabbi Yohanan said: Who** is assured **of** a place in the **World-to-Come? It is one who juxtaposes** the blessing of **redemption**, recited after *Shema*, **to the evening prayer. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says: The prayers were instituted** to be recited **between** the two recitations of *Shema*. According to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, one recites the morning *Shema*, then recites all of the prayers and only after the recitation of the evening prayer does he recite the evening *Shema*.

The idea that the mention of the Redemption should immediately connect with the Amidah is often discussed in Chabad thought. This is often in discourses on Vayigash, following the explanation of ‘and Judah drew near to Joseph’. Judah signifies the Amidah, Malchut, and Joseph signifies the higher Sefirot, Redemption. (See Zohar I, 205b). ‘Redemption’ in this sense can be understood as the freedom of creativity and inspiration, while the Amidah is selflessness. The moment of transition from Redemption to the Amidah is a step beyond oneself, even one’s most holy aspect of self. (See the discourse Vayigash elav Yehudah, 5734).

Another way of understanding this, as explained by the Rebbe, is to see the Prayer for Redemption as literally that, a prayer for Moshiach, and the Amidah is then said with the certainty of the Redemption at that moment³.

In the Morning Prayer, all Prayer texts agree in that there is nothing in between the prayer for Redemption and the Amidah. At Maariv, all texts have a Kaddish in between, but that is not seen as an

³ See Hitva'aduyot, 5751 vol.2 p. 110-111.

interruption. But on Shabbat (and Festivals), most styles of prayer except Chabad add a paragraph ‘Veshamru bnei Yisrael..’ (or a line, on Festivals) before the Kaddish. Rabbi Shneur Zalman saw that as an interruption between the Redemption and the Amidah and did not want his followers to say it. But his great friend Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichew, believed it was right to say this paragraph, because ‘it causes excitement in Heaven’. Rabbi Shneur Zalman felt that joining Redemption directly to the Amidah also ‘causes excitement in Heaven’, but he also wanted to respect his friend’s view. So, when he published his Siddur in 1803, it included that paragraph, but this was not to be said by those following Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s guidance, it was just for his friend Rabbi Levi Yitzhak⁴.

Friendship is an essential aspect of Chassidic thought.

בְּמַאי קָא מְפַלְגִי?

Although the practical difference between these two positions of Rabbi Yohanan and Rabbi Yehoshua is clear, the Gemara seeks to determine: **With regard to what do they disagree?** What is the basis of their argument?

אִי בְּעִית אֵימָא קָרָא, אִי בְּעִית אֵימָא סְבָרָא.

The Gemara answers: **If you wish, say** that they disagree over the interpretation of **a verse; if you wish, say** instead that they disagree on a point of **logic**.

אִי בְּעִית אֵימָא סְבָרָא.

If you say that they disagree on a point of **logic**, then the argument relates to the redemption recited after *Shema*, whose focus is the exodus from Egypt, the first redemption. The question is whether that redemption began at night, which would render it appropriate to juxtapose redemption to the blessing of the evening prayers as well, in prayer for immediate redemption. Or, perhaps, the redemption from Egypt only began during the day.

⁴ See Dayan L.Y. Raskin’s *Siddur Rabeinu Hazaken* (2025) vol.2 p.583.

דְּרַבִּי יוֹחָנָן סָבַר גְּאוּלָּה מְאוּרְתָא נְמִי הוּי, אֶלָּא גְּאוּלָּה מְעַלְיִיתָא לָא הוּיָא אֶלָּא עַד צִפְרָא. וְרַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לִוִּי סָבַר כִּיּוֹן דְּלֹא הוּיָא אֶלָּא מִצְפָּרָא — לָא הוּיָא גְּאוּלָּה מְעַלְיִיתָא.

Rabbi Yoḥanan holds: Redemption occurred in the evening as well; however, the full-fledged redemption was only in the morning. Since the redemption began in the evening, it is appropriate to juxtapose the blessing of redemption to the daily evening prayer. **Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, on the other hand, holds: Since full-fledged redemption only occurred in the morning, and the redemption of the previous evening was not a full-fledged redemption, there is no need to juxtapose the blessing of redemption to the evening prayer.**

וְאִיבְעִית אִימָא קֵרָא, וְשִׁנְיָהֶם מִקֵּרָא אֶחָד דְּרִשּׁוּ, דְּכָתִיב "בְּשֹׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ".

And if you wish, say instead that the dispute between Rabbi Yoḥanan and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi is not a difference over a point of logic, but over the interpretation of **a verse. Both derived their opinions from the same verse: “When you lie down, and when you rise.”** Both interpreted that the juxtaposition in this verse of the recitation of *Shema* at night and the recitation of *Shema* in the morning draws a parallel between them.

רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן סָבַר: מְקִיֵּשׁ שְׁכִיבָה לְקִימָה, מָה קִימָה — קְרִיאַת שְׁמַע וְאַחֵר כֶּה תְּפִלָּה, אִף שְׁכִיבָה נְמִי — קְרִיאַת שְׁמַע וְאַחֵר כֶּה תְּפִלָּה. רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לִוִּי סָבַר: מְקִיֵּשׁ שְׁכִיבָה לְקִימָה: מָה קִימָה — קְרִיאַת שְׁמַע סְמוּךְ לְמִטָּתוֹ, אִף שְׁכִיבָה נְמִי — קְרִיאַת שְׁמַע סְמוּךְ לְמִטָּתוֹ.

Rabbi Yoḥanan holds: The verse juxtaposes lying down and rising. Just as when one rises, the recitation of *Shema* is followed by prayer, as everyone agrees that in the morning one juxtaposes redemption to the morning prayer, so too, when one lies down, the recitation of *Shema* is followed by prayer. And Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi maintains: The verse juxtaposes lying down and rising in a different sense. Just as when one rises, he recites *Shema* adjacent to rising from his bed, as the verse, when you rise, means when one awakens, so too when one lies down, he recites *Shema*

adjacent to lying down in **his bed**. Therefore, the recitation of the evening *Shema* should be performed as close as possible to the moment when one actually lies down.

Note that one should recite the *Shema* before going to sleep, even though one may have recited it in the evening Prayer (see below, 4b-5a).

This emphasises the importance of being aware of the Oneness of G-d all the time. Similarly, the Mezuzot on one's doors which have the *Shema* in them, also remind one of the Oneness of G-d and the love of G-d every time one sees them⁵.

אמר רבי אלעזר, אמר רבי אבינא: כל האומר "תהלה לדוד" בכל יום שלש פעמים — מובטח לו שהוא בן העולם הבא.

Tangential to Rabbi Yohanan's statement that one who juxtaposes redemption and prayer is assured of a place in the World-to-Come, a similar statement is cited. **Rabbi Elazar said that Rabbi Avina said: Anyone who recites: "A Psalm of David" (Psalms 145) three times every day is assured of a place in the World-to-Come.**

מאי טעמא?

This statement extolling the significance of this particular chapter of Psalms, usually referred to as *ashrei* because its recitation is preceded by recitation of the verse, "Happy [*ashrei*] are those who dwell in Your House, they praise You Selah" (Psalms 84:5), raises the question: **What is the reason** that such significance is ascribed to this particular chapter?

אלימא משום דאתיא באלף בית, נימא "אשרי תמימי דרך" דאתיא בתמניא אפ"ן.

If you say that it is because it is arranged alphabetically, then let us say: "Happy are they who are upright in the way" (Psalms 119) where the alphabetical arrangement appears eight times.

⁵ Rambam, Book of Love, Laws of Tefilin and Mezuzah, 6:13.

אֵלֹא מְשׁוּם דָּאִית בֵּיה "פִּוֹתָם אֶת יָדְךָ", נִימָא "הַלֵּל הַגְּדוֹל" דְּכַתִּיב בֵּיה "נָתַן לָחֶם לְכָל בָּשָׂר".

Rather, if you suggest that this particular chapter is recited **because it contains** praise for God's provision of sustenance to all of creation: **"You open Your hand** and satisfy every living thing with favor" (Psalms 145:16), then **let him recite the great *hallel*** (Psalms 136), **in which** numerous praises are **written**, including: **"Who provides food to all flesh**, Whose kindness endures forever" (Psalms 136:25).

אֵלֹא מְשׁוּם דָּאִית בֵּיה תַּרְתִּי.

Rather, the reason why *tehilla leDavid* is accorded preference **is because it contains both** an alphabetic acrostic as well as mention of God's provision of sustenance to all creation.

The Previous Rebbe taught in a discourse: The fact that (in Ashrei) there is the Alef Beit, which means the sense of the holiness of the letters of the Torah, even if one does not understand them, and also the awareness of Divine Providence, that G-d prepares food for every living thing – by virtue of these two aspects one inherits the World to Come⁶.

Regarding the holiness of the Hebrew letters, the Baal Shem Tov wrote: know that in every word you say in prayer or Torah study, have the intention to feel unity [with G-d]. For in every letter there are [spiritual] worlds, and souls, and G-dliness, and the letters rise up and connect with each other, and become a word, and they are unified with the Divine. You should include your own soul with them at every step. And all the worlds are unified together and rise up, and there is limitless joy and delight, as you might imagine in our limited physical world, the joy of a bride and groom; how much more so on that spiritual level!⁷

אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹסֵפִּין: מִפְּנֵי מָה לֹא נֶאֱמַר נוֹן בְּ"אֲשֶׁרִי" — מִפְּנֵי שֶׁיֵּשׁ בָּהּ מִפְּלִתָּן שֶׁל שׂוֹנְאֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, דְּכַתִּיב: "נִפְּלָה לֹא תוֹסִיף קוֹם בְּתוֹלֵת יִשְׂרָאֵל".

⁶ Nishmata D'Oraita, p.26, from Rabbi J. I. Schneersohn's Discourses, 5688, p.156.

⁷ The Sacred Epistle of the Baal Shem Tov, printed in Keter Shem Tov 2a-b.

Additionally, with regard to this psalm, **Rabbi Yoḥanan said: Why is there no verse beginning with the letter *nun* in *ashrei*? Because it contains an allusion to the downfall of the enemies of Israel, a euphemism for Israel itself. As it is written: “The virgin of Israel has fallen and she will rise no more; abandoned in her land, none will raise her up” (Amos 5:2), which begins with the letter *nun*. Due to this verse, *ashrei* does not include a verse beginning with the letter *nun*.**

בְּמַעְרָבָא מְתַרְצִי לֵהּ הָכִי: “נָפְלָה וְלֹא תוֹסִיף לְנִפּוֹל עוֹד, קוּם בְּתוּלַת יִשְׂרָאֵל.”
אָמַר רַב נַחֲמָן בֶּר יִצְחָק: אֶפִּילוּ הָכִי, חֲזַר דָּוִד וּסְמַכָּן בְּרוּם הַקֶּדֶשׁ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר “סוֹמֵךְ
ה’ לְכָל הַנִּפְּלִים.”

In order to ease the harsh meaning of this verse, **in the West**, in Eretz Yisrael, **they interpreted it** with a slight adjustment: **“She has fallen but she shall fall no more; rise, virgin of Israel.” Rav Naḥman bar Yitzḥak adds: Even so, David went and provided support, through divine inspiration.** Although King David did not include a verse beginning with the letter *nun* alluding to Israel’s downfall, he foresaw the verse that would be written by Amos through divine inspiration; and the very next verse, which begins with the letter *samekh*, reads: **“The Lord upholds the fallen** and raises up those who are bowed down” (Psalms 145:14). Therefore, through divine inspiration, David offered hope and encouragement; although the virgin of Israel may have fallen, the Lord upholds the fallen.

The Rebbe discusses this feature of Ashrei in his comments on his father Rabbi Levi Yitzhak’s points on the Zohar Miketz (Zohar 1, 201b). Rabbi Levi Yitzhak says, discussing the concept of a miracle, נס, Ness, citing our passage in the Talmud, that the Nun represents the fall, Nofel/naflah, and then the Samech – Somech, support - expresses the miracle.

The Rebbe asks: If the letter Nun represents falling, and for this reason it is absent as an initial letter in Ashrei, and Samech represents being supported, somech, why does the word Nes, miracle, begin with Nun? Shouldn’t it rather begin with Samech? In

Ashrei no verse begins with Nun and so similarly the word miracle shouldn't begin with Nun.

The Rebbe answers that Ashrei is speaking of simple daily life. Then the Nun is negative and one wants to conceal it. But the miracle is something out of the ordinary. The Nun, the falling, is part of the miracle. The miracle transforms the darkness of the Nun, the falling, the problem, into the light of miracle. Hence it is right for the Nun to be the first letter⁸.

In the Zohar passage discussed by Rabbi Levi Yitzhak, it states that if someone forgives anyone who might have offended him, before he goes to sleep, he is worthy to have miracles performed on his behalf (Zohar I, 201b). Hence the Lubavitch Siddur begins the prayers before going to sleep with the statement that 'Behold I forgive anyone who angered or upset me...'

The Talmud now speaks of Saying the Shema Before Going to Sleep

אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: אף על פי שקרא אדם קריאת שמע בבית הכנסת — מצוה לקרותו על מותו. אמר רבי יוסי: מאי קרא — "רגזו ואל תחטאו אמרו בלבבכם על משכבכם ודמיו סלה".

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Even though one recited *Shema* in the synagogue, it is a mitzva to recite it upon his bed in fulfillment of the verse: "When you lie down." **Rabbi Yosei said: What verse** alludes to the fact that one must recite *Shema* in the evening, upon his bed, as well? **"Tremble, and do not sin; say to your heart upon your bed and be still, Selah"** (Psalms 4:5). This is understood to mean: Recite *Shema*, about which it is written, "on your hearts," upon your bed, and afterward be still and sleep.

אמר רב נחמן:

With regard to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi's statement, **Rabbi Nahman said:**

⁸ Sichot Kodesh, 5733, Miketz, sec.6 (pp.229-230, 233).

5a

אם תלמיד חכם הוא — אין צריך. אמר אב"י: אף תלמיד חכם מיבעי ליה למימר
 חד פסוקא דרחמי, כגון: "בְּיָדְךָ אִפְקִיד רוּחִי, פְּדִיתָה אוֹתִי ה' אֵל אֱמֶת".

If one is a Torah scholar, he need not recite *Shema* on his bed since he is always engaged in the study of Torah and will likely fall asleep engrossed in matters of Torah. **Abaye said: Even a Torah scholar must recite at least one verse of prayer, such as: “Into Your hand I trust my spirit; You have redeemed me, Lord, God of truth”** (Psalms 31:6).

The Chabad approach to saying the Shema before sleep, is to use that opportunity for Cheshbon Hanefesh, accounting of the soul, evaluating what one did or did not do during the day.

The Rebbe comments that when saying this verse ‘Into Your hand..’ one still is able to the accounting⁹.

⁹ Source?