

Talmud Tour

Berachot 3a

עד סוף האשמורה.

In the mishna, we learned that Rabbi Eliezer establishes that one may recite the evening *Shema* **until the end of the first watch (mishmar)**. These watches are mentioned in the Bible as segments of the night, but it must be established: Into precisely how many segments is the night divided, three or four? Moreover, why does Rabbi Eliezer employ such inexact parameters rather than a more precise definition of time (*Tosefot HaRosh*)?

מאי קסבר רבי אליעזר? אי קסבר שלש משמרות הוי הלילה, לימא "עד ארבע שעות". ואי קסבר ארבע משמרות הוי הלילה, לימא "עד שלש שעות"!

What does Rabbi Eliezer actually hold? If he holds that the night consists of three watches, let him say explicitly that one recites the evening *Shema* **until the fourth hour. If he holds that the night consists of four watches, let him say** explicitly **until the third hour.**

לעולם קסבר שלש משמרות הוי הלילה, והא קמשמע לן: דאיכא משמרות ברקיע ואיכא משמרות בארעא. דתניא, רבי אליעזר אומר: שלש משמרות הוי הלילה, ועל כל משמר ומשמר יושב הקדוש ברוך הוא ושואג כארי, שנאמר: "ה' ממרום ישאג, וממעון קדשו יתן קולו שאג ישאג על נוהו".

The Gemara responds: **Actually, Rabbi Eliezer holds that the night consists of three watches**, and he employs this particular phrasing of watches **in order to teach us: There are watches in heaven and there are watches on earth**; just as our night is divided into watches, so too is the night in the upper worlds. **As it was taught in a baraita: Rabbi Eliezer says: The night consists of three watches, and over each and every watch, the Holy One, Blessed be He, sits and roars like a lion** in pain over the destruction of the Temple. This imagery is derived from a reference in the Bible, **as it is stated: "The Lord roars [yishag] from on high, from His holy dwelling He makes**

His voice heard. He roars mightily [*shaog yishag*] over His dwelling place, He cries out like those who tread grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth” (Jeremiah 25:30). The three instances of the root *shin-alef-gimmel* in this verse correspond to the three watches of the night.

וְסִימָן לַדָּבָר: מִשְׁמֶרֶת רִאשׁוֹנָה חֲמֹר נֹעֵר, שְׁנֵייה כְּלָבִים צֹעֲקִים, שְׁלִישִׁית, תִּינוֹק יוֹנֵק מִשְׁדֵּי אִמּוֹ, וְאִשָּׁה מְסַפֶּרֶת עִם בַּעְלָהּ.

And signs of the transition between each of these watches in the upper world can be sensed in this world: In the first watch, the donkey brays; in the second, dogs bark; and in the third people begin to rise, a baby nurses from its mother’s breast and a wife converses with her husband...

לְמֵאֵי נִפְקָא מִינָהּ — לְמִיקְרֵי קְרִיאַת שְׁמַע לְמֵאֵן דְּגַנְי בְּבֵית אָפֶל וְלֹא יָדַע זְמַן קְרִיאַת שְׁמַע אִימַת. כִּיּוֹן דְּאִשָּׁה מְסַפֶּרֶת עִם בַּעְלָהּ וְתִינוֹק יוֹנֵק מִשְׁדֵּי אִמּוֹ, לִיקוּם וְלִיקְרֵי.

.....**What is the practical ramification of this sign?** It is relevant to **one who recites *Shema* while lying in a dark house**, who cannot see the dawn and **who does not know when the time for reciting *Shema* arrives**. That person is provided with a sign that **when a woman speaks with her husband and a baby nurses from its mother’s breast**, the final watch of the night has ended and **he must rise and recite *Shema***.

אָמַר רַב יִצְחָק בַּר שְׁמוּאֵל מִשְׁמִיָּה דְּרַב: שְׁלֹשׁ מִשְׁמֵרוֹת הוּי הַלַּיְלָה, וְעַל כָּל מִשְׁמֶר וּמִשְׁמֶר יוֹשֵׁב הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא וְשׂוֹאֵג כְּאֶרֶץ, וְאֹמֵר: “אִוִי שְׁהַחְרַבְתִּי אֶת בֵּיתִי וְשָׂרַפְתִּי אֶת הַיִּכְלִי וְהִגְלִיתִי אֶת בְּנֵי לְבִין אוֹמוֹת הָעוֹלָם.”

Rav Yitzhak bar Shmuel said in the name of Rav: The night consists of three watches, and over each and every watch the Holy One, Blessed be He sits and roars like a lion, because the Temple service was connected to the changing of these watches (*Tosefot HaRosh*), and says: “**Woe to Me, that due to their sins I destroyed My house, burned My Temple and exiled them among the nations of the world.**”

Malchut is called 'night', and it has three kinds of Tzimtzum (veiling), and they are the three watches (mishmar). Each stage of veiling, the watch, provokes the roar from Atzilut. Because the word Mishmar also means prison. The flow from Malchut descends lower and lower, experiencing veiling after veiling, in darker and darker realms. Then the lower waters weep, saying 'we want to be close to the King', and in response there is the 'roar' from above.

This 'imprisonment' of the three kinds of Mishmar (watch/prison) also applies to each individual. Each person is trapped in their own materiality, forgetting the Divine. Thus there are three kinds of sin which are ubiquitous: 1) 'theft' in spiritual terms, one learns spiritual teachings from one's father and mother, Wisdom and Understanding, but one does not respond with love and awe, the teaching has been stolen; 2) inappropriate erotic thoughts 3) 'murder' in spiritual terms, such as anger, shaming a person, or speaking Lashon Hara. These are the three 'prisons' of each individual. And because we are caught in these prisons, causing the Shechinah to be caught as well, G-d cries out, like a lion roaring¹.



Edvard Munch, The Scream, 1893. Is this the scream of one schizophrenic individual, of all existence, or of G-d..?

And how should we respond? By screaming?

¹ Rabbi Yehuda Cohen and Rabbi Yehuda Leib Weissglass, *Nishmata d'Oraita* (2023), from R. Shneur Zalman's discourses of 1802, p.154, and R. Dov Ber's Torat Chaim Shemot, vol.2 p.288.

תניא, אמר רבי יוסי: פעם אחת הייתי מהלך בדרך ונכנסתי לחורבה אחת מחורבות ירושלים להתפלל. בא אליהו זכור לטוב ושמר לי על הפתח, (והמתין לי) עד שסיימתי תפילתי. לאחר שסיימתי תפילתי אמר לי: "שלום עליך, רבי". ואמרתי לו: "שלום עליך, רבי ומורי". ואמר לי: בני, מפני מה נכנסת לחורבה זו? אמרתי לו: להתפלל. ואמר לי: הנה לך להתפלל בדרך. ואמרתי לו: מתירא הייתי שמא יפסיקו בי עוברי דרכים, ואמר לי הנה לך להתפלל תפלה קצרה.

Incidental to the mention of the elevated significance of the night watches, the Gemara cites a related story: **It was taught** in a *baraita* that **Rabbi Yosei said: I was once walking along the road when I entered the ruins of an old, abandoned building among the ruins of Jerusalem in order to pray.** I noticed that **Elijah, of blessed memory, came and guarded the entrance for me and waited at the entrance until I finished my prayer. When I finished praying and exited the ruin, Elijah said to me,** deferentially as one would address a rabbi: **Greetings to you, my rabbi. I answered him: Greetings to you, my rabbi, my teacher. And Elijah said to me: My son, why did you enter this ruin? I said to him: In order to pray. And Elijah said to me: You should have prayed on the road. And I said to him: I was unable to pray along the road, because I was afraid that I might be interrupted by travellers and would be unable to focus. Elijah said to me: You should have recited the abbreviated prayer** instituted for just such circumstances.

באותה שעה למדתי ממנו שלשה דברים: למדתי שאין נכנסין לחורבה, ולמדתי שמתפללין בדרך, ולמדתי שהמתפלל בדרך מתפלל תפלה קצרה.

Rabbi Yosei concluded: **At that time,** from that brief exchange, **I learned from him three things: I learned that one may not enter a ruin; and I learned** that one need not enter a building to pray, but **he may pray along the road; and I learned that one who prays along the road recites an abbreviated prayer,** so that he may maintain his focus.

This passage is cited in Keter Shem Tov sec. 276 in a cryptic passage attributed to the Baal Shem Tov, which is elucidated in Nishmata d'Oraita (*The Soul of the Torah*): When Rabbi Yosi entered the ruin, he was doing so on behalf of the Jewish people, who were suffering

greatly (that is what is meant by the 'ruin'). His intention was to pray with great intensity on their behalf. The Baal Shem Tov was known to embark on dangerous spiritual battles for the sake of the Jewish people; but here he warns that this is not always advisable. Also, sometimes, instead of intense solitary prayer, one should cloak one's own prayer with the prayers of the community, and pray 'along the road' where people are passing. In that case, one might also have to reduce the intensity of one's prayer, and just pray an abbreviated prayer, which begins with the word *Havinenu*, meaning 'make us understand'². In this context, this means one should pray with the simple understanding of the words, instead of intense, solitary emotion.

ואמר לי: בני, מה קול שמעת בחורבה זו? ואמרתי לו: שמעתי בת קול שמנהמת כיונה ואומרת: "אוי שהחרבתי את ביתי ושרפתי את היכלי והגליתי את בני לבין אומות העולם". ואמר לי: חייך וחי ראשך, לא שעה זו בלבד אומרת כך, אלא בכל יום ויום, שלש פעמים אומרת כך. ולא זו בלבד אלא, בשעה שישראל נכנסין לבתי כנסיות ולבתי מדרשות ועונין "יהא שמיא הגדול מבורך", הקדוש ברוך הוא מנענע ראשו, ואמר: אשרי המלך שמקלסין אותו בביתו כך, מה לו לאב שהגלה את בניו, ואוי להם לבנים שגלו מעל שולחן אביהם.

And after this introduction, Elijah said to me: What voice did you hear in that ruin?

I responded: I heard a Heavenly voice, like an echo of that roar of the Holy One, Blessed be He (Maharsha), **cooing like a dove and saying: Woe to the children, due to whose sins I destroyed My house, burned My Temple, and exiled them among the nations of the world.**

And Elijah said to me: By your life and by your head, not only did that voice cry out in that moment, but it cries out three times each and every day. Moreover, any time that God's greatness is evoked, such as **when Israel enters synagogues and study halls and answers in the kaddish prayer, May His great name be blessed, the**

² 'Make us understand, oh G-d, to know Your ways, circumcise our heart, to be in awe of You...'. This prayer, one paragraph long, is printed in some Prayerbooks as a substitute for the Amidah when one is on a journey.

Holy One, Blessed be He, shakes His head and says: Happy is the king who is thus praised in his house. When the Temple stood, this praise was recited there, but now: **How** great is the pain of **the father who exiled his children, and woe to the children who were exiled from their father's table**, as their pain only adds to that of their father (Rabbi Shem Tov ibn Shaprut).

The message of the story about the ruin appears to be: it is true that G-d weeps, or roars, at the existential grief of existence. But the individual who is sensitive to this must still try to preserve his or her balance. Do not lose yourself in the existential grief, and also it is sometimes wise to cloak yourself with the community on the road, rather than being a lone mystic in the ruin of existence.

Now let us consider:

וְלֹא זֶה בְּלִבְדָּא אֱלֹא, בְּשַׁעֲהַ שְׂיִשְׂרָאֵל נִכְנָסִין לְבֵיתִי כְּנִסְיֹת וּלְבֵיתִי מִדְּרָשׁוֹת וְעוֹנִין
 "יְהֵא שְׁמִיָּה הַגָּדוֹל מְבוֹרָךְ", הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מְנַעֵנֶע רֹאשׁוֹ

when Israel enters synagogues and study halls and answers in the kaddish prayer, May His great name be blessed, the Holy One, Blessed be He, shakes His head

Rabbi Shneur Zalman says in Likkutei Torah: The Holy One does not have any physical form (G-d forbid), so what does it mean by saying the He 'shakes His head'? The 'head' expresses the Divine Will, רצון, which is exalted beyond the other Attributes. The Jewish people have a connection with Hashem on that exalted level, that is why ישראל has the letters לִי ראש. When they say May His great Name be blessed, they cause the Ratzon to flow. 'Shaking the head' is from above downwards, and thus the Ratzon flows downwards so that it should be revealed. Within the Ratzon, the Will, is also concealed the Ta'anug, the Divine delight.

And this is what is meant by His Great Name. For the Divine Names express the revelation of the flow of G-dliness within the worlds and the Seder Hishtalshelut, the Downchaining of the worlds. This is the case for the Names Elokim and Havaye. But the Great Name is beyond the downchaining of the Sefirot, as the Ratzon-Will-Delight is

higher than the downchaining. When the Jewish people bless this exalted Divine Name, they draw it into the downchaining of the worlds where it is revealed³.

Halachah: we therefore can understand why the response Amen Yehe Shmeh Rabbah Mevorach is so significant that it can interrupt most parts of the prayer service, with the exception of: in the middle of Yishtabach, from Shema to Va-ed, between Go-al Yisrael and the Amidah, in the Amidah before the first Yehi Leratzon at the end. The Amen of d'amiran be-alma in the middle of Kaddish has the same rule.

Another explanation of **וְאֵלֵינוּ לֵבָנִים שְׁגָלוּ מֵעַל שׁוּלְחַן אֲבִיהֶם**, 'woe to the children exiled from their father's table.

The Maggid of Mezeritch taught: one is able to serve G-d with everything, even with eating something delicious, and one has delight in it – one can bring the delight to G-d, for G-d is the delight of all delights. So when the Talmud says 'woe to the children exiled from the table of their father' it means they have exiled their father from their table – they have delight without including their father⁴.

Berachot 3b

תְּנוּ רַבָּנִי: אַרְבַּע מִשְׁמֵרוֹת הָיָה הַלַּיְלָה, דִּבְרֵי רַבִּי. רַבִּי נָתַן אוֹמֵר: שְׁלֹשׁ.

The Sages taught in a Tosefta: The night is comprised of four watches; this is the statement of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi. Rabbi Natan says: The night is comprised of three watches.

מֵאִי טַעְמִיָּה דְּרַבִּי? אָמַר רַבִּי זְרִיקָא, אָמַר רַבִּי אֲמִי, אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לֵוִי: כָּתוּב אֶחָד אוֹמֵר: "חֲצוֹת לַיְלָה אֶקוּם לְהוֹדוֹת לָךְ עַל מִשְׁפָּטִי צְדִיקָךְ", וְכָתוּב אֶחָד אוֹמֵר: "קִדְמוּ עֵינֵי אֲשֵׁמוֹרוֹת" הָא כִּי צִד, אַרְבַּע מִשְׁמֵרוֹת הָיָה הַלַּיְלָה.

What is Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi's reasoning? Rabbi Zerika said that Rabbi Ami said that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi's opinion is based on a comparison of two verses. One verse says: "At midnight I rise to give thanks – lehodot lach - for

³ Nishmata d'Oraita, Likkutei Torah, Shelach, 48b-c.

⁴ Nishmata d'Oraita, Or Torah, sec.430.

Your righteous laws” (Psalms 119:62), and the other verse says: “My eyes forestall the watches, that I will speak of Your word” (Psalms 119:148). Taken together, these verses indicate that their author, King David, rose at midnight, two watches before dawn, in order to study Torah. How is it possible to reconcile these two verses? Only if there are four watches in the night does one who rises two watches before dawn rise at midnight.

וְדוֹד בְּפִלְגָא דְלִילְיָא הוּא קָאִי? מְאוּרְתָא הוּא קָאִי! דְּכִתִּיב: “קִדְמָתִי בְנֶשֶׁף וְאַשְׁוּעָה”, וּמִמָּאִי דְהָאִי “נֶשֶׁף” אוּרְתָא הוּא? — דְּכִתִּיב: “בְּנֶשֶׁף בְּעֶרְבַּיּוֹם בְּאִישׁוֹן לַיְלָה וְאַפְלָה!”

Incidental to the Gemara’s mention of King David, other sources are cited that describe his actions. Regarding that which was cited above, that he would rise in the middle of the night in order to serve his Creator, the Gemara asks: Did David rise at midnight? He rose in the evening. As it is written: “I rose with the *neshef* and cried, I hoped for Your word” (Psalms 119:147). And how do we know that this *neshef* is the evening? As it is written: “In the *neshef*, in the evening of the day, in the blackness of night and the darkness” (Proverbs 7:9). Apparently, King David did indeed rise when it was still evening.

אָמַר רַב אוֹשְׁעִיָא, אָמַר רַבִּי אַחָא: הֲכִי קָאֻמַּר (דְּדוֹד): מְעוּלָם לֹא עֲבַר עָלַי חֲצוֹת לַיְלָה בְּשִׁנָּה.

The Gemara suggests several ways to resolve this contradiction. Rabbi Oshaya said that Rabbi Aḥa said: David said as follows: Midnight never passed me by in my sleep. Sometimes I fulfilled the verse, “I rose with the *neshef* and cried,” but I always, at least, fulfilled the verse, “At midnight I rise to give thanks for Your righteous laws.”

רַבִּי זִירָא אָמַר: עַד חֲצוֹת לַיְלָה הָיָה מִתְנַמְנֵם כְּסוֹס, מִכָּאן וְאֵילָךְ הָיָה מִתְגַּבֵּר כְּאֵרִי. רַב אֲשִׁי אָמַר: עַד חֲצוֹת לַיְלָה הָיָה עוֹסֵק בְּדַבְרֵי תוֹרָה, מִכָּאן וְאֵילָךְ בְּשִׁירוֹת וְתַשְׁבְּחוֹת.

Rabbi Zeira said: Until midnight, David would doze like a horse, as a horse dozes, but never sleeps deeply. From midnight on, he

would gain the strength of a lion. Rav Ashi said: Until midnight, he would study Torah, as it is written: “I rose with the *neshef* and cried, I hoped for Your word,” and from midnight on, he would engage in songs and praise, as it is written: “At midnight I rise to give thanks.”

וְדוּד מִי הָוָה יָדַע פִּלְגָא דְלִילְיָא אֵימַת? הֲשֵׁתָא מֶשֶׁה רַבִּינוּ לֹא הָוָה יָדַע,
דְּכְתִיב “כְּחֻצוֹת הַלַּיְלָה אֲנִי יוֹצֵא בְּתוֹךְ מִצְרַיִם”.

When King David said: At midnight I rise, the assumption is that he rose precisely at midnight. The Gemara asks: Did David know exactly when it was midnight? Even Moses our teacher did not know exactly when it was midnight. How do we know this about Moses? As it is written that he said to Pharaoh: “Thus said the Lord: About midnight, I will go out into the midst of Egypt” (Exodus 11:4). The word *about* indicates that it was only an approximation.

מֵאִי “כְּחֻצוֹת”. אֵילִימָא דְאָמַר לִיה קוּדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא “כְּחֻצוֹת” — מִי אִיכָא
סְפִיקָא קָמִי שְׁמַיָא?! אֵלֹא: דְאָמַר לִיה (לְמַחֲר) “בְּחֻצוֹת” (כִּי הֲשֵׁתָא), וְאַתָּא
אִיהוּ וְאָמַר “כְּחֻצוֹת”, אֵלֶמָּא: מְסַפֵּקָא לִיה, וְדוּד הָוָה יָדַע?!

The Gemara clarifies: What is the meaning of the expression: About midnight? Did Moses say it or did God say it? If we say that the Holy One, Blessed be He, Himself, said: About midnight, to Moses, is there doubt before God in heaven? Rather, this must be understood as follows: God told Moses: At midnight, but from the fact that when Moses came to Pharaoh he said: About midnight; apparently, Moses was uncertain about the exact moment of midnight. Moses, the greatest of all the prophets, was uncertain, and David knew?

דוּד, סִימְנָא הָוָה לִיה, דְאָמַר רַב אַחָא בְּרַ בִּיזְנָא, אָמַר רַבִּי שְׁמַעוֹן חֲסִידָא:
כְּנֹר הִיָּה תְלוּי לְמַעְלָה מִמַּטְתּוֹ שֶׁל דוּד, וְכִינּוּן שְׁהֲגִיעַ חֻצוֹת לַיְלָה, בָּא רוּחַ
צְפוֹנִית וְנוֹשְׁבֶת בּוֹ וּמִנְגֵן מְאֵלִיו, מִיַּד הִיָּה עוֹמֵד וְעוֹסֵק בְּתוֹרָה עַד שְׁעָלָה
עֲמוּד הַשָּׁחַר.

The Gemara offers several answers to this question:
David had a sign indicating when it was midnight. As Rav Aḥa bar

Bizna said that Rabbi Shimon Ḥasida said: A lyre hung over David's bed, and once midnight arrived, the northern midnight wind would come and cause the lyre to play on its own. David would immediately rise from his bed and study Torah until the first rays of dawn.

Regarding Midnight – the Zohar⁵ says that ‘at midnight The Holy One arises.. to delight with the Tzaddikim in the Garden of Eden’. The RaShaB⁶ explains (paraphrased): The Torah says that G-d called the light day, and the darkness He called night. ‘Day’ means light and Chesed (Kindness), and Night is darkness and harshness, (dinim). It is known that ‘night’ means the Sefirah Malchut (Kingship), because it is built from Gevurot, Severity. This is because Malchut is the source of the worlds, which come into being through Gevurah and Tzimtzum, severity and veiling, concealment of the Divine. Concealment is העלם (he’elem) and the world is העולם (ha’olam).

But Malchut also has within it the quality of Chesed, as it says ‘His throne is established through Chesed’, והוכן בחסד כסאו . (The Divine ‘throne’ means Malchut). This is why the night divides into two halves – the first half of the night is Gevurah, and the second half is Chesed.

Now, the point of division of these two halves is at midnight, which both divides and joins these two halves.

That moment of midnight is beyond either Gevurah or Chesed. It is from a higher level, beyond time. The radiance of Ein Sof shines through it to those below. This is the special quality of Midnight, and this is why the Zohar says specifically at midnight the Holy One rejoices with the Zaddikim, because the term ‘the Holy One’ in this case denotes the Infinite, beyond the distinction between Kindness and Severity.

This is why King David said (in Psalms) that at midnight he rises ‘lehodot lach, [translated above as] to give thanks to You’. Hoda’ah means acceptance of that which is above Understanding, for at

⁵ Zoahr I, 92a

⁶ Rabbi Shalom Dovber Schneersohn, 5th Lubavitcher Rebbe, 1860-1920.

Midnight the Essence is revealed, and thus too the Delight of the Divine is revealed to, and together with, the Tzaddikim in the Garden of Eden⁷.

⁷ Nishmata d'Oraita, from RaShaB, Book of Discourses 5678 p.241-2.