

## ~~Appendix A~~

### **The Institution of *Shema*' Recital Upon One's Bed**

The necessity to recite the verses of the *Shema*' had been a subject of disagreement in the middle of the first century CE between the Pharisaic houses of study – Hillel and Shammai - of how to hermeneutically parse the verses of “reciting them ... when you lie down and when you get up” (Deut. 6:7, 11:19), found in each of the first two paragraphs of the *Shema*'. The House of Shammai reading that the verse was instructing as to one's physical positioning when reciting it and the House of Hillel reading it as referring to standardized times of people generally going to sleep and waking up (*Berakhot* 1:3). Either way, both agreed that in the evenings and mornings, the *Shema*' was to be recited.

There was a move from the requirement to say the *Shema*' in terms of a formal, public liturgical requirement, and moving into the house – that is, on one's bed, prior to going to sleep.<sup>1</sup> This seems to be a move to make it more connected to the verses' language of lying down – not just to recite it [in the synagogue] in its time – that of people's going to sleep. Seemingly, this was done to fill in a religious lacuna in the moments while going to sleep, such that the Rabbis sought to fill this void by prescribing these verses.

While this move may have been made toward the beginning of the third century, the formal obligation was articulated by Rabbi Yehoshua, son of Levi, in the latter half of the third century to recite the *Shema*' on one's bed even though one has already recited it in the synagogue in the language of a religious requirement (*Berakhot* 4b). According to Rav Assi, he based this prescription on the verse of “So tremble, and sin no more; ponder it on your bed, and sigh” (Ps. 4:5). The significance of this verse here is that, along with the two verses in Deuteronomy about lying down and speaking, there are no other verses in the Bible about prescribing speech on one's bed.<sup>2</sup> In the Palestinian Talmud, there are no formal prescriptions regarding the saying of the *Shema*' on one's bed, versus that of the Babylonian Talmud.

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<sup>1</sup> Carl M. Perkins, “The Evening Shema: A Study in Rabbinic Consolation,” *Judaism* 43, no. 1 (1994), 32, 34. As to the latter page reference, I am unconvinced of his conclusions regarding the Babylonian Talmud's attitudes towards reciting the *Shema*'. Were he to have separated the tannaitic statements from those of the amoraim who were speaking of a different requirement of reciting the *Shema*', the former of the Deuteronomic requirement and the latter of a rabbinic requirement, he would have uncovered that they were not speaking of the same exact topics.

<sup>2</sup> Drew Kaplan, “In Your Lying Down and In Your Rising Up': A Biblical Sleep Ethic,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (January-March 2006), 47. While also listed there is Psalm 149:5, that verse is more suggestive than prescriptive. Nevertheless, this verse will be brought into the picture in the Babylonian Talmud.

However, Rabbi Ze'era reported around the turn of the fourth century that he had seen Rabbi Shmuel, son of Nahmani, reciting *Shema'* over and over again until he fell asleep (*Yerushalmi Berakhot* 1:1). Both Rabbi Aha and Rabbi Tahlifta, his son-in-law, reported in the name of Rabbi Shmuel, son of Nahman that this was due to the same verse as had Rav Assi identified (*Yerushalmi Berakhot* 1:1).

Around the same time – perhaps a few decades earlier – it was asked of Rabbi Eleazar and Rabbi Yohanan if a man had fulfilled his obligation if he had fallen asleep after having recited the first verse of the *Shema'*, with the former accepting it and the latter not (*Yerushalmi Berakhot* 2:1). Several decades earlier, Rav had dealt with this same issue, having said that a man had fulfilled his obligation if he only had recited the first line before having fallen asleep (*Berakhot* 13b).

The functional purpose of the recitation of the *Shema'* on one's bed, according to Rabbi Huna in the name of Rav Yosef, was in order to cause damaging forces to separate from him (*Yerushalmi Berakhot* 1:1). The significance to this is similar to the reasoning offered by the early fourth century sage Rav Yosef in the *Yerushalmi* that damaging spirits should flee from him by his contemporaries Rabbi Eleazar<sup>3</sup> and Rabbi Yitzhak, where the latter offers the same reasoning as Rav Yosef, and Rabbi Eleazar offering a similar one, whereby it is as if one seizes a sword on both sides of his hand<sup>4</sup> (*Berakhot* 5a). It seems as if both of them, as well as Rav Yosef, utilize, or at least look to, this saying of the *Shema'* on one's bed as a method of spiritual or, perhaps, physical, protection over them while they sleep.<sup>5</sup>

In the middle of the fourth century, a disagreement broke out regarding this religious requirement of reading out the *Shema'* on one's bed: Rav Nahman, son of Yitzhak<sup>6</sup> said that if he is a learned scholar, he need not recite it (*Berakhot* 4b-5a), presumably because he is accustomed

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<sup>3</sup> See Rabbi Raphael Rabbinovicz, *Variae Lectiones in Mischnam et in Talmud Babylonicum*, vol.1, *Tractate Berachoth et totus ordo Seraim* (in Hebrew) (Munich: H. Roesl, 1867; Jerusalem: Ohr HaHakhmah, 2002), 12, n. 400. See also MS Oxford 23 (366) and MS Firenza 7-9 I II.

<sup>4</sup> Utilizing Psalm 149:5.

<sup>5</sup> The belief in damaging forces existed in Tannaitic sources (*Avot* 5:6, *Berakhot* 3a, *Berakhot* 6a, *Berakhot* 62a, *Pesahim* 54a, *Bava Metzia* 107b) to some degree, so it does not seem like such a radical concept. Moreover, it was possible that Rabbi Yehoshua, son of Levi, could have implemented this due to damaging spirits, as he had mentioned that they are all killed on the Sabbath (*Shabbat* 121b).

<sup>6</sup> His patronym is omitted in the Vilna printed edition, but should be included; see Rabbinovicz, *Variae Lectiones*, 11, n. 70. Cf. MS Oxford 23 (366), MS Firenza 7-9 I II, MS Paris 671. It seems that the patronym was dropped off of the end of the page when it went to print in the Soncino printed edition and retained that reading for the Vilna printed edition.

to learning,<sup>7</sup> and, therefore, is protected from these damaging forces. Upon this statement, his contemporary,<sup>8</sup> Abaye, said that if a learned scholar avails himself of this exemption, he still needs to say some verse of mercy (*Berakhot* 5a), presumably to still impart upon the action taking place a certain mindfulness, rather than just having the learned scholar going through his learning.

Another possibility to this discussion was that Rabbi Yehoshua, son of Levi, had wanted to ensure that, for those men who had recited the evening *Shema*’ in synagogue, which would have still been during the day, or at least before the stars came out – being too early for the proper time of the recitation of the *Shema*’, they would now be saying it in the proper time. Thus, the reason that Rav Nahman, son of Yitzhak said that a learned scholar need not say it would be that he would be more mindful and careful to recite it after nightfall, but before bedtime. Then, Abaye wanted to make sure to say something in order that the learned scholar should still be protected from damaging spirits or demons.

Two possible Tannaitic precedents that could have existed before Rabbi Yehoshua, son of Levi, made his requirement are to be examined. The first is the main *beraita* in our paper which advises one to say the first paragraph of the *Shema*’ when entering into one’s bed (*Berakhot* 60b). It could be that Rabbi Yehoshua, son of Levi, meant to intensify this obligation or, perhaps, this previous prescription was not a tremendous imperative. Furthermore, perhaps Rabbi Yehoshua, son of Levi was referring to just the first paragraph of the *Shema*’ or maybe all three paragraphs of it.<sup>9</sup>

This is an excised appendix from what is to appear in my (Drew Kaplan’s) forthcoming article in *Milim Havivin* vol. 3 (2007) on the Hamapil blessing. I may be e-mailed at [drew@drewkaplan.info](mailto:drew@drewkaplan.info).



<sup>7</sup> Rashi, *Berakhot* 5a, s.v. *Ve-lo talmid hakham hu*.

<sup>8</sup> As opposed to my previous article, wherein it is Rav Nahman that makes the statement (“Rabbinic Sleep Ethics: Jewish Sleep Conduct in Late Antiquity,” *Milim Havivin* 2 [2006], 85), rather than Rav Nahman, son of Yitzhak, which makes a difference of a generation. Thus, Abaye is now seen as commenting on his colleague’s statement.

<sup>9</sup> Or perhaps just the first two paragraphs, as they each have the language of lying down, while the third paragraph does not speak about sleep at all.