

The Weekly Daf



by Rav Mendel Weinbach - Dean, Ohr Somayach Institutions

Berachos 2-8

Week of 27 Elul 5757 - 4 Tishrei 5758 / 29 Sept. - 5 Oct. 1997
Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud
studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

THE TALMUD'S FIRST QUESTION

When may one recite the "Shema" in the evening?

This is the question which serves as the opening of the Babylonian Talmud.

In response the Mishneh cites the earliest time — when the stars appear and the *kohanim* who have immersed themselves in a mikveh to purify themselves from a state of *tumah* are eligible to once again eat *trumah*.

While there is a consensus on how early the Shema can be recited in the evening, there are several differing positions as to how late this mitzvah can be performed. Rabbi Eliezer limits this to the first third of the night while the Sages extend it to midnight and Rabban Gamaliel until the morning.

The differing opinions, explains Rashi (3a), are based on how to interpret the term "and in your lying down to sleep" which the Torah uses for the time-frame of the evening Shema. Rabbi Eliezer's interpretation is that this refers to the time when people are involved in lying down to sleep. Since there are early retirers and late ones this period extends to the first third of the night. Rabbi Gamaliel and the Sages both interpret this not as when people go to sleep but to when they are actually sleeping. Which is all night long. The Sages, however, limit the recital to midnight because they contend that there is a rabbinical decree requiring a person to recite the Shema before that hour in order to prevent him from falling asleep before reciting and entirely missing out on the mitzvah.

This is why the Mishneh concludes with the story of Rabban Gamaliel's sons arriving home after midnight without having recited the Shema. Rabban Gamaliel informed them that they could still recite the Shema because even the Sages who limit the time to midnight agree that the Torah gave a person the opportunity to recite the Shema as long as people are sleeping, which is until the morning. They only disagreed with his own opinion by insisting that a rabbinical decree required recital before midnight. But even they would agree that if one forgot to do so before midnight, he still had an opportunity to do so until daybreak.

Berachos 2a

FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

When Rabbi Yochanan, who taught Torah in *Eretz Yisrael*, was told that there were Jews in Babylon who reached old age, he greeted this report with wonder. In the Torah's promise of longevity for fulfilling the *mitzvot* of Hashem we are told that this is "in order to increase your days and the days of your children upon the land which Hashem swore to give to ancestors." (*Devarim 11:21*) If long life, asked Rabbi Yochanan, is conditional on living in *Eretz Yisrael*, how can it be attained elsewhere?

Only after inquiring about the behavior of those elderly Babylonian Jews and learning that they came early to the synagogue and left late was the mystery solved. It is this merit of synagogue attendance, concluded Rabbi Yochanan, which enabled them to live such long lives.

The solution, however, is itself a mystery as to how synagogue attendance can serve as a substitute for the seemingly indispensable element of living in *Eretz Yisrael*.

"The synagogue and houses of Torah study outside of *Eretz Yisrael*," say our Sages (*Megillah 29a*), "will in the hereafter be reestablished in *Eretz Yisrael*."

The soil upon which a synagogue stands, suggests the *Klei Yakar* in his commentary on Chumash, is, in a sense, extraterritorial *Eretz Yisrael*. By regularly attending the synagogue even in Babylon, those Jews were spending a significant part of their lives on land which had the sacred status of *Eretz Yisrael* and were therefore entitled to the blessing of longevity intended for those who live in the Holy Land.

Prepared by Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, Israel

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☎ 22 Shimon Hatzadik Street, POB 18103, Jerusalem Israel ☎ 972-2-581-0315 fax: 972-2-581-2890 ✉ ohr@virtual.co.il
☎ 38 East 29th Street 8th floor, New York, NY 10016, USA ☎ 1-212-213-3100 fax: 1-212-213-8717 ✉ RZCorlin@aol.com or estern@Aol.com
☎ 613 Clark Avenue West, Thornhill, Ontario L4J 5V3, Canada ☎ 1-905-886-5730 fax: 1-905-886-6065 ✉ Somayach@MSN.com

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22 Shimon Hatzadik Street, POB 18103, Jerusalem Israel

☎ 972-2-581-0315

fax: 972-2-581-2890

✉ ohr@virtual.co.il

38 East 29th Street 8th floor, New York, NY 10016, USA

☎ 1-212-213-3100

fax: 1-212-213-8717

✉ RZCorlin@aol.com or estern@Aol.com

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