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In Order to Distance One from Sin

In the first *Mishnah* we learn about the time period in which the evening *Shema* is recited. While everyone agrees that the starting time is nightfall, a debate ensues regarding that latest time one can recite *Shema*. *R' Eliezer* maintains that it must be recited within the first third of the night, the *Chachamim* argue that the limit is midnight while *Rabban Gamliel* maintains that one has until dawn. We learn however, that the *Chachamim* really agree with *Rabban Gamliel* and one could recite the *Shema* the entire night. Nevertheless, the *Chachamim* ruled that *lechatchila* (ideally) one should recite the *Shema* before midnight “in order to distance one from sin.” How do understand this concern and what else is encompassed by their decree?

The *Gemara* (*Berachot* 4b) citing a *Beraita* elaborates:

The *Chachamim* made a *seyag* (fence) for their words, in order that a person should not return from the field in the evening and say: I will go to my house and eat a little, drink a little and sleep a little and afterwards I will recite *Shema* and pray; a deep sleep will then take hold of him, and the result will be that he will sleep the entire night. Rather when a person comes from the field in the evening, he should enter *shul*, and if he can read *pesukim* he should read *pesukim*, if he can learn *Mishnah* he should learn *Mishnah*, and he recites *Shema* and prays and eats his bread and *benches*...

At first the *Beraita* appears to be elaborating on the *Chachamim's* concern that one will miss reciting the evening *Shema*. The *Tosfot* however explain that we also learn from this *Beraita* that once the time for reciting the evening *Shema* has arrived, it is forbidden for one to eat a meal prior to reciting *Shema* and praying *ma'ariv*. The *Rashba* extends this prohibition further to other activities that are prohibited close to *mincha gedolah* prior to praying *mincha*, e.g. having a hair cut (see *Shabbat* 1:2). The *Rambam* (*Tefillah* 6:7) however explicitly restricts this prohibition to eating and drinking, while the prohibition regarding the other activities as only applying to *mincha* time. The *Aruch HaShulchan* explains that since the time to recite the evening *Shema* is longer than the time to pray *mincha* there was no concern that one would become preoccupied and miss *davening*. Instead here their concern was that one might fall asleep. Consequently eating and drinking that can draw one into slumber were prohibited until one recited *Shema* and *davened*.

How much eating is prohibited? A quick review of the *Beraita* seems to suggest that the even eating “a little” is prohibited. Nevertheless the *Tosfot* explicated stated that a meal is prohibited?

The *Tosfot R' Akiva Eiger* understands the even a small amount of food is prohibited and believe the *Tosfot* agree (while not being particular with their choice of words). He explains that if the *Tosfot* wanted to derive that having a meal was prohibited, they could have learnt it from an explicit *Mishnah* (*Shabbat* 1:2) where we learn that one must stop his meal to recite *Shema*. The fact that they opt for this *Beraita* means it is teaching us something else, i.e. even a small amount is prohibited. (See inside for further proofs.)

The *Tifferet Yisrael* (*Boaz* 1) argues that the *Tosfot* should be understood as it is written – only a meal is prohibited. He explains the *Tosfot* chose the *Beraita* to learn this law instead of the *Mishnah* in *Shabbat* because it teaches us something new. The *Tifferet Yisrael* notes that at first the *Tosfot* seems to be restating *Beraita* – a meal prior to *Shema* is forbidden. The *Tifferet Yisrael* suggests that a more careful reading reveals that the *Tosfot* understand that it is forbidden to eat a meal a half an hour prior to the time one must read *Shema* - “from the time that the time to read *Shema* approaches”. Furthermore the directive of the *Beraita* that one should return from work, learn and then recite *Shema* implies that prohibition applies even prior to the time to recite *Shema*. (See inside for further proofs.)

If only a meal is prohibited then how do we understand the plain meaning of the *Beraita* that appears to be concerned with eating “a little”? The *Aruch HaShulchan* explains that one cannot derive anything from the first part of the *Beraita* as it illustrates the way people speak. People have a tendency to say they only eat and drink a bit and a have a little nap – all three together. Nevertheless the *Chachamim* were concerned that when people returned they would eat more. Furthermore the end of the *Beraita* provides further proof that only a meal is prohibited. The instruction that one should “recite *Shema*, pray and eat bread (*pat*)” implies that the concern is only really with a fix meal and not a snack, because that is to what the language of *pat* generally refers.

* As always no practical *Halacha* should be derived from these articles. Consult your local rabbinic authority should any questions arise.

Yisrael Yitzchak Bankier

Revision Questions

ברכות א' א' – ג' א'

- When is the starting time for *kriyat sh'ma* at night? (א' א')
- What are the three opinions regarding the latest time that one can recite *sh'ma* at night? (א' א')
- For what *mitzvah*, other than *kriyat sh'ma*, did the *Chachamim* bring forward the latest time that one can perform the *mitzvah* "to prevent one from transgressing"? (א' א')
- What are the two opinions regarding the starting time for *kriyat sh'ma* in the morning? (ב' א')
- What are the two opinions regarding the latest time that one can recite *sh'ma* in the morning? (ב' א')
- If the time for reading *sh'ma* in the morning has passed (but the *zman t'fillah* has not been completed) can one read *sh'ma* with the *brachot kriyat sh'ma*? (ב' א')
- Explain the debate surrounding the significance of "ובשכבך ובקומך". (א' ג')
- Which *Tana* put himself in danger to recite *sh'ma* in the manner held by *Beit Shammai*? (א' ג')
- How many *brachot* does one recite before and after *kriyat sh'ma* in the morning and at night? (א' ד')
- Is there a *mitzvah* of remembering *yetziyat mitzrayim* at night? If so, how is it fulfilled? (א' ה')
- Explain the debate between *Ben Zoma* and the *Chachamim* about the *pasuk*: "למען תזכר את יום צאתך ממצרים כל ימי חייך" (דברים ט"ז: ג'). (א' ה')
- If someone happens to be reading the chapter of *sh'ma* from the *Torah* during *zman kriyat sh'ma* do they fulfill the *mitzvah* of *kriyat sh'ma*? (א' ב')
- Explain the debate between *R' Meir* and *R' Yehuda* about when it is permissible to interrupt during and in between the chapters of *sh'ma*. (א' ב')
- To what does *בין הפרקים* refer? (ב' ב')
- Explain the ordering of the chapters of *kriyat sh'ma*. (ב' ב')
- Explain the debate or ruling in the following cases: (ב' ג')
 - Reading *sh'ma* without hearing the words.
 - Not being precise with the pronunciation of the words.
 - Reading the *p'sukim* out of order.
 - If someone made a mistake.
- What is ruling regarding an employee working in a tree with regards to reading *sh'ma* and *t'fillah*? (ב' ד')
- Until when is a groom exempt from reciting *sh'ma*? (ב' ה')
- What are the three cases where *Rabban Gamliel* acted against the ruling of the *Mishnah*? What was his justification in each of these cases? (ב' ה'-ו')
- What was the name of *Rabban Gamliel's* slave? (ב' ו')
- Can a groom be *machmir* and recite *sh'ma* on his wedding night? (ב' ח')
- What three *mitzvot* are close relatives of the deceased exempt from prior to the burial? What is the law regarding those carrying the coffin and others attending the funeral? (ג' א')

Local Shiurim

Sunday -Thursday

After *ma'ariv*
Mizrachi Shul

Friday & Shabbat

10 minutes before *mincha*
Beit Ha'Roeh

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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	שבת קודש
11 th July כ"ט תמוז	12 th July א' אב	13 th July ב' אב	14 th July ג' אב	15 th July ד' אב	16 th July ה' אב	17 th July ו' אב
Berachot 3:2-3	Berachot 3:4-5	Berachot 3:6 - 4:1	Berachot 4:2-3	Berachot 4:4-5	Berachot 4:6-7	Berachot 5:1-2

