

# PART 3-4: KING DAVID AT NIGHT

*by Rabbi Dr. Azriel Rosenfeld*

David said "I get up at midnight to praise You" (Psalms 119:62), but he also said "I cried out early, in the NESHEF" (ibid.147), and "neshef" means evening (Prov. 7:9: "In the NESHEF... in the evening of the day"). He meant that he was never asleep at midnight; or that until midnight he dozed like a horse and then rose up like a lion; or that until midnight he studied Torah and then sang praises. NESHEF can also mean morning (1 Sam.30:17: "David smote them from the NESHEF until the next evening"); it can mean either that the night was swept away (NASHAF) and the day came, or that the day was swept away and the night came.

Moses didn't know exactly when midnight was, because he said (Ex.11:4) "At about midnight I will go out into Egypt". But David knew, because a harp hung above his bed, and at midnight a north wind blew and it played; he then got up and studied Torah until dawn, as it says (Psalms 57:9) "Awaken... harp; I will awaken the dawn". We can also say that Moses did know exactly when midnight was, but he said "at about midnight" because Pharaoh's astrologers might have miscalculated the time and said "Moses is a liar" (Derech Eretz Zuta Ch.3: "Teach your tongue to say 'I don't know' so you won't get caught in a misstatement"); or when he said KA-CHATZOS he didn't mean "at about midnight", but rather "at this time tomorrow night".

When David said "Guard my soul, for I am righteous" (Psalms 86:2), he meant: All other kings sleep until nine, but I get up at midnight to praise G-d. David said "If I did not (LULEI) believe that I will see G-d's goodness in the land of life" (Psalms 27:13); there are dots over "lulei" because David meant "I know that You will reward the righteous in the future, but I do not know if I will have a share among them". Nevertheless, David called himself righteous; he was in doubt only because he feared that a sin might interfere. Similarly, G-d said to Jacob "I will guard you everywhere you go" (Gen.28:15), but Jacob was afraid (Gen.32:8) because he feared that a sin might interfere. Also, "Until Your nation passes, until this nation that You acquired passes" (Ex.15:16) refers to the first and second entries into the Land; Israel was worthy of a miracle in Ezra's time, just as they were in Joshua's time, but sin interfered.

## 4. The Evening Shema and the Evening Prayer (4b)

The Mishnah tells us that according to the Sages, the time for reciting the evening Shema ends at midnight; but according to Rabban Gamliel it can be recited until dawn if necessary, and he once told this to his sons when they came home after midnight from a party. Indeed, whenever the Sages say

that a commandment should be performed by midnight, if necessary it can be performed until dawn; the Sages limited it to midnight in order to keep people away from transgression. The sages made a fence for the law about reciting the evening Shema so that a man should not come from the field in the evening and say "I will go to my house, eat a little, drink a little, and sleep a little", because he might fall sound asleep and sleep all night. Rather, a man who comes from the field should go to the synagogue, study Torah if he is accustomed to do so, recite the Shema and the evening prayer (the Amidah), and then eat his meal and say Grace.

R.Yochanan says that the evening Shema precedes the evening Amidah, and that the blessing "Who redeemed Israel", which is recited after the Shema, should immediately precede the Amidah, just as it does in the morning; but R.Yehoshua b.Levi says that all three recitations of the Amidah (morning, afternoon, and evening) come between the morning Shema and the evening Shema. Their difference of opinion may be based on reasoning: The redemption from Egypt began in the evening, but it was not final until morning. Or it may be based on the verse "When you lie down and when you get up" (Deut.6:7), which teaches us that lying down and getting up are analogous: According to R.Yochanan, the Shema precedes the Amidah in the evening just as it does in the morning; according to R.Yehoshua, the Shema immediately precedes going to bed in the evening just as it immediately follows getting out of bed in the morning.

We regard the blessing "Who redeemed Israel" as adjacent to the Amidah even though the Amidah must be preceded by "G-d, open my lips" (Psalm 51:17) because that verse is regarded as part of the Amidah. Similarly, we regard them as adjacent in the evening even though an additional blessing, "Lay us down...", is recited after the evening Shema, because the blessing "Lay us down..." is regarded as part of the blessing about the redemption.

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