

KRIAT SHEMA 2:2

by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

2. Everybody [may] read [K'riat Sh'ma] *K'darkan* (in their own way); whether standing, walking, lying down or riding on the back of an animal. It is forbidden to read K'riat Sh'ma while he is laid out with his face in the ground or laying down on his back with his face facing up. However, he may read while lying on his side. If he was obese and could not turn on his side, or was sick, he may lean a bit on his side and read.

[RABD: "It is forbidden...he may read". The RABD wrote - it is better if he lies down and he must do so if possible]

BODY POSTURE DURING K'RIAT SH'MA

Yitzchak Etshalom

I.

*Teach them to your children and talk about them when you sit at home *uv'lekh't'kha vaderekh* (when you are on the way), when you lie down and when you rise*

The verse clearly obligates us to speak/recite these words (either Talmud Torah in general, or specifically the words of K'riat Sh'ma - see Introductory Shiur) as we walk on our way, along with the other circumstances mentioned.

Beit Hillel (Berakhot 11a), following the lead of this verse, rule that "People stand and read [K'riat Sh'ma], sit and read, *Matin* (recline OR lie down) and read, walk on the way and read or engage in work and read." This is in opposition to Beit Shammai's demand that "in the evening, everyone must recline and read; in the morning, everyone must stand up and read", based on the verse "when you lie down and when you rise up."

The Gemara then cites a Tosefta (Berakhot 1:6) in which R. Yishma'el and R. Elazar b. Azariah were together, R. Yishma'el reclining and R. Elazar b. Azariah sitting up. When the time for K'riat Sh'ma arrived, R. Elazar reclined. In response, R. Yishma'el sat up. The Gemara explains that whereas R. Yishma'el was already reclined and intended to stay in that position to read, R. Elazar intentionally reclined in order to read - seemingly a Beit-Shammai move. (This was after the Halakha had been decided in favor of Beit-Hillel's position). This led to the second problem - the students present

might have concluded from their actions that the Halakha follows Beit Shammai's position. The Gemara then presents three approaches:

(a) You may follow Beit Hillel OR Beit Shammai in this case, because Beit Hillel certainly allow for a reading in the style that Beit Shammai mandate;

(b) If you read in accordance with Beit Shammai's ruling, you have not fulfilled the Mitzva; ("Lo Yatza");

(c) If you read in accordance with Beit Shammai's ruling, you are liable for the death penalty. To support this position (no a literal judicial ruling) - they cite the Mishna (1:3) where R. Tarfon recalls that he reclined in accordance with Beit Shammai's position and ended up risking his life as a result - to which his colleagues responded: You were liable for that, since you violated the teaching of Beit Hillel.

The second position is the most intriguing (since the third is clearly non-literal). Rabbi S.R. Hirsch (commentary to Devarim [Deuteronomy] 6:7) explains as follows:

"The reason for this might perhaps be that Hillel's teaching - each person reads in his own way - is not to be taken simply as a facility - a leniency - but as an essential characteristic of K'riat Sh'ma which just by the fact that 'Each person reads in his own way' is shown to be the thought that should fill our minds in every situation and every position in life, whereas the denial of the canon 'Each person reads in his own way' by adopting a definite position in which to say it in the morning and another at night would give K'riat Sh'ma the appearance of containing a thought which one would have to get out of one's ordinary course to take it to heart."

II.

PRAKDAN

As mentioned above, *Matin* (reclining OR lying down) is listed among Beit Hillel's acceptable body postures for K'riat Sh'ma. This ruling is supported by the discussion in the Gemara (Berakhot 24a) regarding the recitation of K'riat Sh'ma while in bed with one's spouse. (The essential point of the sugya there concerns issues of exposure/contact with one's own nakedness or that of others while reciting K'riat Sh'ma. These Halakhot will be discussed in greater detail when we get to K'riat Sh'ma 3:16-19) The very fact of the discussion implies that reciting K'riat Sh'ma lying down (abed) is perfectly acceptable.

This position is apparently challenged by the statement of R. Yosef (Berakhot 13b): A *Prakdan* should not recite K'riat Sh'ma.

Among the Rishonim, there are three translations of "Prakdan"

(a) Rashi (and Tosafot - Nidah 14a s. v. Aparkid) explains that it means someone lying flat on his back.

(b) Arukh (quoted in Tosafot) - Prakdan means someone lying on his stomach.

(c) Rambam (and R'ah - commentary on Berakhot, beginning of Chapter 2) both here and in Hametz uMatzah 7:8 - Prakdan is EITHER lying flat on the back or on the stomach.

In any case, a Prakdan seems to be excessively open to sexually oriented thoughts - as is seen from the next piece in the Gemara:

[from R. Yosef we infer that reading K'riat Sh'ma is forbidden while lying as a Prakdan, but] is sleeping in this fashion permissible? After all, R. Yehoshua b. Levi used to curse anyone who slept as a Prakdan!

Rashi explains the prohibition of sleeping this way: perhaps he will become erect while he is sleeping and this will be seen by others - which is disgraceful. (This may be why Rashi identified "Prakdan" as specifically on your back - if sleeping on your stomach, this problem would not occur. See, however, Rambam in Issurei Bi'ah (cited below) for an apparent "combination" of these approaches.)

Tosafot (Nidah 14a s.v. Layit) explains, in the name of Rashbam, that lying in that fashion as a tendency to increase *Hirhur* (sexually exciting thoughts). Rambam adopts the same approach (Issurei Bi'ah 21:19).

According to either approach, sleeping in the manner of Prakdan is objectionable on Hirhur grounds.

The Gemara concludes: regarding sleeping, if he inclines a bit to his side, it is permissible. This is not the case, however, regarding K'riat Sh'ma.

In other words, R. Yehoshua b. Levi's "curse" applies to sleeping flat on your back (or stomach) - but, if you lean a bit on your side, that's acceptable. When R. Yosef mentions the prohibition of reciting K'riat Sh'ma while a Prakdan, that applies even if leaning a bit on the side. (The Gemara then makes an exception for someone who is obese - that he may recline just a bit to read.)

III.

At this point, two questions come to the fore:

(a) If leaning over a bit is not sufficient for K'riat Sh'ma - what type of posture is acceptable? Surely, in the light of Beit Hillel's ruling (and the discussion about saying K'riat Sh'ma while in bed with one's spouse), some type of lying down must be a valid body posture for K'riat Sh'ma.

(b) Why does K'riat Sh'ma demand "more" leaning over than just sleeping?

HOW MUCH IS ACCEPTABLE?

Tosafot (Nidah 14a s.v. K'riat Sh'ma) and Ra'aviah (#70) resolve the conflict between the R. Yosef's law of Prakdan and the discussion about K'riat Sh'ma in bed in the same way as Rambam does in our

Halakha: Lying totally on one's side is perfectly acceptable. In other words, there are three body positions in bed:

- (a) Lying flat on your back or on your stomach - always forbidden (this is not referring to lying down to read etc. - it's specifically related to sleeping);
- (b) Reclining a bit to the side - acceptable for sleeping, but not for K'riat Sh'ma (except in an exigency);
- (c) Lying totally on your side - acceptable even for K'riat Sh'ma.

REASON FOR THE PROHIBITION OF PRAKDAN IN K'RIAT SH'MA

Is Prakdan a problem for K'riat Sh'ma for the same reason that it's a problem for sleeping - but, due to the solemnity of K'riat Sh'ma, the rule is extended further? Or is it for some other reason?

R'AH'S APPROACH

R'ah (and Ritba) maintains that the same reason applies - Hirhur. Whereas we are somewhat strict with regards to sleeping, when it comes to K'riat Sh'ma, we are "more concerned" with Hirhur. This certainly fits with other restrictions concerning K'riat Sh'ma - such as not reciting K'riat Sh'ma while seeing another's nakedness or some other sexually titillating sight (or sound).

RASHI'S APPROACH

Rashi (Berakhot 13b s.v. Ki Matzli) indicates that the problem with reading K'riat Sh'ma while a Prakdan is that "he is accepting upon himself the authority of God (*Malkhut Shamayim*) in a manner of lordliness and haughtiness (*Ga'avah*)". Most Rishonim prefer this approach (e.g. R. Yonatan haKohen from Lunel, commentary on Rif, Berakhot 13b).

A clear difference between these two approaches is how to deal with the entire K'riat Sh'ma - if it is an issue of Hirhur, that will apply equally to the first verse, the first Parasha and the entire three Parashiot. On the other hand, if the problem is one of "accepting God's authority in a manner of Ga'avah" - that would only apply to the first verse (or, at the most, the first Parasha).

Ra'aviah (#70) distinguishes between the first Parasha, where he requires lying on the side - and the second (and, presumably the third) Parasha - where he allows "normal" lying down. We will assume that Ra'aviah adopts Rashi's reason for the prohibition - which is why he makes that distinction.

A THIRD POSSIBILITY

I would like to suggest a third possible approach. I am very hesitant to suggest it, as I could not find it in the Rishonim - but I will offer it anyways and will welcome critiques and responses.

In the beginning of the shiur, I quoted the Tosefta, which related a story about R. Yishma'el and R. Elazar b. Azariah. In that story, R. Yishma'el went out of his way to sit up (after R. Elazar lay down) to

say K'riat Sh'ma. His reason was to make sure that no one thought that the Halakha follows Beit Shammai. Even though Beit Hillel allows reading while *Matin* (which may mean "reclining" and not "lying down"), if someone CHANGES their body posture in order to lie down, that seems like a "vote" for Beit Shammai's position.

Of all the body postures mentioned by Beit Hillel (which, if you check their language carefully, apply to continuing the previous body posture - i.e. keep walking, keep sitting etc. - and not to changing body postures), the one which seems least appropriate for a religious/meditative/study experience (K'riat Sh'ma) is lying down. Someone would only recite K'riat Sh'ma lying down if they held that that was the proper/ideal way to do so (unless they were just lazy or unable to get up). Therefore, we have a concern that someone reciting K'riat Sh'ma lying down is implicitly supporting Beit Shammai's position - and therefore we forbid it.

This approach would have some serious implications which are also not mentioned in the Rishonim. First of all, we would likely apply it only to nighttime K'riat Sh'ma -w hich is the recitation about which Beit Shammai demand lying down. Second - it would exclude any sort of lying down, even on your side. This last issue stands in direct conflict with the ruling of many Rishonim.

The reason they most likely did not "go for" this approach is that R. Yosef would surely have used a different term - *Shokhev* or *Muteh* as opposed to *Prakdan*. This last objection was raised by my teacher and Haver, R. Yisroel Miller.

now, to the questions:

Q1: Why is it permissible to read K'riat Sh'ma while walking, riding on an animal etc.? Isn't this improper?

A: See Rav Hirsch's comments (in the first part of the shiur) - it is a basic definition of K'riat Sh'ma that it be "accessible" to us in all of our movements and circumstances and that it not be "restricted" to specific positions and/or situations. By the way, this is a significant difference between K'riat Sh'ma and Tefilla. Tefilla requires standing, feet together, facing the Mikdash, bowing at certain points etc. Tefilla is truly a step away from our "normal" mode of existence; whereas K'riat Sh'ma helps define and guide our "regular" lives and is thus a part of them.

Q2: If "lying down" is one of the specifically mentioned ways in which reading K'riat Sh'ma is permitted, why does Rambam then forbid reading while lying down, on your stomach and on your back?

A: Lying down is not inherently problematic to K'riat Sh'ma (which it would be, for instance, to Tefilla). There is an ancillary problem (Hirhur, Ga'avah or perhaps "Beit-Shammaism"). Therefore, Rambam lists *Matin* in his first clause - then gets into the details of lying down afterwards.

Q3: Why is reading in these two ways forbidden?

A: Either because of Hirhur, for which we demand a greater level of distance when reciting K'riat Sh'ma (R'ah); Because of Ga'avah - that it is inappropriate to declare God's kingdom and accept His rule while reclining (Rashi, Ra'aviah and most Rishonim) or, perhaps, because it is a uniquely "Beit-Shammai" style of reading.

Q4: What is the practical difference between how most people may read (on their side) and the exception made for the obese and sick?

A: Most people have to turn totally on their side; an obese or sick person may lean just a bit, as long as he is not directly on his back or stomach.

Q5: Considering this Halakha, what is the best way to read bedtime K'riat Sh'ma?

A: As RABD says (see Kessef Mishneh's suggested emendation below), sitting down. One might argue that lying down, totally on your side, is "ideal" for bedtime Sh'ma - but there seem to be significant considerations weighing against that and it seems more appropriate to say it standing or sitting.

Q6: What is the meaning of RABD's gloss?

A: Kessef Mishneh emends the text (based on variant manuscripts) from *YISHKAV* (lie down) to *YESHEV* (sit). In Hebrew, there is a difference of one letter - a "minor" scribal error which, of course, has major ramifications. Kessef Mishneh preferred the other reading only because the reading we have makes absolutely no sense in the context of our sugya.

Mazal Tov to Sandy and Paula Riemer on the Bar Mitzvah of their son Daniel Simcha this past Shabbat, Parashat VaYishlach. May his career in Torah be long and prosperous, bring Nachat (Nachas) to haKadosh-Barukh-Hu, the whole family and all of K'lal Yisra'el (p.s. he did a great job!!!)

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