

# EARLY TO RISE

*by Rabbi Daniel Travis*

It was a momentous and joyous occasion when two of our era's greatest rabbis, Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv and Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, celebrated the marriage of their children. However, the reception was barely under way when Rav Shlomo Zalman was surprised to notice Rav Elyashiv put on his coat and get ready to leave. Rav Auerbach asked him where he was going.

Rav Elyashiv replied: "You know that one of my primary learning sessions is in the early hours of the morning. For many years I have gone to sleep at 10 p.m. and woken up at 2 a.m. If I don't leave now I will not be able to get up for my regular morning Torah study."

Rav Shlomo Zalman responded, "Rav Yosef Shalom, I believe that in this instance you must make an exception. I hereby rule that you are obligated to stay until the end of this wedding."

Rav Elyashav accepted this ruling, took off his coat, and continued rejoicing until late into the night.

Many Torah scholars throughout the ages have made it their practice to go to bed early and wake up to learn in the pre-dawn hours. One important commentator, the Kaf HaChaim, writes that one hour of learning before dawn is equal to many hours of learning during the day (1,24). Nonetheless, the Rambam indicates that it is preferable to stay up late and learn during the night (Deos 4,4). Other authorities support this view and encourage going to sleep after midnight (Arugas HaBosem 1).

While giving serious consideration to what the Torah greats say about waking up and going to sleep, there is another critical factor that must be taken into account. Each person should honestly evaluate how much sleep he needs and when his energy levels are at their peak, and take these into consideration when deciding when to go to sleep and wake up. Whatever one chooses to do, it is crucial to remember these wise words: "It is better to sleep well at night than to cut back on sleep and be tired all day" (Taz, Even HaEzer 25,1).

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