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RABBINIC SLEEP ETHICS: JEWISH SLEEP CONDUCT IN LATE ANTIQUITY¹

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Sleeping occupies, on average, a third of a person's life. The halakhic system, striving as it does to regulate daily experiences, must therefore deal with sleep. While the Bible speaks of general categories of imperatives regarding sleep,² these are not necessarily carried over into rabbinic categories of sleep ethics. Note that when discussing sleep ethics, I am not dealing with the *moral-ity* of sleeping, per se.³ My aim is to collect rabbinic prescriptions and proscrip-

¹ My choice of the plural is deliberate—I wish to point to the multiple perspectives among the sages regarding the approach towards sleep. Given that the sages span several centuries and the lack of uniformity among them about sleep, “we should not expect to find in the literature of Rabbinic Judaism one single all-encompassing, comprehensive, systematic scheme in these matters. After all, ‘the Rabbis’ consisted of very many individual personages whose lives spanned hundreds of years and who lived in two greatly disparate geographical areas, Israel and Babylon.” (Chaim Milikowsky, “Trajectories of Return, Restoration and Redemption in Rabbinic Judaism: Elijah, the Messiah, the War of Gog and the World To Come,” in *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives*, ed. James M. Scott [Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2001], p. 265.) Nevertheless, there is somewhat of a historical canonization of earlier statements which get adopted over time in terms of developing a uniform sleep ethic.

For a look at Biblical sleep ethics, the reader may refer to my “In Your Lying Down and In Your Rising Up: A Biblical Sleep Ethic,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 34:1 (January–March 2006), pp. 47-50. Although it is a collection, rather than an analysis, the various statements and views found throughout the Bible, and does not distinguish between the various works and their authors' individual views upon the matter, it does provide a basic understanding of Biblical sleep ethics. The rabbis themselves only draw from a few verses (Deut. 6:7 and 11:19, and Ps. 4:5 and 149:6) in addressing how to go about sleep.

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² These general categories of Biblical sleep ethics are “after retiring for the night, think/speak only of worthy matters; do not plan evil against other people; do not sleep before pressing duties have been performed” (Kaplan, “In Your Lying Down,” 50). It is interesting to note that the latter two categories are totally omitted in rabbinic sleep ethics.

³ In Roman society, there was a moral component to sleep, such that “to be under the control of the need to sleep was to lack one of the standard moral virtues of rhetorical (and philosophical) theory, temperentia, self-control, in the same way as being controlled by the need for food, drink, or sex.” (Thomas Wiedemann, “The Roman Siesta,” in *Sleep*, ed. Thomas Wiedemann and Ken Dowden [Bari, Italy: Levante Editori, 2003], 131.)

tions in relationship to sleep and begin to categorize them temporally in relation to the sleep act.

PRECEDING ONE'S LYING DOWN TO SLEEP

Before one goes to sleep, the rabbis saw to it that a Jew take care of his⁴ evening prayers. The *tannaim* required that one pray in the synagogue before returning home in the evening lest he procrastinate by eating dinner and sleep end up overtaking him (*Berakhot* 4b). One *tanna*, Abba Binyamin, took care to pray before heading to bed, perhaps even praying physically before his bed (*Berakhot* 5b).⁵ In a related liturgical vein, the recitation of the *Shema* upon one's bed warranted a significant amount of Talmudic attention. The liturgical prescription was to recite the first paragraph of the *Shema* along with a blessing asking God for sleep when one entered into one's bed for that purpose (*Berakhot* 60b)⁶:

Blessed is He who causes the bands of sleep to fall upon my eyes and slumber on my eyelids, and gives light to the pupil of the eye. May it be Your will, O Lord, my God, to make me lie down in peace, and set my portion in Your Torah and accustom me to the performance of commandments, but do not accustom me to transgression; and bring me not into sin, or into iniquity, or into temptation, or into contempt. And may the good inclination have sway over me and let not the evil inclination have sway over me. And deliver me from evil hap and sore diseases, and let not evil dreams and evil thoughts disturb me, and may my bed be complete before You, and enlighten my

⁴ My use of the masculine gender is deliberate, as the rabbis often saw the male as the norm.

⁵ The ensuing Talmudic discussion brings later sources that contradict the possibility of praying physically before one's bed that might not have been problematic for Abba Binyanim. More difficult is the *beraita* (*Ber.* 6b) in which Abba Binyamin himself says that one should pray in a synagogue ("A man's prayer is heard only in the synagogue"), so it may be that he did not actually pray physically *before* his bed but rather *close* in timing to his going to bed. The possibility still exists that he would have prayed physically before his bed.

Although Rashi reads Abba Binyamin's statement as referring to the morning (s.v. *samukh lemitati*), he has to radically change the wording of the statement in order to fit his understanding. It seems to me that the reason Rashi came up with this reading is that he would have found it hard to believe that one would not have prayed before going to bed, denying the very real possibility that Abba Binyamin lived in a time when Jews were not careful to pray the evening service. (See *Berakhot* 27b for the tannaitic disagreement between Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabban Gamliel over the optional or obligatory status of the evening prayer service.)

eyes lest I sleep the sleep of death. Blessed are You, oh Lord, who gives light to the whole world in Your glory.

The language used indicates a concern of falling asleep prior to reciting them. In fact, this was something with which the *amoraim* dealt.

Rav said that if one were to fall asleep while reciting the *Shema* after he had said the first line he has fulfilled his obligation (*Berakhot* 13b).⁷ The early fourth-century sages Rabbah and Rav Nahman used to be careful about staying awake for the first verse, but not after that (*Berakhot* 13b), which follows both R. Yehudah ha-Nasi's practice (*Berakhot* 13b) and Rav's regarding the distinction between the first verse and the rest of the *Shema*.

The need to recite the *Shema* on one's bed, even though one had already recited it in the synagogue during one's evening prayers, was derived from the verse "Tremble and sin not; speak unto your hearts on your beds, and be utterly silent, *selah*" (Ps. 4:5).⁸ R. Yehoshua ben Levi said that it was a commandment to recite it on one's bed (*Berakhot* 4b)—a very explicit instruction to do so—while R. Ze'era said that he had seen R. Shmuel ben Nahmani repeat *Shema* over and over again until he fell asleep (*Yerushalmi Berakhot* 1:1). The latter's practice diverged from that of R. Yehoshua ben Levi, who used to recite Psalms after reciting the *Shema* before falling asleep (*ibid.*).

The need to repeat *Shema* again was rejected by Rav Nahman if one was a scholar (*Berakhot* 4b-5a), since he is accustomed to learning.⁹ However, in the following generation, Abbaye added that even a scholar should still recite a verse of mercy, even though he is not required to recite the *Shema* (*Berakhot* 5a). His contemporary Rava¹⁰ might have commanded his children to not lie down to sleep without having read the *Shema* (*Pesahim* 112b), which might have been

⁶ While MSS Oxford 366 and Paris 671 offer a slightly different reading, these variants do not affect our argument. While MS Paris has various lacunae, the Oxford version is as follows:

Blessed is the One who causes the bonds of sleep to fall over my eyes, the One who guards me like the pupil of the eye. May it be Your will that you should give me my portion in Your Torah and accustom me to the performance of commandments, and not to accustom me to transgression, and do not bring me to sin, nor to temptation, nor to disgrace; nor shall the evil inclination rule over me. And may you stand me up towards peace. Blessed is the lightgiver of the world.

⁷ *Yerushalmi Berakhot* 2:1 contains a parallel discussion between R. Eleazar and R. Yohanan, the former declaring that one has fulfilled his obligation and the latter averring that he had not.

⁸ See the statement of Rabbi Asi or Rav Yosef in describing Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi's practice (*Berakhot* 4b) and the statement of Rabbi Aha and Rabbi Tahlifta, his son-in-law, in the name of Rabbi Shmuel ben Nahman (*Yerushalmi Berakhot* 1:1).

⁹ Rashi, *ad. loc.*, s.v. *ve-im talmid hakham hu*.

¹⁰ Freedman suggests reading Rava here instead of Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nasi. (H. Freedman, *Pesahim*, The Babylonian Talmud Seder Mo'ed vol. 2 'Erubin and Pesahim, gen. ed. I. Epstein [London: The Soncino Press, 1938], p. 577, n. 8.)

that even though they were not obligated to recite it due to their status as scholars, it was still meritorious to do so.

Regarding positioning oneself during the recitation of the *Shema*, Rav Yosef stated that one should not lie on one's back when reciting it (*Berakhot* 13b; *Niddah* 14a). Rashi suggests that one is supposed to be accepting upon one's self the yoke of the kingship of Heaven and that lying on one's back is not a position that would indicate such an action.¹¹ The earlier sage R. Yohanan, who was noted to be rather obese, used to incline while reciting the *Shema* (*ibid.*), since he used to sleep on his back and it would have been too much trouble for him to get up just to read the *Shema*.

SLEEPING LOCATION AND POSITIONS

Another subject of sleep that the rabbis dealt with was where not to sleep. The *tannaim* proscribed sleeping in the shadow of a single palm-tree in a courtyard (*Pesahim* 111a), sleeping in the shadow of the moon (*ibid.*),¹² sleeping in a synagogue¹³ (*Tosefta Megilah* 2:18; *Yerushalmi Megilah* 3:3), and sleeping on the floor, among other activities (*Gittin* 70a). Ben Azzai said not to sleep on the ground (*Berakhot* 62b),¹⁴ and not to sleep in a cemetery¹⁵ (*Tosefta Terumot*

¹¹ *Berakhot* 13b, s.v. *ki matzeli shapir dami*. While a clever possibility, it does not, however, seem likely that the prohibition is related to a concern of the person being "too noisy because he snores loudly on his back and the noise interferes with the sacred prayer" (Sonia Ancoli-Israel, "'Sleep Is Not Tangible' or What the Hebrew Tradition Has to Say About Sleep," *Psychosomatic Medicine* 63, no. 5 [September-October 2001], 785).

¹² The prohibition of these two might be due to the potential of demons injuring him (*Rashi*, *Pesahim* 111a, s.v. *dekel yehidi* and s.v. *be-hatzer*), though it could also be due to people coming along, not seeing this person, and knocking into him. Whatever the reasoning for these, R. Yitzhak suggests that the verse from which we learn these proscriptions is Ps. 23:4.

¹³ While the *Tosefta* proscribes sleeping in the synagogue, R. Yehoshua ben Levi minimized this proscription by adding that "synagogues and schoolhouses belong to sages and their disciples" (*Yerushalmi Megilah* 3:3). Furthermore, R. Hiyya ben Yose would receive guests and lodge them in the synagogue (*ibid.*). Similarly, in Babylonia, they would lodge guests in the synagogue (*Pesahim* 101a) and Rav Ashi used to sleep in the synagogue in Mata Mahasia (*Bava Batra* 3b). R. Yehoshua ben Levi's position seems to mitigate against the need for the solution (to the problem of the contradiction between T. *Megilah* 2:18 and texts discussing rabbis and guests sleeping in the synagogue) offered by *Tosafot* (*Bava Batra* 3b, s.v. *va'ayleh lefuryah lehatam*) that the latter sources are referring to a chamber close to, or connected with, the synagogue.

¹⁴ While Ben Azzai might have proscribed this location due to fear of serpents (Maurice Simon, trans., *Berakoth*, The Babylonian Talmud, Seder Zerai'm, gen. ed., I. Epstein [London: The Soncino Press, 1948], p. 391, n. 4), it is also possible that it was out of concern for one's health, or perhaps comfort. As to the possibility that this is about one's

1:3). Shmuel pointed out that sleeping out in the sun was recognized to be harmful, except on a day of bleeding or on the summer solstice (*Shabbat* 129a).

Among later authorities, R. Levi discouraged (although technically permitted) sleeping alone in a house, as it is a time of risk (*Yerushalmi Shabbat* 2:6). R. Hanin, his contemporary, said that it was specifically prohibited for a man¹⁶ to sleep alone in a house at night (*Shabbat* 151b), due to R. Yohanan's statement that if one were to sleep alone, Lilit¹⁷ would seize him (*ibid.*).¹⁸

The only directions given regarding how to place one's bed are to position it north and south. Abba Binyamin stated that it was something that he particular-

health, there could be a relation here to sleeping on the ground being one of the eight things that causes a diminution of seed, recorded on *Gittin* 70a (see also *Mitzpeh Eitan*, *Berakhot* 62b, s.v. *butz min hakarka*). Another possibility, suggested by *Ya'abetz*, is that this is due to the cold [of the ground] (*Berakhot* 62b, s.v. *butz min hakarka*).

A difficulty could be raised against this proscription from the teaching that one should learn Torah even if it impoverishes him so much so that he should sleep on the ground (*Avot* 6:6). (See also *Nedarim* 49a where R. Akiva is said to have slept on straw along with his wife at the outset of their marriage due to their poverty). The resolution offered by Rashi (*Avot* 6:4, s.v. *Pat be-melah tokhal*) is that this admonition is directed only towards those who can actually afford not to sleep on the ground. Even if one were truly poor enough to not be subject to the proscription, one might still choose to avoid it by wearing some sort of garment. (*Ya'abetz*, *ibid.*)

¹⁵ The context of this position is not clearly proscriptive, but rather describing the signs of a deranged person, so it is possible, although unlikely, that sleeping in a cemetery was actually permissible.

¹⁶ The specific gendering of this statement is not accidental. While from the local context, it would seem obvious that it would be men who should not sleep alone, otherwise Lilit would seize them, other statements in the Talmud with the phrase "it is forbidden to sleep. . ." (e.g., Rav's in *Sukah* 26b, Jerusalem's holy congregation as reported in *Yoma* 69a, *Betzah* 14b, *Tamid* 27b, and the statement in *Yerushalmi Sukah* 1:11) may not have made a gender distinction.

¹⁷ Interestingly, this is the only sexual mention of Lilit in the Talmud. However, there are a limited number of references to her, in both a *beraita* and a statement of Shmuel's attesting to her having wings (*Niddah* 24b), a *beraita* attesting to her having long hair (*Eruvin* 100b), and Rabbah bar bar Hanah attesting to her having a son (*Bava Batra* 73a-b).

¹⁸ While in both the Vilna and Soncino printed versions, it is R. Hanina who makes these two statements as just one combined statement, all of the manuscripts split them up. While the printed versions both have R. Hanina speaking, the manuscripts (see MSS Oxford 23 (366), Vatican 106, and Munich 96 in addition to *Dikdukei Soferim*, *Shabbat*, vol. 2, p. 367, note 90) have either R. Yohanan or R. Hanin (albeit in different combinations). It would seem that the manuscripts are more correct in this matter due to the unlikelihood that the same person who would say that an incident of ill portent would befall someone and then to prohibit it because of that effect. It seems more likely that first someone (in this case, the second generation amora, R. Yohanan) would state the effect, and then someone would come along and prohibit it (in this case, the third generation amora, R. Hanin).

ly troubled to do every day (*Berakhot* 5b). Similar encouragement is offered by R. Hama ben R. Hanina in the name of R. Yitzhak, who claimed that one will have male children if one positions one's bed that way, deriving it from Psalms 17:14 (*ibid.*).

As to one's body position¹⁹ while sleeping, the third-century sages R. Yehoshua ben Levi and R. Yohanan viewed sleeping on one's back differently. The former would reprove whomever would do such a thing (*Berakhot* 13b; *Niddah* 14a),²⁰ presumably due to a concern for physical arousal leading to nocturnal emissions.²¹ However, the latter used to sleep in this fashion, which is explained as an exception due to his obesity (*ibid.*). Despite R. Yehoshua ben Levi's concern, the later sage Rav Yosef made a statement (in formal halakhic language) implying that it was perfectly allowable for people to lie on their backs. An anonymous editorial comment proffers as a resolution the recommendation to lie on one's side (*ibid.*), even though it may not be necessary.

Finally, the few soporifics offered in Talmud are late editorial additions. The Babylonian Talmud suggest putting one's hand to one's forehead will help one to sleep (*Pesachim* 112a), which may "lift the ribs to make it easier to breathe, or it may be an attempt to raise peripheral body temperature."²² The *Yerushalmi* seems to imply that putting on tefillin may also help one to get to sleep, though it forbids such an action (*Shabbat* 6:3).²³ The sages also recognized the soporific effect of a constant, steady, soft sound (*Eruvin* 104a). Wearing a fox's tooth might also help (*Shabbat* 67a).

APPROPRIATE TIME FOR AND AMOUNT OF SLEEP

Since night was seen as a time for sleeping,²⁴ it was important that it be used appropriately. Sleep was not something that was permitted to be sworn away for

¹⁹ One source also addresses garments at the time of sleep—Shmuel said that wearing one's shoes to beds was to experience a taste of death (*Yoma* 78b). His father also forbade his daughters from sleeping together, seemingly implying one should not allow one's daughters to sleep together (*Shabbat* 65a), presumably because they would then familiarize themselves with the others' bodies (*ibid.*).

²⁰ Why R. Yohanan yelled at people who slept on their backs instead of formally making an a halakhic statement to the same effect is unclear, though it is possible that it was merely his view on the matter and not intended to become a formal prohibition.

²¹ Rashi, *Niddah* 14a, s.v. *Afarkid*.

²² Ancoli-Israel, "Sleep Is Not Tangible," 782.

²³ See also the statement of R. Ze'era quoting R. Abba ben Jeremiah, that one is not to sleep (*sheinat keva*—as opposed to nap) in tefillin (*Yerushalmi Berakhot* 2:2).

²⁴ Not only was it the time of sleeping (cf. *Berakhot* 1:3, position of the School of Hillel), but it was perhaps the primary time for sleeping — see the statement of Rav Yehudah that night was created only for sleep (*Eruvin* 65a).

a few days,²⁵ due to its unhealthiness.²⁶ Rav Nahman ben Yitzhak was concerned about the lack of mental clarity involved in the study of Torah due to the lack of sleep (*Eruvin* 65a), suggesting that one needs a good night of sleep for Torah study. An even more stringent teaching is that of R. Hananiah ben Hakinai, that one who stays up in the night and wastes his time is worthy of the death penalty (*Avot* 3:4). This is directed against wasting time that could be used for Torah,²⁷ or perhaps taking away from one's wakefulness, which (*a la* Rav Nahman ben Yitzhak) takes away from one's Torah study. *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*,²⁸ however, suggests that if one is staying up discussing Torah, it is a good omen for him, while if he is discussing other matters, it is a bad omen for him (ARN 29).

The need for an ample and sufficient amount of sleep was surely important, but so, too, importance was placed on not sleeping too much.²⁹ Although we already find in Proverbs (20:13, 23:21, 24:33-34) warnings against sleeping too much,³⁰ the rabbis chose not to address these verses themselves in any of their statements regarding sleep. The rabbis saw sleep as beneficial in small amounts but actually *harmful* in large quantities (*Gittin* 70a; ARN 27:5), and by this, they surely also meant to prohibit sleeping excessively. Sleeping throughout the morning was proscribed by R. Dosa ben Harkinas (*Avot* 3:11), although it is

²⁵ See R. Yohanan (*Sukah* 53a) and *beraita* on *Yerushalmi Sukah* 5:2.

²⁶ The medicinal and curative effects of sleep were also noted by the rabbis. A *beraita* (*Berakhot* 57b) and R. Abbahu (*Gen. Rabbah* 20:10) state that sleep is helpful when sick, and the rabbinic consensus was to encourage sick people to sleep. They were so serious about this that they even exempted one who extinguished a candle on Shabbat for this purpose from punishment (*Shabbat* 2:5).

²⁷ While *prima facie* Rabbi Hananiah's statement is apparently not relevant to Torah study, the mainly tannaitic phrase "*mithayyev benafsho*" ("worthy of the death penalty") in the third chapter of *Avot*, also expressed by Rabbi Ya'akov (3:8) and Rabbi Dosetai ben Yannai (3:9), is used in these two other statements to relate to the loss of one's Torah study. In fact, these three appearances of this expression in relation to Torah study are unique to this chapter and are found nowhere else in rabbinic literature, and seemingly are employed to highlight the importance of these three warnings. (See *Bava Kamma* 3:10, *Tosefta Avodah Zarah* 6:17, *Pesahim* 29a, *Megilah* 7b, and *Ketuvot* 30a for some other tannaitic instances of this term. *Gittin* 52b is one of the few usages of the term by an *amora*.)

²⁸ Schechter, *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, Recension A, 87.

²⁹ Joshua Schwartz, "*Tarbut Homrit ve-Sifrut Hazal be-Eretz Yisrael beshelhi ha-et ha-atikah: Mitot, kle ha-mitah u-minhagei Shenah*" ("Material Culture and Rabbinic Literature in the Land of Israel in Late Antiquity: Beds, Bedclothes, and Sleeping Habits"), in *Retzef u-Temurah: Yehudim ve-Yahadut b'erez Yisrael haBizantit-Notzrit* (Continuity and Renewal: Jews and Judaism in Byzantine-Christian Palestine), ed. Lee I. Levine (Jerusalem and New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 2004), 208.

³⁰ For more on this subject, see my "In Your Lying Down and In Your Rising Up," 49. Cf. Charles David Isbell, "Sleep From The Eyes, Slumber From The Eyelids," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 34:1 (January-March 2006), 41.

unclear how much of the morning he thought problematic.³¹ *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* reframes R. Dosa ben Harkinas' statement in a religious context³² (ARN 21³³) by connecting his statement with that of R. Yehoshua that the latest time for reciting the *Shema* in order to fulfill the commandment is the third hour of the day, as it is "the way of kings to rise at the third hour of the day" (*Berakhot* 1:2).³⁴

A further extension of the trade-off between learning Torah and sleeping is expressed when it was said that a minimum of sleep is one of the 48 things which enable one to acquire Torah (*Avot* 6:6). While diminishing one's sleep frees up more time to study Torah, it is hard to imagine that this was made into an extreme of sleeping tremendously little, as there were concerns (mentioned above, see statement of Rav Nahman ben Yitzhak) about mental clarity while studying Torah.

ARISING FROM SLEEP

Shmuel³⁵ praised remaining sleeping while the first rays of light came up over the horizon as beneficial to one's health (*Berakhot* 62b),³⁶ due to it being too

³¹ Since the four actions within his statement are describing things which are damaging to an individual's social experience (or that "they operate against the good character of man," R. Berel Wein, Feb. 2004, Yeshivat Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem, Israel), it would seem to indicate that he intended the *whole* morning. Additionally, it is also possible that he recognized the importance of waking up about the same time each day in order to keep one's circadian rhythm on the same schedule. (Ancoli-Israel, "Sleep Is Not Tangible," 783).

³² *Avot deRabbi Natan* actually sees all four actions within Rabbi Dosa ben Harkinas's statement within a religious framework, by casting each action as neglecting of Torah study and using scriptural proofs for each one.

³³ In recension A. However, in recension B (chapter 34), no explanation is given, rather it says that these four things tear man from this world and from the world to come (Solomon Schechter, *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan: Solomon Schechter Edition* (Vienna, 1897—reprint: New York and Jerusalem: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1997), 73).

³⁴ R. Yehoshua's language, however, is that such people only lose out on reading out the *Shema* at its appropriate time, but nevertheless do nothing wrong by such actions. While this understanding of his statement may be correct, *Avot deRabbi Natan*, by tying these two different mishnaic statements together, tries to suggest one should not plan to sleep past the third hour of the day, thereby missing the commandment of reciting the *Shema* in its time.

³⁵ While Shmuel is mentioned as having said this in the printed editions, his name is missing in MSS Paris 671 and Oxford 366.

³⁶ See also Rashi, ad loc., s.v. *keastema lefarzela*. A note of caution may be urged here, as he seems to be speaking solely on the topic of relieving oneself (could Rashi have had a manuscript similar to MS Paris 671 that omits the portion of this statement?), though, nevertheless, the same could be said about sleep.

early in the day to rise and thus being “health-giving and invigorating.”³⁷ Nevertheless, it is merely a suggestion, as opposed to a rule. Another health concern when rising was not to do so in such a swift manner, as that would give one light-headedness (*Gittin* 70a).

Waking up from sleep is significant as the starting point of one’s day, and hence warranted a blessing.³⁸ While the two Talmuds offer different blessings for what one should say upon arising (*Berakhot* 60b; *Yerushalmi Berakhot* 4:2), both of them see the act of waking up as something for which to thank God due to having replaced their souls to their “dead” bodies.³⁹ This view may be similar, if not identical, to R. Meir’s statement that “the soul fills the body, and when man sleeps it ascends and draws life for him from above” (*Gen. Rabbah* 14:9). The Babylonian Talmud goes on to list a blessing thanking God for removing the bands of sleep from one’s eyes as well as slumber (*Berakhot* 60b).⁴⁰

DIURNAL SLEEP—NAPPING

While it seems that napping was widespread in the Mediterranean world,⁴¹ the rabbis seldom speak about napping (*sheinat arai*).⁴² When it does come up, it is usually not the focus of the discussion, but rather related to another activity under discussion. While there are instances where the rabbis proscribed napping, such as while wearing *tefillin*, outside of the *sukah*, or while in the study hall, they did not map out any special rituals regarding napping.⁴³ They did define the length of temporary sleep as enough time to walk one hundred cubits

³⁷ Abraham Cohen, *Everyman’s Talmud* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1949; New York: Schocken, 1995), 246.

³⁸ Although Rashi reads *Shabbat* 108b-109a as requiring washing upon arising, it seems that the hand-washing in this section is connected to the washing in the evening, as both Shmuel and R. Yehudah say. Thus, when one finds on *Berakhot* 60b that one already has said fourteen blessings before washing one’s hands (according to the printed Vilna edition), the *sugya* from *Shabbat* does not present a problem.

³⁹ There may be a connection here to the tannaitic notion of sleep being an insignificant portion of death (one-sixtieth) (*Berakhot* 57b).

⁴⁰ This text is according to the Vilna printed edition. For more on this prayer and variant versions, see Yitzhak Satz, “*Yehi Ratzon’ Ahar Hama’avir Shenah Shel Tefilat Shabharit*,” *Yesburun* 3 (1997), 546-557, esp. 547, 551-554.

⁴¹ Wiedemann, “The Roman Siesta,” 125.

⁴² The term appears eight times in tannaitic sources (*Berakhot* 23b, *Sukah* 26a three times, *Sukah* 26b twice, twice more in *Sukah* 28a, and once in *Sukah* 41b) and twice in amoraic sources (*Megilah* 28a and *Yerushalmi Berakhot* 2:3).

⁴³ Unless the prayer said upon waking was meant for whenever one awoke, rather than just the morning; however, this does not seem to be the case.

(*Sukah* 26a-b). Rav declared that it was forbidden for a person⁴⁴ to sleep during the day a longer sleep than that of a horse (*Sukah* 26b). It might seem that the reason for his prohibition on diurnal sleeping was, as Rashi suggested, that it was because of a neglect of time used for studying Torah (ad. loc., s.v. *lishon bayom*). However, it could be that diurnal sleep's conflict with one's productivity⁴⁵ would render it problematic.⁴⁶

The centrality of Torah study for the sages⁴⁷ naturally led to viewing the interruption of sleep as an unfortunate distraction. Nevertheless, there were but a few rare sages who were able to stave off slumber in the study hall and these exceptional actions were viewed as particularly meritorious on their accounts. Two *tannaim* in this category were Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, and his disciple R. Eliezer (*Sukah* 28a); two such *amoraim* were Rav Adda ben Ahavah (*Ta'anit* 20b), and R. Ze'era (*Megilah* 28a). The latter articulated a reason, saying that one who sleeps in the study hall, his knowledge will be reduced to tatters, deriving this idea from Proverbs 23:21 (*Sanhedrin* 71a), a harsher perspective than it simply impeding one's amassing of Torah knowledge.

⁴⁴ Rav's statement *prima facie* seems to be speaking specifically regarding men to the exclusion of women similar to R. Hanin's statement that it is forbidden for a man to sleep alone in a house at night (*Shabbat* 151b) (see above). However is unclear why there should be a gender distinction that only men should not sleep during the day. One possibility is that Rav's statement was really "It is forbidden to sleep . . ." and not "It is forbidden for a *man* to sleep. . ." as it is in MS BHMLR 1606 (ENA 850) and is meant to apply universally. However, as most of the manuscripts and both printed versions distinguish that Rav meant his prohibition for men, a couple of initial possibilities emerge. One is that men worked more than women and that it would seem lazily unproductive for a man to sleep that long, which seems possible from Rav Yosef quoting Proverbs 6:9 ("Until when will the lazy person sleep? When will you arise from your sleep?") regarding Abaye's sleeping on a journey. The other possibility is according to Rashi's suggestion (*Sukah* 26b, s.v. *lishon bayom*) that Rav made his statement due to neglect of learning Torah, it would seem that since women are not obligated in learning Torah, they were not included in Rav's statement.

⁴⁵ The comparison to horses supports this idea. They are the most alert of domesticated animals—horses spend about 88% of a 24-hour period awake. (Katherine Carson and D.G.M. Wood-Gush, "Equine Behaviour II: A Review of the Literature on Feeding, Eliminative and Resting Behaviour," *Applied Animal Ethology* 10 [1983], 186.) An alternative to this possibility was suggested to me by Professor Yaakov Elman, that the horse was held in high esteem in Persian culture, pointing out to me, for instance, King Shapur's response to Shmuel as to the animal upon which the redeemer will come (*Sanhedrin* 98a).

⁴⁶ An additional reason could be that were one to nap long enough, it would disrupt one's ability to sleep at night (Ancoli-Israel, "Sleep Is Not Tangible," 784).

⁴⁷ Cf. Michael L. Satlow, "And on the Earth You Shall Sleep': *Talmud Torah* and Rabbinic Asceticism," *The Journal of Religion* 83, no. 2 (April 2003), 204-225, esp. 218-221 for the sense of discipline involved in the endeavor of Torah study.

CONCLUSION

In creating a sleep ethic,⁴⁸ the rabbis were primarily concerned with taking care of one's evening prayer before bed, recitation of the *Shema* and its parameters, where not to sleep, how not to sleep, soporific advice, getting enough sleep, setting boundaries for sleeping too much or too late, what to do upon waking, and to not sleep in the study hall. However, aside for the evening recital of *Shema*, sleep did not take up much of their attention in their halakhic system, as it was more likely seen as a very normal, quotidian activity, and one that did not require much action regarding it. Nevertheless, they were sure to mark this daily activity with cautions and guidelines. While I have made an attempt to chart out how the rabbis directed conduct regarding sleep, I do not believe that this is the final foray into this field.⁴⁹ Further study is required to further clarify the intellectual history of sleep and sleep ethics in the eyes of the rabbis of the Talmud.

⁴⁸ Inasmuch as there are varying sleep ethics among the sages, I contend that they were attempting to achieve uniformity.

⁴⁹ Some questions that remain: Why did some prolific sages (such as Rava) make almost no statements regarding sleep? Why did sages from *Eretz Yisrael* focus to a much greater extent on the location of sleep? Why do the only formal proscriptive statements about sleep derive from sages from *Eretz Yisrael*?