



Adar I

"May I lie down in peace..."

by Rabbi Elana Kanter

While North Americans are often known for excess, contemporary studies show that what we don't get enough of is sleep. Our ability to sleep at night affects the quality of our waking moments. At different ages and in different situations, there are variables that interfere with rest. Children may be frightened of the dark or afraid of the "letting go" that sleep requires. If we are anxious or have fear-filled dreams, we can wake feeling as if we haven't slept at all. If we are busy, we might simply curtail rest. When something interferes with our rest, be it internal or external, it makes our lives more difficult, giving us less of the energy we need to meet the challenges we face.

The Rabbis understood sleep as something sacred, evidenced by the liturgy we use to prepare for it. Jewish tradition provides us with a blessing to recite in anticipation of sleep, immediately before the bedside recitation of the Shema.

"...Following an introductory passage where we inform God that he or she will forgive anyone who has wronged that person during the day, the prayer [the bedtime Shema] begins with a blessing ordained by the rabbis of the Talmud, Birkat HaMapil, or the blessing of the one who brings one down to sleep. The prayer states, "Praised are You, Adonai our God, who rules the universe, bringing sleep to my eyes and slumber to my eyelids" (Berakhot 60b). It also asks God to protect the individual so that he or she may "lie down in peace and arrive in peace," hoping that the next day will bring new light, for God's "glory gives light to the entire world..."

(myjewishlearning.com)

The rest of *Kriat Shema al hamita* (the bedtime Shema), is a potpourri of verses and prayers, including a passage that speaks of angels surrounding us as we sleep, and the *Shechinah* (the indwelling divine presence) hovering over us.

When we think of sleep as the healing tool that helps us to do our sacred work, the work of *tikkun olam* (repairing the world), perhaps we can give ourselves more of it, and enjoy it more fully, by giving it liturgical context from our tradition.

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