



Reprinted from *Living the Halachic Process* by Rabbi Daniel Mann - Eretz Hemdah, with their permission [www.erezhemdah.org]

Sleeping on Rosh HaShana

Question: May one sleep on Rosh HaShana afternoon?

Answer: It is difficult to balance the various aspects of Rosh HaShana. It is simultaneously a day of awe and of festivity.¹ The minhag to limit sleep on Rosh HaShana stems from the awe of the Day of Judgment, and many take it very seriously. We will review the sources and suggest to the individual to choose his practice based on his custom, his strength, and his circumstances.

The Rama² cites and praises the minhag not to sleep on the day of Rosh HaShana. The source given is a Yerushalmi³ that states that if one sleeps on Rosh HaShana, then his mazal (roughly, his fortune) sleeps,

implying that the judgment he receives may not be as favorable as it could have been. Certainly, we have precedent in Tanach that it is foolish to sleep when one's fate hangs in the balance.⁴

The Mishna Berura⁵ and others quote the Arizal as saying that after chatzot (midday), the heavenly situation is such that one may sleep. As few people finish davening and eating by chatzot, this minhag seems to have little impact on most of us. However, not all agree with the Arizal on this matter.⁶ The Bach⁷ mentions that the Maharam was totally lenient about sleeping on Rosh HaShana.⁸

It is noteworthy that a careful reading of the above primary source may suggest that many 'miss the boat' concerning this minhag. The source does not say not to go to sleep during the day of Rosh HaShana but "not to sleep". According to some, this means that one should wake up before the day begins, which may be as early as ALOT HASHACHAR, more than an hour before sunrise.⁹ (The straightforward implication of the

¹. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 597:1; see Nechemia 8.

². Orach Chayim 583:2.

³. Acharonim point out that our editions of the Yerushalmi are missing this quote.

⁴. See Yona 1:6.

⁵. 583:9.

⁶. Our mentor, Rav Shaul Yisraeli, was lenient on this matter.

⁷. Orach Chayim 597.

⁸. Possibly because he did not feel that the minhag should affect one's ability to enjoy the Yom Tov on a physical level.

⁹. Kaf HaChayim 583:39; Ben Ish Chai, cited ibid.

Aruch Hashulchan¹⁰ and perhaps the Chayei Adam¹¹ goes against that supposition.) Even according to this approach, there is room for leniency to sleep until sunrise,¹² and all the more so if waking up so early will affect one's concentration during tefilla. Nevertheless, there are strong grounds for saying that if one is capable of getting up early, it is counterproductive to sleep longer in order to be able to stay up in the afternoon.¹³

The Mishna Berura¹⁴ says that not sleeping is not the goal in and of itself. Rather, one should spend his time on spiritually worthwhile activities such as learning Torah and reciting Tehillim.¹⁵ If a little sleep will facilitate learning, then it is a worthwhile tradeoff.¹⁶ The Mishna Berura goes on to say that wasting one's time is equivalent to sleeping.

As the main day of Rosh HaShana and its judgment is the first one, there is additional reason for leniency on the second day.¹⁷



¹⁰. *Orach Chayim* 597:2.

¹¹. 139:8.

¹². *Piskei Teshuvot* 583:65.

¹³. *Ben Ish Chai* op. cit.

¹⁴. 583:9.

¹⁵. Ibid.; *Chayei Adam* 139:11.

¹⁶. Ibid.

¹⁷. *Piskei Teshuvot* 583:10.