

Taking A Stance on the Shema
Brachos 11a
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On this week's amud we find the famous disagreement between *Beis Shamai* and *Beis Hillel* as to the basic understanding of the verse "*b'shachbecha uv'kumecha*", when you lay down and when you get up. According to *Beis Hillel*, the *Torah* is merely describing the times of day that we are obligated to say *shema* and according to *Beis Shamai* there is an additional factor being alluded to, that of the position that one must be in to say the *Shema*, in the morning standing up, and reclining in the evening. In our *gemara*, we find a disagreement between the sages of the *Talmud* if one can fulfill his obligation of *shema* if he followed the opinion of *Beis Shamai* and recited the *shema* in that specific position. *Rav Yosef* is of the opinion that one who does so would not fulfill his obligation whereas *Rav Yechezkel* is of the opinion that one would fulfill his duty, albeit not in the ideal manner.

The great Jewish leader of the Germany in the 19th century, *Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch* (1808-1888), poses an interesting question on *Rav Yechezkel*. We know that *Beis Hillel* opines that the manner in which one is required to recite *shema* is described for us by the *Torah* as "*uv'lechtecha b'derech*", as you walk on the road. This, explains *Beis Hillel*, dictates to us that *shema* can be recited in any fashion that one desires (walking, sitting, standing, reclining etc.). If that is the case, asks *Rav Hirsch*, how can it be possible that were one to read the *shema* as dictated by *Beis Shamai* that he has not fulfilled his obligation? Every position possible ought to be included in potential ways that one can fulfill this obligation, including the position presented by *Beis Shamai*? How then can *Rav Yechezkel* say that one would not fulfill his obligation by reclining in the evening following the ruling of *Beis Shamai*?

Rav Hirsch answers this question by revealing to us a novel understanding into *Beis Hillel's* definition of "*uv'lechticha b'derech*", as you go on your way [any position you would like]. He explains that *Beis Hillel* is actually going to the roots of the obligation of reciting *shema*. The main idea of saying *shema* is accepting the yoke of heaven and the commandments of *Hashem*. When *Beis Hillel* rules that we must recite *shema* "however we would like", it is not only referring to our physical position, it is referring to the individual situation that we may be experiencing in life. Financially, physically, emotionally, our family situation etc., we are declaring that we accept the yoke of heaven and *mitzvos* no matter what life brings us and regardless of the challenges that may arise.

Therefore, continues *Rav Hirsch*, if one recites *shema* specifically as *Beis Shamai* rules, in essence he is saying, according to *Beis Hillel*, that he accepts the yoke of *Torah* in specific situations. As such, one would not fulfill the *mitzva* appropriately according to *Beis Hillel* if he says *shema* in this manner.

The *halacha* we follow is in accordance with *Beis Hillel*, and when we prepare to recite *shema* we must be aware of what we are accepting. Not only are we accepting the yoke of heaven and *mitzvos* in a general sense, we are saying that no matter what curve balls are thrown our way in life, wherever we are on the financial ladder, we accept upon ourselves the yoke of heaven and *mitzvos* with the same enthusiasm and zeal as we would, in the picture-perfect life.

We should all merit to be in positions that engender our accepting the yoke of heaven more "easily" and if we do get a curve ball every once in awhile, we should merit the Divine help to enable us to accept the yoke of heaven and *mitzvos*...with a smile.