

# The Minhag of Not Sleeping on Rosh HaShana<sup>16</sup>

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We do many things on Rosh HaShana that are intended to serve as a good omen. We enjoy apples dipped in honey, eat various *simanim* (symbols) and partake in luscious meals to demonstrate that we are beginning the New Year in an auspicious manner. Most of us find great meaning and enjoyment when we partake in the *simanim* of Rosh HaShana. There is one *minhag* of Rosh HaShana however, that many find to be difficult if not oppressive. RAMA (ca. 1530-1572) teaches that one should not sleep on Rosh HaShana.

*There are those who are careful not to eat nuts on Rosh HaShana since the Hebrew word for nut, egoz, has the same numeric value as the word cheit - sin.*

*Additionally, our practice is not to sleep on Rosh HaShana and this is a proper practice.*

**Rama Orach Chaim 583:2**

הגה: יש מדקדקים שלא לאכול אגוזים, שאגוז בגימטריא חטא, ועוד שהן מרבים כיחה וניעה ומבטלים התפלה (מהרי"ל). וגם נוהגים שלא לישן ביום ראש השנה (ירושלמי), ומנהג נכון הוא.

רמ"א או"ח סימן תקפג סעיף ב'

## Source

RAMA was not the first to note that it is improper to sleep on Rosh HaShana. Rav Yehoshua ibn Shuib (ca. 1280-1340) a student of the Rashba in his *derasha* for Rosh HaShana quotes a Yerushalmi that it is forbidden to sleep on Rosh HaShana. Although it is highly unlikely that RAMA was in possession of the *derashot* of ibn Shuib,<sup>17</sup> the same Yerushalmi is cited by RAMA in his *Darkei Moshe* as the source for the prohibition to sleep on Rosh HaShana:

<sup>16</sup> Much of the material for this article was gleaned from two excellent articles in the journal *Ohr Yisrael*. Rabbi Gedalia Oberlander's *Issur Sheina B'Rosh HaShana* (volume 25 page 176-187) and Rabbi Eliezer Brodt's *Issur haSheina bRosh HaShana* (volume 29 pages 146-163)

<sup>17</sup> The *derashot* of R' Yehoshua ibn Shuib were first printed in Constantinople in 1523. The first printed Eastern European edition was Crackow 1573-1575 after RAMA was no longer alive.

*The Yerushalmi in Rosh HaShana teaches that one who sleeps on Rosh HaShana will have sleepy mazal. Therefore we are careful not to sleep on Rosh HaShana.*<sup>18</sup>  
**Darchoi Moshe Orach Chaim 583**

בירושלמי דראש השנה איתא האי מאן  
דדמיך בריש שתא דמיך מזליה ולכן נזהרים  
שלא לישן בראש השנה:  
דרכי משה הקצצר אורח חיים סימן תקפג

Many have noted, however, that this Yerushalmi does not appear in the versions of Yerushalmi that we possess. It is entirely possible that it was found in the Yerushalmi on Kodshim which is missing, or the Yerushalmi on Nidda that is incomplete. Alternatively, some suggest that Rishonim refer to Midrashim that originate in Eretz Yisrael as Yerushalmi.<sup>19</sup> A further suggestion posits that there was a book which many Rishonim drew upon titled the *Sefer haYerushalmi* and when citations are quoted from a Yerushalmi that we do not have, they originate in this work.<sup>20</sup>

## Scope of and Reasons for the Practice

Whatever the source of the custom or prohibition not to sleep on Rosh HaShana is, it is worth noting the scope of this injunction. The simple reading of all the early sources is that the prohibition extends all day.<sup>21</sup> Some contend that the practice only applies in the morning of Rosh HaShana; in the afternoon however it is permissible to sleep.<sup>22</sup> Although there were some who woke at dawn (*alot hashachar*) so as not to sleep during any of the daylight on Rosh HaShana, common practice is to continue one's sleep after day break.<sup>23</sup> *Chayei Adam* states that one should sit down to learn after lunch; if he or she feels tired they may put their heads down to

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It is possible that there are earlier echoes of the prohibition to sleep on Rosh HaShana. In an article in *Moriah* 17, 199-200, page 106, Rabbi Yisrael Mordechai Peles, notes that the *Etz Chaim* of London (a contemporary of Maharam of Rottenberg) had a text ונאמן אתה להחיות נרדמים (You are faithful to revive the sleepy) rather than להחיות מתים (revive the dead) on the first day of Rosh HaShana. This may indicate that not sleeping at least on the first day of Rosh HaShana has a slightly earlier source.

<sup>18</sup> It is worth noting that the Yerushalmi, as cited by R' Yehoshua ibn Shuiv, states that it is prohibited to sleep on Rosh HaShana. RAMA's version however cites that many are cautious not to sleep and his formulation in the *Mapa* on *Shulchan Aruch* is clear that it is customary not to sleep.

<sup>19</sup> Maharitz Chajes, *Megilla* 12b, cites many quotations from Yerushalmi that are not found in our editions and refers to his longer works where he makes the suggestion listed above.

<sup>20</sup> This possibility was set forward by Avigdor Aptowitz in his introduction to the RAVYA. It was challenged however by Rabbi Dovid Dublitzky in his more recent edition to the RAVYA (Introduction, page 12). However, Yaackov Zussman in *Tarbitz* volume 65 feels he uncovered fragments of a Yerushalmi of German origin that may be part of the *Sefer Yerushalmi* that Aptowitz refers to. It remains unclear however, how a Spanish Rishon like R' Yehoshua ibn Shuiv would have this German manuscript of the Yerushalmi.

<sup>21</sup> It is almost universally assumed that the prohibition or practice not to sleep applies only during the day of Rosh HaShana and not at night. Only the *Divrei Chaim* of Sans is cited by Oberlander in his article, page 187, as not sleeping at night. A simple reading of the Yerushalmi cited would indicate that one should not sleep the entirety of Rosh HaShana; at a bare minimum one should refrain from sleeping at night on Rosh HaShana as we are accustomed to doing on Shavuot. See *Mishneh Halachot* vol. 13 #80.

<sup>22</sup> *Magen Avraham* 583:6 cites that Arizal said it is permitted to sleep after *chatzot* (mid-day). Although some argue that Arizal was permitted to sleep since he attained remarkable spiritual heights through sleep and we would not be permitted to do so, the simple reading of *Magen Avraham* is that Arizal said one may sleep, not simply that he himself slept. This deflates much of the argument.

<sup>23</sup> See *Mateh Efraim* 584:1 and comment of R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach in *Halichot Shlomo* page 215 note 33.

sleep a bit. Many understand that *Chayei Adam* is permitting one to sleep at the table but not in a bed. Many cite *Noheg Katzon Yosef* that the *minhag* applies only on the first day of Rosh HaShana, not on the second day.<sup>24</sup>

BACH notes that one who reads the *derashot* of R' Yehoshua ibn Shuiv carefully will notice three separate reasons for the practice not to sleep on Rosh HaShana. The first reason mentioned is based on the Rambam's famous comment (*Hilchos Shofar* 3:4) that the *shofar* of Rosh HaShana is meant to wake us from our slumber so that we do teshuva. One who sleeps is clearly oblivious to the meaning of the *shofar*. The other reasons cited are that it is improper to sleep while one's deeds are being investigated. *Shaat hadin* (the moment of judgment) is not an appropriate time to catch some z's. Finally, sleep implies laziness, an attribute that is very far from the ideal we try to portray on Rosh HaShana.

It would seem that those who adopt the first reason should not sleep all day on Rosh HaShana, as the entire day is termed (Bamidbar 29:1) *yom teruah* (a day of blowing the *shofar*) in the Torah. Those who adopt the second reason, that it is improper to sleep at the time of *din*, would be permitted to sleep after midday, since at that time the *din* is less intense. The practice to continue sleeping beyond daybreak adopts the third approach. One can argue that only going to sleep falls under the category of laziness; one who remains asleep is tired, not lazy. According to all the above-mentioned reasons, sleeping at night is permitted, since it is not the time of *shofar* or the time of *din* and sleeping at night is the way of the world and most certainly does not convey laziness.

## Those Who Slept on Rosh HaShana

In addition to the Arizal and *Chayei Adam* who minimize the scope of the practice not to sleep on Rosh HaShana, there were those who slept regularly and completely disregarded this practice. BACH cites that Maharam of Rottenburg (1215-1293) slept on Rosh HaShana.<sup>25</sup>

*MAHARAM was accustomed to sleeping as he did on other holidays.*

**BACH Orach Chaim 597**

ומהר"ם היה רגיל לישן כמו בשאר יום טוב.  
ב"ה אורח חיים סימן תקצז

It is possible that MAHARAM slept because he did not have the Yerushalmi that is cited as the source of this practice. Alternatively, it is possible that he slept based on an understanding of how *simanim* work on Rosh HaShana.

The Gemara in *Horiyut* notes:

*Now that we say that simanim are significant a person should be careful to see<sup>26</sup> gourds, leeks and beets on Rosh HaShana.*

**Horiyut 12a**

אמר אביי, השתא דאמרת: סימנא מילתא היא, [לעולם] יהא רגיל למיחזי בריש שתא קרא ורוביא, כרתי וסילקא ותמרי.  
תלמוד בבלי מסכת הוריות דף יב.

<sup>24</sup> See earlier note 2.

<sup>25</sup> The practice of not sleeping on Rosh Hashana is left out of the *Levush*. Additionally *Leket Yosher* notes that *Terumat HaDeshen* slept on Rosh HaShana.

Meiri asks a thought provoking question, why are the *simanim* not forbidden as forms of *nichush*, sorcery? After all, ordinarily Jews do not seek omens. He answers that the *simanim* are permitted since they are intended to inspire us to act properly.

*And so that we do not stumble into the forbidden territory of nichush, the rabbis instituted that one should recite statements that inspire teshuva, may our merits be read etc.*

**Beit Habechirah, Horiyut 12a**

וכדי שלא ליכשל בהם לעשות דרך נחש תקנו לומר עליהם דברים המעוררים לתשובה והוא שאומרים בקרא יקראו זכיותינו וברוביא ירבו צדקותינו ובכרתי יכרתו שונאינו ר"ל שונאי הנפש והם העונות ובסלקא יסתלקו עונינו ובתמרי יתמו חטאינו וכיוצא באלו. בית הבחירה למאירי מסכת הוריות דף יב.

Effectively, Meiri is suggesting that absent a *yehi ratzon*, a prayer to inspire proper behavior, a *siman* is dangerously close to *nichush*. *Yehi ratzon* prayers are only recited on positive *simanim*, they were not and could not be instituted for negative *simanim* such as not eating nuts and not sleeping on Rosh HaShana. Perhaps this is why the same Maharam of Rottenburg that BACH cites as not adhering to the practice of not sleeping on Rosh HaShana, is quoted by *Kol Bo* as not refraining from eating any food on Rosh HaShana.

*Maharam was also careful to keep the simanim (eating gourds, cabbage and beats). However, he was not particular to refrain from eating garlic, nuts or any food item.*

**Kol Bo 64**

וכן היה רגיל לעשות הר"ם ואינו נזהר לאכול שומין ואגוזים ולא שום דבר.

**ספר כלבו סימן סד**

Although MAHARAM eagerly embraced the positive *simanim*, he refrained from the negative *simanim* of not sleeping and not eating nuts out of concern that they would constitute *nichush*.

<sup>26</sup> The parallel Gemara in *Keritot* 6, writes that one should be careful to eat, gourds beats etc. We follow the practice as presented there.