

1. **Three watches in the night.** Rabbi Eliezer states that the night is divided into three blocks of time, or watches, in Heaven, and each of these watches in Heaven has a counterpart on Earth. According to Rabbi Eliezer, shema should be said before the end of the first watch. Since there are three watches during the night, that means you have the first third, or the first four hours, of the night to say the shema. But these are halachic hours, not the sixty-minute ones we're used to. Though many Orthodox people today prefer to ignore or reinterpret the more esoteric aspects of the Talmud, this idea of parallels between Heaven and Earth is actually a core concept in Kabbalah.
2. **At each watch, Hashem roars like a lion.** He roars regarding His holy place, the Beit Hamikdash. Commentaries say these three roars refer to the three Temples. Later, G-d's Heavenly bas kol is said to be like the cooing of a dove, but here it is like the roar of a lion. A dove's coo is more like a whimper, while a lion's roar is powerful. Perhaps this roar refers to the third Temple, when there will be no more tears. Yet even for a lion, crying has an element of sadness. There is sadness in exile, but we must learn from our exile to be kind to the oppressed, and that is how we can become powerful and bring about the redemption.
3. **What happens during those three periods?** A donkey brays, a dog barks, a baby nurses, and a woman talks to her husband. What does that mean? There are three levels of the soul. During the first watch, a donkey brays. The first level of the soul is the *nefesh*, which is associated with physical living. The Hebrew word for donkey, *chamor*, can also mean physicality. During the second watch, dogs bark. Dog is man's best friend because dogs have emotions. They can get happy and they can cry. This represents the second level of the soul: the *ruach*, the emotional soul. The third watch is when a baby nurses from its mother and a woman talks to her husband. This is probably referring to older babies who sleep through the night and just wake up a little early to nurse. But it's also a metaphor. Nursing refers to the Jewish people gaining sustenance by learning. A woman talking to her husband refers to the intimate connection we have with G-d. This represents the highest level of the soul: the *neschama*, which is associated with people and not animals. This is the intellect, where the consciousness evolves beyond even spiritual emotions.
4. **Tikkun chatzos.** Donkeys, dogs, and babies – what exactly is Rabbi Eliezer talking about? Do these signs indicate the beginning of each watch? The end? Why would we need a sign to designate the beginning of evening or the end of the third watch? You can just look outside and see whether it's day or night. Perhaps the signs are meant to indicate the end of each watch for the aid of people who are not able to look outside and see. Instead of looking for the sun, these people could listen for babies nursing or husbands and wives talking and know that it's time to say the morning shema. Or maybe the signs indicate the end of the first watch, the middle of the second watch, and the beginning of the third watch. The Shulchan Aruch says that it's appropriate to pray at the end of each watch. It could be that the times indicated by these signs are also appropriate times for prayer. The middle of the second watch would be *chatzot*, the time when G-d cries and we should cry with Him. This is very important in the Zohar.
5. **A *nafka mina* for someone who lives in a dark house.** What if a person can't see outside to know if it's morning? They can listen for the sounds of babies nursing and husbands and wives talking. Some opinions suggest that hearing those sounds is not enough to assume it's morning, but that the person must actually then go outside and check. Others, however, say that even though it's certainly possible to hear those noises before morning actually begins, it is safe to

make an assumption based on the majority. Since, the majority of the time, the sounds of babies and husbands and wives indicates morning, when you hear these things you can assume that it is morning and you can rely on that to say the shema.

6. **A story of Rabbi Yossi and Elijah the Prophet.** Rabbi Yossi says: One time I was traveling, and I didn't want to stop to pray on the road. I decided to pull into a ruin in Jerusalem. Elijah the Prophet came and waited by the doorway until I finished praying. Then he told me, "Peace be unto you, my teacher." And I responded, "Peace be unto you, my teacher, my master." Then he asked me why I entered this ruin and I told him I came in to pray. He told me I should have prayed on the road. I responded that I was concerned I would be interrupted by travelers on the way. So he said I should have done a short version of the prayer. I learned three things from him at that time: you shouldn't go into a ruin; you can pray on the road; and if you are on the road you should use a short prayer. Elijah also said to me, "What voice did you hear in the room?" I replied, "I heard a Heavenly echo that was cooing like a dove. It was saying 'Woe is to My children, that because of their sins I destroyed My house and burned down My sanctuary, and I sent them into exile.'" He said to me that G-d says this three times every day. And not only that, but when Jews go into their synagogues and study halls and they say in Kaddish, "May G-d's great name be blessed," He shakes His head and says, "Praised is the King that they praise Him in His home, and woe is to the father that sent His children into exile, and woe is to those sons who got sent away from being at their father's table." Some commentaries ask, isn't Elijah a Heavenly figure, and don't we say about Torah that *lo bashamayim hi* – it is not in Heaven? How could Rabbi Yossi learn these things from Elijah? But *lo bashamayim hi* just means that we don't need to ask the Heavens to resolve our halachic disputes, not that Torah cannot be learned from Heavenly sources.
7. **Reb Tzadok suggests on this teaching that G-d is asking for *hataras nedarim*.** When a person makes a vow and regrets it, he goes to a sage and talks about his intentions, and sometimes the sage is able to undo the vow. That is what G-d is doing in this story. He wants to undo His vow that keeps His children in exile, because it is as if He didn't realize the consequences. Is it possible that G-d truly did not understand the consequences of His vow? In fact, the whole point of prayer is that G-d can "change His mind" about His decrees.
8. **G-d cries out for His people.** Three times a day G-d cries out that He wishes He hadn't destroyed the Temple, and when we praise Him in Kaddish He cries out again. The Tur says that when we praise His Name, He shakes His head and says, "Woe is to the sons that were exiled from their father's home, and what does it say about a father that the children praise Him like this, but He has distanced them from His table?" We must understand the importance of the line, "*yehei shemei rabbi mevorach leolom ul'olmei olmaya*" in Kaddish. Tosfot asks, where is the comma in this line? The Machzor Vitry understands it as "*yehei shemei rabba, mevorach leolam ul'olmei olmaya*" – may G-d's name become big, and blessed forever and ever. We say that G-d's Name should become big, not that it is big, because until certain things happen in the world, such as the destruction of Amalek and the rebuilding of the Temple, His Name is not big. The whole world does not yet know that He exists. But when G-d brings His exiled children back to His table, His name will be made great.
9. **Everything is worse since the Destruction of the Temple.** There's a gemara in Sotah that connects to this one, which talks about the time of the Destruction of the Temple and says that since that time, things are just not as good. Food isn't as good, relationships aren't as good, etc.

So what goodness is left in the world? There are two things, as explained by Rashi: 1. We say in *uva letzion* a series of quotes about G-d's holiness in this world and the next, and they're translated into Aramaic so that even people who didn't know *lashon hakodesh* can sanctify G-d's name in Heaven and on Earth. 2. We say Kaddish after *aggadeta*. What does it mean that this is the goodness we still have in this world? The blessings before the shema, *uva letzion*, the kaddish, and kedusha all contain descriptions from the prophets of the sanctity in Heaven and on Earth. This is essential to understanding what the Temple represents: it is a manifestation of Heaven. Through our actions in the Temple below we were able to procure a Heavenly flow of spiritual nourishment, and we were able to "feed" G-d and serve Him. This is what we refer to as *Maaseh Merkavah*. Today, without the Temple, things aren't as good as they were, but we still have our synagogues and we can still sanctify G-d's Name, and therefore there is still goodness in the world.

10. **There are three reasons one should not go into a ruin:** 1. Someone may suspect there's a prostitute waiting there. 2. It might collapse. 3. Because of demons. Some food for thought: Do we still fear demons today, or has rationalism brought an end to them? Or are there maybe different types of forces today, perhaps psychological ones?