

Talmud Brachot Daf 4:

1. **Moses and King David.** Both Moses and King David knew when midnight was, but they acted like they didn't. Moses told Pharaoh that the tenth plague would happen around midnight, and King David relied on his harp to tell him when midnight was. Why? Because Moses didn't want to give the Egyptians an opening to say he'd been wrong, and King David needed the harp not to tell him when midnight was, but to ensure he woke up. The lesson is that you don't need to act with certainty when there's a chance that could backfire. You should always anticipate what might happen. Moses recognized that he was dealing with a difficult antagonist who would try to twist everything he said and did, so he used inexact wording just to be safe and not invite trouble. When you have something to say that could get twisted, you should be careful how you say it.

2. **There seems to be a contradiction relating to King David.** Was he sure about his place in olam haba, or did he doubt? The answer is that he knew the good he had done, but he worried that some of the bad things he had done would cause him to lose his spot. The same was true of Jacob. When he had his dream about the ladder G-d told him He would protect him, but then we see later that Jacob was fearful. After that promise, what did he have to be afraid of? He was concerned that sin would have diminished the promise of G-d's protection. But this contradicts another principle: If a prophet predicts that something bad will happen and it does not, he isn't necessarily a false prophet, because sometimes bad decrees can be overturned. But if a prophet predicts something good and that doesn't happen, we know he's a false prophet, because G-d will never take back a good prophecy. If G-d never takes back a good prophecy, how could Jacob have been worried about losing the protection he was promised? Maybe that principle only applies in the specific situation of testing prophets, while more personal prophecies, even of good, can always be overturned.

3. **The opinion in the Mishna that you have until midnight to say the evening Shema.** Rabban Gamliel says you have the entire evening to say the Shema. He understands "when you go to sleep" as "while you're asleep," meaning that the entire time that people are asleep is also time that you can say Shema. In theory the Rabbis agree with that, but in practice they made a decree that it should only be until midnight, because otherwise people might fall asleep and forget. But then the gemara says that anyone who goes against the words of the Rabbis is chayav mita. Why? That's not usually the case. But in this case, the Rabbis knew how likely it is that if someone doesn't say Shema early he will not say it at all. Since the potential for sin is very strong, it's important to be extra careful.

4. **Why such a harsh punishment for such a small thing?** To make a point. Sometimes when a rabbi in the gemara is losing an argument, he says something strong like this just to show how strongly he feels about the issue.

5. **Saying the Maariv tefillah in connection with a mention of redemption gets a person olam haba.** Everyone agrees that you're supposed to mention redemption before Shacharit, but there's a debate about doing it at Maariv. This is because the primary redemption from Egypt happened during the day. Rashi says that mentioning the redemption is like knocking on the door, and tefillah is like G-d coming to answer. Rabbi Soloveitchik says that before you can stand before G-d, you need to get

permission. The gemara is outlining things you need to do to get ready for tefillah, and one of those things is mentioning redemption.

6. Rav Yochanan says the person who connects redemption to prayer at Maariv goes to olam

haba. Others disagree. Tosfot explains that the custom to say additional prayers before the Maariv amida began because synagogues used to be outside of the community, and if someone came late and finished late they'd have to walk home by themselves, which was dangerous. The extra prayers were instituted to give people time to catch up so that no one would have to walk alone at night. The law follows Rav Yochanan. Rav Amram Gaon argues, saying the reason we say kaddish at that point is to show that there is no concept of mentioning redemption at Maariv.

7. The gemara suggests that the additional prayers we say before the Shemonah Esrei are not an

interruption. These prayers are more like an extended mention of redemption. The underlying theme of these prayers is the recognition of G-d's greatness. When we express our gratitude for the redemption from Egypt, we are acknowledging that we owe everything to G-d. Far from being an interruption, this acknowledgment is the perfect way to get us ready for the Shemonah Esrei. What about the verse, "Hashem open my lips..."? This was also instituted by the rabbis as a part of the extended mention of redemption. When the chazzan is repeating Shemonah Esrei, should he repeat that verse out loud? Rabbi Soloveitchik says yes, because this isn't an add-on, it's actually a part of what tefillah is. It needs to be heard by the congregation, just like the rest of Shemonah Esrei. Others disagree, because historically this verse has never been said out loud. There's something private about it.

8. Who is a ben olam haba? Someone who says Ashrei every day. How many times a day? One or three, depending who you ask. What is so special about Ashrei that it can earn someone a place in olam haba? It follows the aleph beis and includes the verse, "You open Your hands and you satiate the needs of all living creatures."

9. Rabbi Yochanan: Why does Ashrei skip the letter nun? Because nun stands for nophel, someone who falls. The nun represents the hidden person, who is not seen until someone picks him up. We skip any mention of falling and instead go straight to samech, saying Hashem supports all the fallen. When someone does fall, the only concern you should have is picking him up. Instead of focusing on problems, just pick your neighbor up off the ground, and deal with everything else after. Why the alphabetical formula? Attempting to praise G-d can be dangerous, because there can be no end to His praises. According to Rabbi Soloveitchik, by using the aleph beis we are saying that we can never say all His praises, but we want to praise Him in every way and we don't have the words, so He should take the full aleph beis and formulate all the praises as if we said them properly.

10. Permission for Shemonah Esrei and for the Shema. The rabbis understood that before saying the Shema, you need to get "permission." That is the purpose of the blessings before and after. The same is true for Shemonah Esrei: it needs to be prefaced with the Shema and its blessings.