Even God Makes Time for Leisure: Rabbinic Narratives about God’s Work, Play, and Rest Schedule

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Part I: The Hours of Creation

1. **Leviticus Rabbah 29:1 (trans. Slotki); cf. Pesiqtat de Rav Kahana 23:1**

   ...on the first of Tishre, Adam was created: in the first hour the idea [of creating a person] occurred [to God], in the second He took counsel with the Ministering Angels, in the third He kneaded him [Adam], in the fourth He shaped him, in the fifth He made him into a lifeless body, in the sixth He breathed a soul into him, in the seventh He stood him on his feet, in the eighth He brought him into the Garden of Eden, in the ninth he was commanded [against eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge], in the tenth he transgressed, in the eleventh he was judged, in the twelfth he was pardoned.

2. **Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedria 38b (trans. Soncino); cf. Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer 11**

   Rabbi Yohanan ben Hanina said: The day consisted of twelve hours. In the first hour, his [Adam’s] dust was gathered; in the second, it was kneaded into a shapeless mass. In the third, his limbs were shaped; in the fourth, a soul was infused into him; in the fifth, he arose and stood on his feet; in the sixth, he gave [the animals] their names; in the seventh, Eve became his mate; in the eighth, they ascended to bed as two and descended as four; in the ninth, he was commanded not to eat of the tree; in the tenth, he sinned; in the eleventh, he was tried; and in the twelfth, he was expelled [from Eden] and departed, for it is written, “Man abides not in honor” (Psalm 49:13).

Part II: God’s Work Since Creation

3. **Leviticus Rabbah 8:1 (cf. Genesis Rabbah 68:4, marginal note in Ms. Vatican 30)**

   ...and as the hours of the day have been fulfilled, it is written, ‘A voice saying: ‘The hours were completed and the hours are fulfilled’ (Psalm 104:1, JPS). As the voice is saying, so let it be established for them. Amen let it be established for them.

- Morning
- Midday
- Afternoon
- Evening
- Night
- Midnight
- Early Morning
- Day
- Night
- Midnight
- Early Morning
Matrona asked Rabbi Yose ben Halfuta, saying: How many days did the Holy One, blessed be He, create His world? He said to her: For six days, as it says “For six days God created the heavens and earth…” (Exod. 31:17). She said to him: Since then, what does God sit and do? He said to her: “He sits and creates matches, so-and-so’s daughter to so-and-so, so-and-so’s wife to so-and-so, so-and-so’s wealth to so-and-so. She said to him: How many slaves and maidservants do I have, and easily within an hour I could match them up. He said to her: If it is easy in your eyes, it is as difficult for God as splitting the Sea of Reeds, as it says “God makes the solitary to dwell in a house [He brings out the prisoners into prosperity, the rebellious dwell but in a parched land” (Psalms 68:7). Rabbi Yose b. Halfuta went to his home. She [Matrona] went and brought a thousand slaves and a thousand maidservants and she made them stand in rows and said to them, so-and-so will go with so-and-so, and so-and-so will go with so-and-so. In the morning, they came to her, this one’s head disheveled, this one’s eyes blinded, this one’s arm broken, this one’s leg broken. One said: I don’t want this one, and another said: I don’t want this one. She sent them off and said: Good is your Torah, beautiful and praiseworthy. He said to her: I didn’t tell you this, rather I said that if it is simple in your eyes it is as difficult for God as the splitting of the Sea of Reeds, as it says, “God makes the solitary to dwell in a house, He brings out the prisoners into prosperity…” (Psalms 68:7).

Part III: God’s Daily Schedule


Moses the prophet said: When I ascended the mountain [of Sinai], I saw the Lord of all the world divide the day into four parts: three hours occupied with Torah, three hours occupied with judgment, three hours providing for all the world, and three hours matching between men and women...

Deut 32:4 (NRSV)

The Rock, his work is perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God, without deceit, just and upright is he.

The Ancient of Days / is seen in the high heavens
He divides the day / into four quarters, in His Wisdom

For three hours, He meditates on the Torah, / which preceded all other creatures
For it is wisdom / given as a gift to the people

He decreed three hours for sitting in judgment / for He is the Judge
The strong and faithful One / who resides in his heavenly abode

And He decreed also in His wisdom / the Strong One of the World
Three hours (devoted) to sustaining in His wisdom / all who dwell in the world

Thus He bedecked / perfect couples with crowns
(Devoting) three hours of every day to making matches, / grooms and brides

While still in your mothers’ wombs / the two of you were matched
Name with name, he joined your names: / Blessed is He who joined you together!

He joined (you), balanced scales / groom with bride
To crown you / in the presence of all the community

May you have good lives / and may peace reside between you
May blessing inhabit all your handiworks / and may your good fortune grow
Better is a good name / than goodly oil
To do well by you / ...and you shall be protected from any sin

May children arise from you / upright and righteous
May they be inscribed in the Book of Life / and cling to Torah


וּהְוָא אֱמֶרְךָ יִהְוָה אָמֶרְךָ: שִׁתְמֵנְךָ שָׁעַרְתָּ שָׁעַרְתָּ הָיוֹם. שִׁלְשַׁמְתָּ הַכְּבָּרָה יִשָּׁבְעָתָּ בָּהוּ. שִׁכְוַת—יִשָּׁבְעָתָּ זֶאת הַכְּבָּרָה כָּלָה. בִּינָה שִׁלְשַׁמְתָּ שָׁעַרְתָּ בְּעַלְכָּה. עָמַד מְכָסִי הָדִּי יִשָּׁבְעָתָּ עַל כָּלָּוָּה. שֵׁלְשַׁמְתָּ—יִשָּׁבְעָתָּ זֶאת הַכְּבָּרָה כָּלָה. מֶכֶסִי הָדִּי יִשָּׁבְעָתָּ עַל כָּלָּוָּה.

לִוְיָהְנָו שְׁאַמְּרוּ: לִוְיָהְנָו הָזֶה לֶשַׁכָּה בָּהוּ.

Rav Judah said in the name of Rav: The day consists of twelve hours. During the first three hours the Holy One, Blessed Be He, is occupying Himself with the Torah. During the second three He sits in judgment on the whole word, and when He sees that the world is so guilty as to deserve destruction, He transfers Himself from the seat of Justice to the seat of Mercy. During the third quarter, He is feeding the whole world, from the horned buffalo to the brood of vermin. During the fourth quarter He is sporting with the Leviathan, as it is said, “There is Leviathan, whom You have formed to laugh with” (Psalms 104:26).

אִמֶּרְךָ יִהְוָה שָׁעַרְתָּ הָיוֹם בְּעַלְכָּה. שִׁלְשַׁמְתָּ הַכְּבָּרָה יִשָּׁבְעָתָּ בָּהוּ. שֵׁלְשַׁמְתָּ—יִשָּׁבְעָתָּ הַכְּבָּרָה בְּעַלְכָּה. שָׁעַרְתָּ—יִשָּׁבְעָתָּ הָיוֹם בְּעַלְכָּה.

Said Rabbi Nahman ben Isaac: Yes, He laughs with His creatures, but He does not laugh at His creatures except on that day. Rabbi Aba said to Rabbi Nahman b. Isaac: Since the day of the destruction of the temple, there is no laughter for the Holy One, blessed be He. Whence do we know that there is not? Shall we say from the verse, “And on that day did the Lord, the God of Hosts, call to weeping and lamentation?” (Isaiah 22:12). But this refers to that day and no more. Shall we then say, from this verse: “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember thee?” (Psalm 137:5-6). But this, too, excludes forgetfulness, but not laughter. Hence, [it is known] from the verse, “I have for a long time held my peace, I have been still, and refrained myself, now will I cry” (Isaiah 42:14). What then does God do in the fourth quarter? — He sits and instructs the school children, as it is said, “Whom shall one teach knowledge, and whom shall one make to understand the message? Them that are weaned from the milk” (Isaiah 28:9). Who instructed them theretofore? — If you like, you may say Metatron, or it may be said that God did this as well as other things.
A person should make sure to not engage too much in leisure, idle talk, or nonsense...

Thus God said to Israel: my child, I sat for 974 generations before the world was creation, and since the day that the world was created until that very hour, I studied, parsed, and analyzed all of the Torah, and from the day that I created the world and I sat on my throne of glory, a third of the day I read and study, a third of the day I judged the whole world, and a third of the day I do charitable acts, and I feed and sustain the entire world, all of my creations, and I only engage in leisure (laughter) for a single hour.

Anyone who engages too much in idle talk or nonsense, they escort them until the hour when they enter the next work. God says to them: why didn’t you learn from your father in heaven, who sits on his throne of glory, a third of the day he reads and studies, a third of the day he judges the law, and a third of the day he does charitable acts, and feeds and sustains all of the world’s creations and all of the works of his hands, and he doesn’t engage in leisure except for a single hour. If a person responds to God: I studied Torah since I was thirteen onwards, God asks: what Torah did you do and what good deeds did you accomplish? Did you not engage in idle talk or things that aren’t fitting?

Part IV: God’s Mood Swings, Daily Habits, and Multitasking

8. Babylonian Talmud, Arudah Zarah 4a (trans. Soncino); cf. b. Sanhedrin 105b, b. Berakhot 7a

A person should make sure to not engage too much in leisure, idle talk, or nonsense...

Thus God said to Israel: my child, I sat for 974 generations before the world was creation, and since the day that the world was created until that very hour, I studied, parsed, and analyzed all of the Torah, and from the day that I created the world and I sat on my throne of glory, a third of the day I read and study, a third of the day I judged the whole world, and a third of the day I do charitable acts, and I feed and sustain the entire world, all of my creations, and I only engage in leisure (laughter) for a single hour.

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Our Rabbis taught: God is angry every day, but how long does His anger last? — A moment. And how long is a moment? — one fifty three thousand eight hundred forty eighth of an hour is a moment. No creature could ever precisely fix this moment, except Balaam the wicked, of whom it is written who knew the knowledge of the Most High... And how long does His wrath last? — A moment [Rega]. And how long is a Rega? Said Amemar (others say, Rabina): As long as it takes to utter this word. And whence do we know that His wrath lasts a moment? — Because it is written, For His anger is for a moment, His favour is for a lifetime; or, if you wish, from this verse: Hide thyself for a little moment, until the wrath be past. When is He wrathful? — Said Abaye: During the first three hours, when the comb of the cock is white. And is it not white at all other times? — At other times it has red streaks, at that time there are no red streaks in it.

9. Babylonian Talmud, Baba Metzia 59b (trans. Sefaria)

עמד רב ביוושע על רגליו אתmour (זברים ל, יב) לא בשמשת היא אמי לא בשמשת היא אמר רב ירח שמבר
ננתה أنها المهאר סיניukt או את מ지요ית בתכ קולה חנכה בחור סיני חור והשנה במח ('מ, הב') בחרים
לחותה עשהיה רב נמחה י/Internal יא"ל מי עביכ קוב"ה בהחיה שכתובת א"ל לך חיות עמך נצחו בני

כנResponseType בני.

Rabbi Yehoshua stood on his feet and said: It is written: “It is not in heaven” (Deuteronomy 30:12). The Gemara asks: What is the relevance of the phrase “It is not in heaven” in this context? Rabbi Yirmeya says: Since the Torah was already given at Mount Sinai, we do not regard a Divine Voice, as You already wrote at Mount Sinai, in the Torah: “After a majority to incline” (Exodus 23:2). Since the majority of Rabbis disagreed with Rabbi Eliezer’s opinion, the balakha is not ruled in accordance with his opinion. The Gemara relates: Years after, Rabbi Natan encountered Elijah the prophet and said to him: What did the Holy One, Blessed be He, do at that time, when Rabbi Yehoshua issued his declaration? Elijah said to him: The Holy One, Blessed be He, smiled and said: My children have triumphed over Me; My children have triumphed over Me.

10. Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 3a (trans. Soncino); cf. Berakhot 6a

עד סף האשאמרות, מי כסבר רב אלי: יא כסבר שמלשمشוריה הילולה - לيمن עvidia ששתון
וי כסבר ארבע משמורת הילולה - ליימ עד ששתון - ליעל כסבר שמלשمشוריה הילולה
והא קמשורַת: דיאียม משמורת ברוך ביום משמורת באורא. ודינא: רב אליעזר אמא: שמלש
מشرك מי הילולה על כל משמורת יישב הקדוש ברוך היא והושא כאר, שמאורה ימשאר: שמלש
ומשורת הילולה, עלי כל משמורת יישב הקדוש ברוך היא. והושא כאר; אומד: ובנין שבעתונותים

הרכהים את בתי ושרפת את הזכיל הגרוזים לבן אומד השעה.

Until the end of the first watch. What opinion does Rabbi Eliezer hold? If he holds that the night has three watches, let him say: Till four hours [in the night]. And if he holds that the night has four watches, let him say: Till three hours? — He holds indeed, that the night has three watches, but he wants to teach us that there are watches in heaven as well as on earth. For it has been taught: Rabbi Eliezer says: The night has three watches, and at each watch the Holy One, blessed be He, sits and roars like a lion. For it is written: “The Lord does roar from on high, and raise His voice from His holy habitation; ‘roaring He doth roar’ because of His fold” (Jeremiah 25:30)... Rabbi Isaac b. Samuel says in the name of Rav: The night has three watches, and at each
watch the Holy One, blessed be He, sits and roars like a lion and says: Woe to the children, on account of whose sins I destroyed My house and burnt My temple and exiled them among the nations of the world.

11. Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 6a (trans. Sefaria)

Rabbi Avin bar Adda said that Rabbi Yitzḥak said: From where is it derived that the Holy One, Blessed be He, wears phylacteries? As it is stated: “The Lord has sworn by His right hand, and by the arm of His strength” (Isaiah 62:8)... Rav Nahman bar Yitzḥak said to Rav Hyya bar Avin: What is written in the phylacteries of the Master of the world? Rav Hyya bar Avin replied: “Who is like Your people, Israel, one nation in the land?” (1 Chronicles 12:21)... Rav Aha, son of Rava said to Rav Ashi: It works out well for one of the compartments. What about the rest of the compartments? He said to him: “For who is a great nation,” (Deuteronomy 4:7); “And who is a great nation” (Deuteronomy 4:8); “Happy are you, Israel” (Deuteronomy 33:29); “Or has God attempted” (Deuteronomy 4:34); “And to elevate you” (Deuteronomy 26:19)...


Come and see that the attributes of the Holy Blessed One are not like the attributes of flesh and blood. A flesh and blood king is not able to make war, and to be a scribe, and teach children. Yet with the Holy Blessed One it is not like this; yesterday at the sea God was like a warmaker, as it says (Exodus 15:3) “God is a man of war,” and it says (Job 26:12) “In God's strength God split the sea” -- and today, at the giving of the Torah, God descended to teach Torah to God’s children, and so it says (Job 36:22) “See, God is beyond reach in God's power; who governs like God?”, it happened [?]: (Exodus 20:1) “And God said all these things.”

Part IV: God's Nightlife


בַּבְּלִיָּאָם מַאֲסַי עֶבֶד? אָכְבֵּעַת אָיָה: מְתַּנֵּי מִמָּא: אָהְבָּעַת אָיָה: רֹכֶב עַל כֹּבֵּר כִּסְפֵּן שָׁבְמוֹת עָשֶׂרֶל עַל עָלִמִּים, שְׁנָמָרוֹ: רֹכֶב עַל עָלִים בְּרוֹחוֹת אַלֵפִי שָׁנָא, אָלָכָרֵי שָׁנָא אֱלָל שְׁנָא: אָהֲבָעַת אָיָה: יִשְׁבַּשְׁמוּתֵיהֶרֶם מְמִי חֵי, שְׁנָמָרוֹ: יִשְׁמֵא יְזִּיר הָעָדְּבָלֵל שָׁרַי מִעָמִי.
And what does He do by night? — If you like you may say, the kind of thing He does by day; or it may be said that He rides a light cherub, and floats in eighteen thousand worlds; for it is said, "The chariots of God are myriads, even thousands shinan" (Psalms 68:18). Do not read 'shinan' [repeated], but she-enan [that are not]; or it may be said, He sits and listens to the song of the Hayyoth, as it is said, "By the day the Lord will command His lovingkindness and in the night His song shall be with me" (Psalms 42:9).

Rabbi Levi says: Anyone who interrupts his study of words of Torah to occupy himself with mundane matters will be fed with the coals of the broom tree, as it is stated: "They pluck salt-wort from wormwood, and the roots of the broom are their food" (Job 30:4). Reish Lakish says: With regard to any-one who occupies himself with Torah at night, the Holy One, Blessed be He, extends a thread of kindness over him by day, as it is stated: "By day, the Lord will command His kindness, and in the night His song shall be with me" (Psalms 42:9). The verse is understood as follows: What is the reason that by day, the Lord will command His kindness to extend over him? It is due to the fact that in the night His song is with me, i.e., he occupies himself at night with Torah, which is referred to as a song.


Each day, when the dawn begins to appear, the majestic King sits and blesses the beasts [of heaven]: “To you, Beasts, do I speak, you, Creatures, do I cause to hear. O Beasts, who bear the throne of My glory with whole heart and with longing soul. May that hour be blessed in which I created you, may that planet be exalted under which I formed you, may the light of that day in which you occurred to the thoughts of My heart, shine. For you are a precious vessel that I have prepared and have completed. Be silent before Me, all creatures that I have made, that I may listen and give ear to the voice of the prayer of My children.”