

Sleeping in Shul

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

A Professor, said Bergen Evans, is one who speaks in other people's sleep. Anyone who has taught knows how difficult it is to keep the attention of students. Perhaps we can take some comfort in the report of the *Midrash* that Rabbi Akiva once noticed his students were falling asleep in his class. If one can fall asleep on Rabbi Akiva, who are we to complain?

Every rabbi has had the same experience in synagogue. You are on fire with your eloquence only to see the guy in the third row gently snoring while being poked by his embarrassed wife. You comfort yourself by imagining that he probably works late, or the kids kept him up, or perhaps he suffers from narcolepsy. What we Rabbis generally do not imagine is that our droning is soporific.

And what if you are the sleeper? Surely that is even more uncomfortable than being the preacher whose words do not rouse the congregation. May I suggest you take the insouciant attitude of the great Winston Churchill. As Savior of the free world he felt himself entitled to grab a little shuteye in the House of Commons. When a fellow MP approached him and said "Must you fall asleep when I am speaking?" Churchill answered, "No, it is purely voluntary."