

Introduction: We're looking for a time when we can say the Shema. Shema is associated *with kabbalat ol malchut shamayim*, accepting the yoke of Heaven. We shift our consciousness to realize the supreme importance of G-d in our lives, and that begins to give life meaning. We have a purpose; we're here to serve. We have to recognize that there is a higher power, and we dedicate ourselves to Him every evening and every morning.

1. **Purity obtained through the sunset.** You might not expect laws about ritual purity in a tractate about prayer and blessings. But in fact those laws are brought up right at the beginning. In part, the purpose is to teach us an important principle of learning: different parts of Torah are not completely divorced from each other. Everything connects. Since the laws of purity are by and large not practiced today without the Temple, we might think those laws are irrelevant. But they're not, because those laws connect to others. Kohanim need to be pure when they eat the terumah. If a kohen becomes impure, he must go to mikvah to purify himself. Then he waits for the sun to set, representing a new time and the possibility of change, and he can then eat terumah. But for *kadshim* (sacrificial foods), going to the mikvah is not enough to purify. The kohen would also need to bring an offering. Psychologically, what does bringing an offering mean? When a person does something wrong, there are two elements of teshuva – spiritually correcting oneself. First, one must make a statement of inner resolve not to return to the sin. Second, one needs to balance out the negative act with a positive act. For example, if you insult a friend, you need to apologize and promise not to do it again, but for full teshuva you should also give them a gift. This positive act reinforces your commitment to never hurt them again. But this second level is not always necessary. In the case of the evening Shema, we don't need two steps of repentance. All we need is a commitment to do better and a sunset.
2. **Five opinions about when to say the evening Shema. First, Rabbi Eliezer:** at the time when we sanctify the Shabbat. Rashi explains that on Friday evening, at some point the sun sets and it's no longer day, but it's not yet dark. This in-between time is called *bein hashmashot*. At that time, we are not sure if it's still technically Friday afternoon or if it's already Shabbat. So we accept Shabbat at that early time and treat that block of time as Shabbat, even if in reality it is not night yet. Our ability to sanctify time creates a halachic reality, and according to Rabbi Eliezer that new reality is enough to allow us to say Shema at that early time.
3. **Rabbi Yehoshua:** at the time when the kohanim would become pure to eat the terumah. The Mishnah says the time when they eat terumah, and Rabbi Yehoshua clarifies that it's the time they become pure to eat it. The time of purity might be a little earlier than the time of eating, or they might be the same time. Either way, Rabbi Yehoshua is saying that the Shema doesn't require extensive preparation. You don't need to sit and meditate to get yourself ready. As soon as it's time, you can recite the Shema.
4. **Rabbi Meir:** at the time when the kohanim would go to the mikvah before evening to be able to eat terumah. This opinion is even earlier than the previous ones; it's even still during the day. This represents the power of the mikvah to renew.
5. **Rabbi Chananya:** at the time when poor people go to eat bread and salt. Initially the gemara suggests that this is even earlier, because poor people don't have light in their homes and must eat when it's still light outside. But that suggestion is not accepted, and we say that poor people actually eat later than others. It's good to be aware of what poor people are doing and not just to think about ourselves.

6. **Rav Achai:** at the time when regular people eat. This opinion has nothing to do with kohanim or purity; it's just dinnertime. Normal isn't necessarily a bad thing, because even the normal can become sanctified. Kohanim are not the only people who matter.
7. **Ben Hashmashot – between day and night.** Rashi introduces this concept and discusses how it applies to Friday night and the sanctification of time. Because we are in doubt about when night really starts, we bring in Shabbat at the earlier time. According to the Ritva, there are two ways to understand this. The first is that we really are not sure, so we play it safe and take the more stringent approach. Since Friday at sundown might be Shabbat, we treat it like Shabbat. The second is that *bein hashmashot* is in a way both day and night; it is an in-between time with elements of both. Therefore we have to treat it as both day and night.
8. **Understanding Talmudic logic.** What is the *hava amina* (the initial understanding), and what is the *maskana* (the final understanding)? Initially, the gemara suggests that poor people eat earlier than other people, perhaps because they don't have light in their homes and must eat when it's still light outside. But then it brings in a *beraita*, a Mishnaic teaching that wasn't included in the Mishna, that analyzes the five opinions of when the Shema can be said. If poor people did actually eat earlier, then Rabbi Chananya's opinion would be the same as Rabbi Meir's. So we must say that poor people actually eat later than other people. We started out with an assumption, but upon further analysis the *hava amina* didn't hold up and we had to adjust the logic.
9. **Creating objective times from subjective concepts.** The opinions on this page are different from the ones on the previous page. Here we don't have concrete times, like *tzeit hacoachavim*. Rather, the gemara is focused on the time people go to sleep, which is subjective. Different people go to sleep at different times. Nonetheless, we do not worry about individuals, but about when the general population goes to sleep. Once the gemara determines that time, it becomes the objective reality and is not subject to change. Even though we have electricity today and the times discussed in the gemara are no longer relevant, we still follow the same rulings.
10. **The concept of *bein hashmashot*.** How long is the time of *bein hashmashot*? Many halachic opinions follow Rabbeinu Tam, who says *bein hashmashot* is up to 72 minutes. The Vilna Gaon and others have it as a shorter time, and according to Rabbi Meir it is just a moment. That's an interesting idea, that change can happen quicker than you think. We've been waiting for Mashiach for so long, but when the time arrives he can come *k'heref ayin*, in a blink.