

# KRIAT SHEMA 1:06

*by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom*

**6.** The first B'rakha beforehand during the day is "Yotzer Or uVoreh Hoshekh..." (He who forms light and creates darkness...) and the second B'rakha is "Ahavat Olam Ahavtanu" (You have loved us with an eternal love). The [B'rakha] afterwards is "Emet veYatziv" (it is true and stable) The first B'rakha beforehand at night is "Ma'ariv Aravim..." (who causes evening to fall...) - second to it is "Ahavat Olam, Beit Yisra'el, Amkha Ahavta..." (Your nation, the house of Israel, You have loved with an eternal love...) The first B'rakha afterwards is "Emet ve'Emunah" (it is true and faithful). Second to it is "Hashkiveinu" (Cause us to lie down).

**Q1:** Why do we mention darkness in the morning?

**Q2:** Why is the theme of God's love always mentioned immediately before the Sh'ma?

**Q3:** Why is the theme of redemption from Egypt always mentioned in the B'rakha immediately after Sh'ma?

**Q4:** Why do the B'rakhot associated with the redemption from Egypt begin with "Emet"?

**Q5:** Is the time for these B'rakhot the same as the time for K'riat Sh'ma?

**Q6:** What is the meaning of the order of all of these B'rakhot?

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## **Birkot K'riat Sh'ma (1) Yitzchak Etshalom**

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The Mishna in Berakhot (1:4) states: In the morning, two B'rakhot are recited before [K'riat Sh'ma] and one after and in the evening, two B'rakhot are recited beforehand and two after.

We can infer from this Mishna that the number of B'rakhot recited before and after Sh'ma is significant - the Mishna does not tell us which B'rakhot are said, rather how many.

The Talmud Yerushalmi (JT) offers two explanations - which may reflect differing understandings of Birkot K'riat Sh'ma: (this explanation is paralleled in Midrash Tehillim 1:17 and 6:1 with subtle yet significant differences).

R. Simon said in the name of R. Sh'muel b. Nachman: [this is on account of] "You shall meditate upon

it [Torah] day and night" (Yehoshua [Joshua]1:8) - i.e. that the meditations of day and night should be equal. (explanation: in the morning K'riat Sh'ma, we read three Parashiot (paragraphs) from the Torah - add two B'rakhot beforehand and one after, and there are six units read within the general context of morning K'riat Sh'ma. There was a dispute as to whether or not to read the third Parasha and the Palestinian custom was not to read it. Therefore, there were only two Parashiot read; in order to "equalize" the evening and morning K'riat Sh'ma contexts, an extra B'rakha was added in the evening.) R. Yossi b. Avin says in the name of R. Yehoshua b. Levi: [this is on account of] "Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous ordinances." (Tehillim [Psalms]119:164). (explanation: adding up the two B'rakhot beforehand and one afterwards in the morning and the two beforehand and two afterwards in the evening leaves us with a total of seven B'rakhot recited around K'riat Sh'ma each day.)

(Besides the significance of the number of B'rakhot - the stress on "before" and "after" seems to point to the deliberate location of K'riat Sh'ma - in the middle of these series of B'rakhot.)

## II

There are, *prima facie*, two approaches to Birkot K'riat Sh'ma: Either these B'rakhot are independent of K'riat Sh'ma or they are, in some fashion, tied to Sh'ma. If they are independent, then their function must be seen in the larger scope of B'rakhot and Tefilla - and will likely be defined by those contexts. In that case, we have to explain their function(s).

On the other hand, if we understand these B'rakhot to be more than incidental neighbors of K'riat Sh'ma, but integrally tied in with it, we may wish to define the B'rakhot within that context. If that is the case, we will have to explain their role within the realm of K'riat Sh'ma - how each B'rakha associates itself with the themes of the Sh'ma and why they are read in their specific order.

There are two litmus tests by which this question can be examined:

(a) What happens if someone is unsure whether or not he read K'riat Sh'ma and its B'rakhot? Since, according to most Rishonim, K'riat Sh'ma is a Biblically ordained Mitzva ("D'Orayta"), the rule would be that "Safeq d'Orayta leChumra" - in case of doubt, we are stringent and repeat the Mitzva. The B'rakhot alone are certainly Rabbinically mandated ("D'rabanan") - so, if the B'rakhot are part of the Mitzva of K'riat Sh'ma (a rabbinic extension of the Torah's command) - in case of doubt, we would read both K'riat Sh'ma and the B'rakhot. If, on the other hand, Birkot K'riat Sh'ma stand independently, we would not repeat them - just the three Parashiot of K'riat Sh'ma.

(b) Are the time parameters for Birkot K'riat Sh'ma the same as those of K'riat Sh'ma itself? This is a practical matter, which will be discussed at greater length when we get to 1:9-10 - however, the nut of the question is the viability of reading K'riat Sh'ma with its B'rakhot at a time which is not a valid K'riat Sh'ma time - such as before dark, or after mid-morning. Again, if the B'rakhot stand independently, their time-frame may be defined by another consideration (Tefilla) or they may have their own time frame. On the other hand, if they are an extension of K'riat Sh'ma, they would likely be

"bound" the same time-frames as K'riat Sh'ma.

### III

Rambam (MT K'riat Sh'ma 2:13) rules that if one was in doubt about whether or not he read K'riat Sh'ma and its B'rakhot, he should re-read it - with the B'rakhot. (On the other hand, if he knew that he read K'riat Sh'ma but was in doubt about the B'rakhot, he should not re-read them.) This would seem to indicate that Rambam views the B'rakhot as an extension of K'riat Sh'ma (see Teshuvot Rashba 1:320 for an explanation of Rambam's approach in this regard), such that their times should be the same. Rambam seems to contradict this approach in 1:13, where he rules that if someone reads K'riat Sh'ma after mid-morning, he has not fulfilled "reading K'riat Sh'ma in its proper time"; however, he still reads it (as one who is reading Torah) along with the B'rakhot beforehand and afterwards - and he may do this all day. (until the end of the day - even afternoon). On the surface, this ruling seemingly presumes that Birkot K'riat Sh'ma are independent of K'riat Sh'ma, with their own time-frame. However, as discussed in the opening shiur, Kessef Mishneh opines that Rambam's approach is that the time for daytime K'riat Sh'ma is all day - and that the Rabbis limited it to mid-morning. That would at least "save" this theory - so that Rambam maintains that Birkot K'riat Sh'ma are an extension of K'riat Sh'ma.

A different approach is adopted by Rashba (Teshuvot 1:47) - he maintains that Birkot K'riat Sh'ma function as independent units, unrelated to K'riat Sh'ma itself. One of his proofs is that if these B'rakhot were directly associated with K'riat Sh'ma, they would have the format of "Asher Kid'shanu...Likro et Sh'ma" instead of the thematic ranges expressed therein. This approach is presented as a response to the oft-asked question (see just about every Rishon at the beginning of Berakhot) of how we justify "early Ma'ariv" - the evening Tefilla, including K'riat Sh'ma and its B'rakhot, being said before nightfall (which was the common custom throughout the Middle Ages). Rashba answers (following Rashi) that the B'rakhot are associated with Ma'ariv, which may be said from a while before sunset - and, as long as we re-read K'riat Sh'ma after dark, we have properly fulfilled that Mitzva.

By the way, R. Hai Ga'on (quoted in Talmidei Rabbenu Yonah, 1b in RIF pages, s.v. veRabeinu) ruled on the early-Ma'ariv question differently - that the person should read K'riat Sh'ma without the B'rakhot (as one reading words of Torah), say the Tefilla with the community and then, after dark (at home) he should read K'riat Sh'ma with its B'rakhot. This is a clear Rambam-like approach, defining them not only as the B'rakhot WITH K'riat Sh'ma, but as the B'rakhot OF K'riat Sh'ma.

We can associate these two approaches with the two verses and explanations provided in the Yerushalmi (cited above). The first verse and explanation does not distinguish between the B'rakhot and the Parashiot of Sh'ma - as long as the total of B'rakhot + Parashiot is the same in the morning and the evening, we're satisfied. Since, in the Palestinian custom, one of the Parashiot was left out in the evening, another B'rakha was added to equate the two "meditations". The underlying postulate is

that the B'rakhot are an extension of K'riat Sh'ma - sort of "rabbinic Parashiot".

The second verse and explanation focus on the B'rakhot alone - that the total B'rakhot said during one day (day and night) should be seven. Here, the presupposition is that the B'rakhot are independent of K'riat Sh'ma.

These formulae may be reflected in the ruling of the Shulhan Arukh (Orach Hayyim 60:2) that if someone read K'riat Sh'ma without the B'rakhot, he should later say the B'rakhot and doesn't need to say K'riat Sh'ma with them (like RASHBA) - but that it is preferable to say K'riat Sh'ma with the B'rakhot (in line with Rambam's approach).

#### IV

Whichever approach we prefer, the question of the proximity of these B'rakhot to K'riat Sh'ma must be addressed.

The Gemara (Berakhot 11b) states that if you get up early (before saying K'riat Sh'ma) to study, you need to recite the "Birkat HaTorah"; but if not, you need not say it, because it is "included" within Ahavah Rabbah (the B'rakha immediately before K'riat Sh'ma in the morning). Ramban (novellae to B'rakhot) expands on this theme and avers that the B'rakha said immediately before K'riat Sh'ma (Ahavah Rabbah or Ahavat 'Olam, depending on Nusach, in the morning, Ahavat 'Olam in the evening) operates as a "Birkat haMitzva" - the B'rakha said before performing any Mitzva. If we say a B'rakha before reading the Hallel or Megilla (which are Rabbinically mandated), Ramban reasons, certainly we should say a B'rakha before K'riat Sh'ma. (This B'rakha also operates as a Birkat HaTorah since, as we explained in the opening shiur, one of the central functions of K'riat Sh'ma is to be the twice-daily focus of Talmud Torah). Why, then, does this B'rakha not follow the usual "Birkat haMitzvot" format - i.e. "...asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav vetzivanu..." ("...Who made us holy through His Mitzvot and commanded us...")?

God's love for us, which is the overarching theme of the B'rakha before K'riat Sh'ma, is a perfectly symmetrical statement in preparation for the beginning of K'riat Sh'ma - where we affirm our allegiance to God and remind ourselves that we are commanded to love Him. The "motivation" for our love for God, expressed and affirmed in K'riat Sh'ma, is God's abounding, eternal love for us, expressed in His giving us the Torah.

Although we might view the first B'rakha ("Ma'ariv 'Aravim" - Who causes evening to fall - in the evening; "Yotzer Or" - He who forms light - in the morning) as a general B'rakha of praise for God, Ramban indicates that there is a more intrinsic connection to K'riat Sh'ma - since it is the event of sunrise (or thereabouts - we will discuss this at 1:11) and nightfall that generate the new obligation of K'riat Sh'ma, we take this opportunity to praise God for these natural, daily occurrences. As to why we mention the creation of dark in the morning and dawn at night, Rabbenu Yonah (5b in RIF pages, s.v. Midat) quotes R. Eliyahu of the Tosafist school who explains that this is a classic anti-dualist statement. The dualist school, associated with Zoroastrianism, held that the world was controlled by

two forces, dark and light - and it is against this polytheistic stand that Yeshaya states: "I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe; I the LORD do all these things." (Yeshaya [Isaiah] 45:7) In general, the B'rakhot that were established by Ezra and his court (and by later courts) are patterned after Biblical references and styles. Since praise for God is often couched in symmetrical terms (e.g. Shoftim [Judges] 5:4, Shemot [Exodus] 15:14-17), it is entirely expected that a B'rakha praising God for the beauty of dawn would not overlook the grandeur of evening - and vice-versa. However, the stress in the Gemara (Berakhot 11b) to mention the characteristic of night by day and the characteristic of day at night - indicates that R. Eliyahu's explanation may indeed be the underlying reason for the textual composition of these B'rakhot.

V

We are not only commanded to include the mention of the Exodus when we read K'riat Sh'ma (see the shiur on KS 1:3) - but the rabbis were concerned that we connect and adhere this "mentioning" to Tefilla. This Halakha - "Semikhat G'ulah liT'fila" (which we will discuss at Tefilla 7:17) implies that after mentioning the Exodus in the third Parasha of K'riat Sh'ma, we then praise God in greater detail for the events of the Exodus - leading us right into the Tefilla. Rabbenu Yona has a beautiful explanation for this "adherence" (2b in RIF pages, s.v. Eizehu) - since God took us out of Egypt in order to be His people and to worship Him - it follows that after recalling the great kindness of the Exodus, we immediately move into "worship-mode" - Tefilla.

This B'rakha, both in the evening and morning, begins with the word "Emet" - "It is true". However, that is a bit misleading. In truth, the last word of the K'riat Sh'ma proper is "Eloheikhem" - however, on account of a verse in Yirmiya [Jeremiah] - (10:10) which states "The Lord is the true God" - we add the word "Emet" to the end of K'riat Sh'ma - and it then becomes the beginning of the next B'rakha. This overlap serves an additional function, besides bridging a Halakhically awkward moment between Parasha and B'rakha. It serves as an inclusio to the beginning of the Sh'ma: We began by averring our allegiance to the One True God - and that is how we end. We then associate this True God with the Exodus and all that that implies - thus tying theological statements with our history.

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Now - to the answers:

**Q1:** Why does Rambam tell us the number of B'rakhot (blessings) recited at each time of K'riat Sh'ma? - in the next Halakha, he will briefly describe each one; we could figure out how many there are from there.

**A:** The number has its own significance - either because of "seven praises for God" to be recited daily, or else to make the "meditations" of day and night equal. (Yerushalmi)

**Q2:** Why are there two B'rakhot beforehand both times, but the number changes afterwards between daytime and nighttime?

**A:** Again, either to complete the "seven praises" - or to add an extra unit to the nighttime (B'rakhot + ) K'riat Sh'ma. As to why the additions are made after K'riat Sh'ma and not before, it may be that we want to first praise God for the time of day, which is that which generates the obligation of K'riat Sh'ma (as Ramban says) - and then, immediately, to recite the B'rakha which best prepares and motivates us for the actual Sh'ma - praising God for His eternal love, expressed by giving us His Torah.

**Q3:** What is the function of these B'rakhot? Are they associated with the Mitzva of K'riat Sh'ma - just as we make a B'rakha before doing other Mitzvot? Are they contextually appropriate around K'riat Sh'ma?

**A:** This is a "Machloket" (dispute) among the Rishonim. While Ramban clearly states that Ahavah Rabbah/Ahavat Olam is the Birkat haMitzva for K'riat Sh'ma, Rashba explicitly disassociates the B'rakhot from K'riat Sh'ma itself. Rambam's opinion is a bit unclear, as he allows the B'rakhot to be said all day, yet he ties the B'rakhot to K'riat Sh'ma as regards how to behave in case of doubt. If we follow Kessef Mishneh's argument, Rambam may be aligned with those who maintain that Birkot K'riat Sh'ma are directly part - as a Rabbinic extension - of K'riat Sh'ma.

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## **Halakha 6:**

**Q1:** Why do we mention darkness in the morning?

**A:** To counter the "argument" of dualists who maintain two supernatural forces, with dark and light representing these opposing "gods".

**Q2:** Why is the theme of God's love always mentioned immediately before the Sh'ma?

**A:** The theme of God's love for us is balanced by our love for God, which we declare at the beginning of the K'riat Sh'ma.

**Q3:** Why is the theme of redemption from Egypt always mentioned in the B'rakha immediately after Sh'ma?

**A:** It allows us to bring the "mention" of the Exodus, in the third paragraph of K'riat Sh'ma, into proximity and attachment with the Tefilla.

**Q4:** Why do the B'rakhot associated with the redemption from Egypt begin with "Emet"?

**A:** This will be answered in the next shiur.

**Q5:** Is the time for these B'rakhot the same as the time for K'riat Sh'ma?

**A:** The resolution here depends on the dispute mentioned above. It should be pointed out, however, that the Mishna in B'rakhot (1:2) states that if one reads K'riat Sh'ma after its prescribed time, "Lo

hifsid" - "he has not lost out" (because he is still reading words of Torah) - the Gemara (10b) explains that "he has not lost out" - refers to the B'rakhot, which he may still recite. Whereas Rambam holds that this means that he can recite these B'rakhot all day, Rav Hai Ga'on (quoted in ROSH, Berakhot 1:10) holds that they may only be recited through the fourth hour (the end of the proper time for the morning Tefilla).

**Q6:** What is the meaning of the order of all of these B'rakhot?

**A:** In a thumbnail sketch: First we praise God for the (consistently) changing times of day - the dawning and setting of the sun. We integrate praise for the opposite event, in order to reaffirm our conviction that only One God is the Master over both day and night, light and darkness.

Then we praise God for His eternal love for us, expressed by his giving us His Torah and Mitzvot.

After the Sh'ma, we extend the "mention" of the Exodus, detailing both the events and the ramifications of those events - for us and for other nations. In the morning, we immediately move into the Tefilla, demonstrating that we recognize that our national and political freedom is but a vehicle to allow us to worship God fully and completely. In the evening, either because of the considerations mentioned above or due to the particularly frightening nature of nighttime, we add a second B'rakha "Hashkiveinu", in which we ask God to watch over us as we sleep and protect us from all harm - and to allow us to rise up to a serene and peaceful day on the morrow.

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