

Shiur 1 - Berachot 2a

Structure and Significance of Masechet Berachot

Masechet Berachot consists of nine chapters. The first two chapters focus on *Kriat Shema*, the fourth and fifth on prayer, and the third chapter acts as a bridge between the two. Chapters six, seven, and eight discuss *Berachot* (blessings) recited before and after meals, while the ninth chapter covers general blessings recited upon observing supernatural phenomena or special events, such as the blessings of *Shehecheyanu* or *HaTov VeHaMeitiv*.

The structure of the first eight chapters aligns roughly with the daily schedule. The day begins with *Kriat Shema* (though traditionally *Modeh Ani* is said upon waking, *Kriat Shema* appears to have historically been the first recitation upon rising). Prayer follows *Kriat Shema*, occurring three times daily, followed by eating. This organization supports the concept of 100 blessings required daily, designed to wrap the day in the feeling of God's presence. A blessing involves addressing God in the second person (*Baruch Atah*—Blessed are You), signifying an intimate and direct relationship with the Divine. This emphasis on the immediate presence of the *Holy One, Blessed Be He* is seen as reflecting a theological response established by the Sages (*Chazal*) after the destruction of the Second Temple. With no Temple (*Beit HaMikdash*) acting as the localized presence of God (*Lifnei Hashem*), the Sages sought to overemphasize God's presence throughout the entire world, leading to the establishment of numerous blessings recited daily.

The Mishna's Approach to the Timing of Kriat Shema

The *Mishnah* begins the discussion of *Kriat Shema* not with the obligation itself, but with a specific detail: the prescribed time (*zman Kriat Shema*). The requirement to recite *Shema* is derived from the Torah verse that mentions reciting it "*Beshokhvakha Uvekumekha*" (when you lie down and when you rise up).

The meaning of *Beshokhvakha Uvekumekha* is subject to a fundamental dispute

between *Beit Shammai* and *Beit Hillel*.

1. **Beit Shammai** held that *Beshokhvakha* means reciting *Shema* when one is actually physically lying down at night, and *Uvekumekha* means reciting it when physically standing up in the morning. A story is recounted regarding Rabbi Tarfon, who, following the tradition of *Beit Shammai*, insisted on stopping his journey and lying down on the road to recite *Shema*. He was admonished for putting himself in danger, suggesting a strong preference against following the literal interpretation of *Beit Shammai*.
2. **Beit Hillel** maintained that the phrases refer not to physical position but to the time unit itself—the time when people generally lie down (*Besha'ah Shebnei Adam Shokhvim*) and the time when people generally rise up.

The initial *Mishnah* addresses the time span for evening *Kriat Shema* (*Arvit*).

Determining the Time Span for Evening Kriat Shema

The *Mishnah* asks, "From when do we recite *Shema* in the evenings?" and answers: "**From the time the Kohanim enter to eat their Terumah**". This beginning time is equivalent to *Tzet HaKokhavim* (nightfall, when stars appear). The *Gemara* later questions why the *Mishnah* uses the obscure phrase concerning the *Kohanim* instead of simply stating *Tzet HaKokhavim*.

Regarding the end time (*Sof Zman Kriat Shema*), the *Mishnah* presents three opinions:

1. **Rabbi Eliezer** says the time limit is "*Ad Sof Ha'Ashmorah HaRishonah*" (until the end of the first watch), meaning the first third of the night, interpreted as the average time people go to sleep.
2. **The Sages (Hakhamim)** say the limit is "*Ad Hatzot*" (until midnight).
3. **Rabban Gamliel** says the limit is "*Ad She'Ya'aleh Amud HaShahar*" (until the rising of dawn), encompassing the entire night. Rabban Gamliel's reasoning is that *Beshokhvakha* means the time one is sleeping, which continues until dawn.

The Principle of *Gezeirah* (Enactment) and Rabban Gamliel's Story

The *Gemara* relates a story: Rabban Gamliel's sons returned late from a wedding (*Beit Mishteh*), likely after midnight, having missed *Kriat Shema*. They asked their father for the ruling. Rabban Gamliel told them: "If dawn has not yet broken, you are obligated to recite *Shema*" (*Im Lo Alah Amud HaShachar Chayavim Atem Likrot*).

Rabban Gamliel explained that the time limit of midnight set by the Sages (*Hakhamim*) was a **precautionary enactment (*gezeirah*)**. The essential law (*ikar hadin*) allows for recitation until dawn. This *gezeirah* (limiting the time to midnight) was instituted "*Kedei Leharhik Adam Min Ha'Averah*" (in order to distance a person from transgression). The fear was that if people were told they could perform the *mitzvah* all night, they might go to sleep early and then oversleep, missing the *mitzvah* entirely. By setting the limit at midnight, people were motivated to perform the act before sleeping. Rabban Gamliel demonstrated that in a case of need (like returning late from a wedding), one may rely on the essential law which permits recitation until dawn.

This principle that the Sages set a midnight limit for precautionary reasons applies to several laws, including burning the fats and limbs of sacrifices (*Hakatar Halavim V'Eivarim*) and eating the meat of certain offerings (*Kol HaNe'ekhalim L'Yom Echad*). While the essential law for these acts extends until dawn, the Sages limited them to midnight to prevent negligence.

Structural and Informative Questions of the Gemara

The *Gemara* challenges the *Mishnah's* opening structure:

1. **Why begin with a detail?** The *Gemara* asks: "*Tanna Heikha Ka'i D'Katani Mei'eimatai*" (Where does the Tanna stand that he begins with 'from when?'), implying that the *Mishnah* assumes prior knowledge of the obligation. The *Mishnah* is thus understood not as an informative handbook (like the *Mishneh Torah* of the *Rambam*), but as a collection of rabbinic discussions focusing on points of ambiguity or dispute, assuming

the reader is already familiar with the basic Jewish practice derived from the *Chumash* (Torah).

2. **Why prioritize evening *Shema*?** The *Gemara* asks: "*Mai Shinna D'Tani D'Arvit Breisha*" (What is different that it teaches the evening first?). The answer is that the *Mishnah* follows the order of the Torah verse itself: *Beshokhvakha Uvekumekha* (lying down precedes rising up), reflecting the cosmic order that defines the day starting with evening (*Vayehi Erev Vayehi Boker Yom Echad*).

The Significance of the Kohanim Eating Terumah

Returning to the question of the *Kohanim* (priests) eating *Terumah*, the *Gemara* concludes that the *Mishnah* introduced this phrase to teach an associated law (*Milta Agav Orhacha KaMashma Lan*). The *Mishnah* clarifies the time of *Tzet HaKokhavim* while also teaching a law concerning the *Kohanim*: that **atonement (*kapparah*—the sacrifice) is not required as a prerequisite for a *Kohen* to eat *Terumah***. The *Kohen* who was ritually impure (*tamei*) need only wait for sunset (*Bi'at Shemesha*) and immersion in a *mikveh* to become purified and eat *Terumah*—they do not need to wait for the next day to bring the required sacrifice (*Korban*).

This interpretation hinges on the meaning of the verse *Uva HaShemesh Vetaher* (and the sun sets and he becomes pure). The *Gemara* debates whether *Vetaher* refers to the day becoming dark (*Tahor Yoma*) or the man becoming pure through an action (bringing a *Korban*). Rava bar Rav Shila argues that since the verse uses the passive form *Vetaher*, it refers to the day becoming pure upon sunset, not an action requiring the *Kohen* to bring a *Korban*.

The Tosafot's View and Rabbeinu Tam's Cosmology

The *Tosafot* challenge Rashi's interpretation of the *Gemara's* debate, arguing that the biblical phrase *Uva HaShemesh* always means sunset, never sunrise. According to *Tosafot*, the *Gemara's* debate is not about the sacrifice (*kapparah*), but about the timing of the sunset itself—specifically, whether *Uva HaShemesh* refers to the first sunset (when the sun enters the firmament, *Raki'a*) or the second, definitive sunset (true nightfall, *Tzet HaKokhavim*).

This view is connected to the cosmological understanding of the *Raki'a* (sky/firmament), which was believed to be a thick dome holding back the heavenly waters. According to the view adopted by *Hakhamim* (*Chakhmei Yisrael*), the sun travels above the *Raki'a* at night.

Rabbeinu Tam explains the concept of two sunsets based on this cosmology. The first *Sheki'ah* occurs when the sun disappears into the *Raki'a* (firmament). Light persists because the sun is still traveling through the *Raki'a*. The second *Sheki'ah* occurs later, when the light truly disappears (approximately four to five *mil* or 72 minutes later), corresponding to *Tzet HaKokhavim*. The debate in the *Gemara*, according to *Tosafot*, is whether the *Kohanim* can eat *Terumah* after the first *Sheki'ah* (even though it is still light), or only after the second *Sheki'ah* (true nightfall). The conclusion drawn from the verse *Vetaher* (passive) is that it refers to the moment night sets in, confirming that the *Kohanim* must wait for *Tzet HaKokhavim*.

Concluding Summary of the Mishnah's Nature

The *Mishnah* is fundamentally **not an informative text** providing a handbook of Judaism from A to Z. It serves to record the complex debates, discussions, and details the rabbis explored in the study hall (*Beit Midrash*). The discussion of *Kriat Shema* illustrates how the concept of *Beshokhvakha* can be interpreted in multiple ways (physical position, bedtime, or all night), requiring the establishment of *halakhic* boundaries, often including precautionary enactments (*gezeirot*). The use of the *Kohanim* in the opening law suggests multiple purposes: teaching an ancillary law, providing a factual marker in the absence of clocks, or symbolically reinforcing the presence of the priestly system in the post-Temple world.