

THE HALACHAH SHEET

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Kerias Shema

Introduction

- By nature, we walk around feeling independent, free to do as we please. We easily forget Who is really in charge and that we have a Ruler above us. The *Sefer HaChinuch* explains that *Kerias Shema* serves as a built-in reminder twice a day that Hashem is our King.¹ Saying Shema correctly is a whole-hearted acceptance of His sovereignty. Further, it's a statement of and commitment to the foundations of our *emunah*, namely, that every single occurrence in our life is being directed and overseen by Hashem, and that He is the One Source of all of the seeming multiplicity and complexity in the world. Fulfilling this mitzvah properly can give us a clear perspective for navigating through our daily lives as loyal servants in His kingdom.

The Mitzvah

- The mitzvah of reading *Kerias Shema* is twofold: We are required to recite it once during the day, and another time at night, as the *pasuk* says, "V'dibarta bam...u'v'shachbecha u'v'kumecha."²

Reading Shema

- **Sitting.** You can say *Kerias Shema* while sitting or standing.³ However, if you were previously sitting, don't stand up specifically for *Kerias Shema*.⁴
- **Tefillin.** *L'chatchilah*, you must be wearing tefillin when being *yotzei* the mitzvah of *Kerias Shema*.⁵ There are *pasukim* in Shema that refer to our tefillin, so not wearing them would be as though you are testifying falsely about yourself.⁶
- **Audible.** Any part of davening, and certainly Shema, must be said in a way that you can hear yourself.⁷ *B'dieved*, you are *yotzei* even if you didn't hear it.⁸
- **Trop.** There is a preference to read *Kerias Shema* with the *trop*.⁹ Nevertheless, this shouldn't be done at the expense of *kavanah*.
- **Signaling.** It is forbidden to signal or motion to someone while you are reciting *Kerias Shema*, especially during the first parashah, so as to not give off the impression that *Kerias Shema* is something we do causally.¹⁰ However, you may motion for someone to be quiet if they are disrupting your ability to have *kavanah*.¹¹ From the second parashah, you can signal to someone, but only for the purpose of a mitzvah.¹²

Responses

- There are certain parts of davening that you may respond to during *Kerias Shema*, depending on where you are up to. The guidelines are as follows (beginning with the most stringent):
 - **The first *pasuk*.** It is forbidden to respond to anything while reciting the first *pasuk* of *Kerias Shema*, until after concluding "*Baruch Shem*."¹³ Similarly, it is forbidden to respond to anything in between the words "*Elokeichem*" and "*emes*" at the conclusion of *Kerias Shema*.¹⁴
 - **Mid-parashah.** During a parashah of Shema, you may respond to the following (ideally, first finish the *pasuk* you are in the middle of): **1) Kaddish:** "*Yehei shemei rabba...*"

and amen to "*d'amiran b'alma*"; **2) Kedushah:** "*Kadosh kadosh...*" and "*Baruch shem...*"; **3) Barechu:** After *Yishtabach* and in response to someone's *aliyah*; **4) Modim D'Rabbanan:** Only say the words "*Modim anachnu lach*."¹⁵

- **Between parashiyos.** You may answer to any of the above responses in between parashiyos. Additionally, you can respond amen to any berachah.¹⁶

Accuracy

- You should read *all* of davening precisely, enunciating the words; however, this is especially important for the mitzvah of *Kerias Shema*.¹⁷ Chazal compare Shema to a proclamation of a king, which would be read meticulously.¹⁸ Doing this properly requires focusing on three areas:
 - **Words.** Many times in the parashiyos of *Kerias Shema*, a word ending in a certain letter will be followed by another word beginning with that same letter (e.g. בכל לבבך). When reading at a fast pace, it is natural for these two words to merge and be read as one. This similarly occurs with a word beginning with an *aleph* and the word preceding it. Therefore, in these instances one should pause slightly in between the two words to differentiate between them.¹⁹ Many siddurim divide words like these with a line to assist readers with this.
 - **Letters.** One should be careful to pronounce the letters of Shema correctly. For example, the word "*V'ahavta*" shouldn't be read "*V'ahafta*."²⁰
 - **Nekudos.** Additionally, one should be careful to pronounce *nekudos* precisely. For example, the word following "*V'ahavta*" is "*eis*," not "*es*."
 - **Sheva.** A *sheva* is one of the *nekudos* ("."), and it makes the sound *ih* (as in *igloo*). However, sometimes it is pronounced (called a *sheva na*), and other times it is not (called a *sheva nach*). For example, "*b'chol l'avicha*" is the correct pronunciation and not "*b'chol l'avcha*"; "*v'hayu hadivarim*, and not *v'hayu hadvarim*.²¹ Some siddurim print a small line on top of letters that have a *sheva na*, to indicate that they should be pronounced.
 - If you are davening in a *maariv* minyan that you know davens at a pace that won't allow you to read *Kerias Shema* properly, you may begin on your own and wait for the chazzan at the conclusion of *Kerias Shema* ("*Hashem Elokeichem emes*").

Breakdown

Structure

- **Parashiyos.** *Kerias Shema* is comprised of three parashiyos (groups of *pesukim*): **1) Shema** through *V'ahavta* (*Va'eschanan* 6:4–10), **2) V'haya** (*Eikev* 11:13–21), and **3) Va'yomer** (*Shelach* 15:37–41).

- **Additions.** There are three additional phrases that are included in *Kerias Shema*: 1) **Kel Melech Ne'eman** 2) **Baruch Shem...** 3) **"Hashem Elokeichem emes."**

Pre-Shema

- **Kavanah.** *L'chatchilah*, you must have *kavanah* before beginning Shema that you are being *yotzei* your mitzvah.²²
- **Tzitzis.** Gather all four (some say just the front two) of your tzitzis upon reaching "*v'havi'einu*" in Ahavah Rabah. Hold the tzitzis in your left hand, between your fourth finger and your pinky, and keep it that way until reaching the third parashah, *Va'yomer*.²³

Kel Melech Ne'eman

- Reading *Kerias Shema* properly possesses a healing power on every one of a man's 248 limbs, with each word corresponding to a different limb. *Kerias Shema* (including *Baruch Shem*) has a total of 245 words.²⁴ There are different ways to gain the three words necessary to complete the count:

1) **Hashem Elokeichem Emes.** The chazzan repeats the last three words of *Kerias Shema* ("*Hashem Elokeichem emes*") in order to be *motzi* the *tzibbur* in the three extra words necessary to reach 248.²⁵ You gain these words as long as you hear the chazzan saying them (even if you're up to a different part of Shema). *L'chatchilah*, the chazzan should have in mind to be *motzi* everyone, and everyone should have in mind to be *yotzei*. This is the ideal option.²⁶

2) **Kel Melech Ne'eman.** Saying "*Kel Melech Ne'eman*" before *Kerias Shema* is another way to reach 248 words. When you are saying Shema by yourself (and therefore option 1 isn't possible), say *Kel Melech Ne'eman*.²⁷

3) **Three names of Hashem.** The *poskim* bring an additional way to gain the three necessary words. Through gematria calculations, the *vavs* that begin the first 15 words of "*V'yatziv...*" (at *shacharis*),²⁸ or the ending word "*emes*" at *maariv* equal three names of Hashem.²⁹ With intention, this can complete the count.

Shema Yisrael — Parashah #1 (first pasuk)

- **Out loud.** It is customary to read the first *pasuk* of *Kerias Shema* out loud in order to awaken oneself to have *kavanah*.³⁰
- **Covering eyes.** The minhag is to cover your eyes with your right hand (even lefties) in order to eliminate external distractions.³¹ If you wear glasses, you may put your hand over them.
- **Kavanah.** You must have *kavanah* for the first *pasuk* of *Kerias Shema* in order to be *yotzei* your obligation. The essential *kavanah* is for the meaning of the words.³²
 - **B'dieved.** If you didn't have *kavanah*, and realized:
 - **Mid-pasuk** — conclude the *pasuk*, and then say it again (quietly) with *kavanah*.³³
 - **Before finishing parashah #1** — restart Shema.³⁴
 - **During parashah #2** — finish parashah #2, return to the beginning of Shema, and after concluding parashah #1, skip to parashah #3.³⁵

• **Meaning.** The intent of the *pasuk* is as follows: "**Shema** [Hear/accept] **Yisrael** [including yourself], **Hashem** [Who is] **Elokeinu** [the power-source behind everything], [is] **Hashem** [Who is] **one**." Accordingly, one must pause appropriately before each "Hashem" (where a comma would be written), in line with the *pasuk's* meaning.³⁶

- **Kabalas ohl.** One must have the intention that he is accepting Hashem's kingship over himself.³⁷

- **Echad.** Upon reaching the word *echad*, one should think about Hashem's dominion over the heavens, earth, and all four directions.³⁸
- **Hashem's names.** Different names of Hashem have different connotations. Ideally, one should have the specific *kavanah* when saying each of these names. The proper *kavanos* are:³⁹
 - **Y-H-V-H:** Hashem is past/present/future, and the Master of everything.⁴⁰
 - **Elokeinu:** He is the power-source behind everything.
- **Foreign thoughts.** Ideally, try not to allow any foreign thoughts enter your mind while saying the first *pasuk* of *Kerias Shema*.⁴¹

Baruch Shem

- **Pause.** Pause slightly before and after saying "*Baruch Shem...*" to separate between the different segments of *Kerias Shema*.⁴²
- **Kavanah.** If you didn't have *kavanah* for *Baruch Shem* and realized before beginning "*V'ahavta*," go back and say it again. If you realized at a later point, don't go back.⁴³
- **Quiet tone.** *Baruch Shem* is said quietly. Chazal teach us that its source is Yaakov Avinu, who said it to his children in response to their saying Shema Yisrael. In order to highlight the fact that *Baruch Shem* is not an actual *pasuk*, we say it in a whisper.⁴⁴

V'ahavta/V'haya — Parashah #1 and #2

- **Touching tefillin.** In the first parashah when saying the phrase "*u'keshartem l'os al yadecha*," touch your *tefillin shel yad* (even over your sleeve), and when saying "*v'hayu l'totafos ben einecha*," touch your *tefillin shel rosh*. In the second parashah, when saying "*u'keshartem osam l'os al yedchem*," touch your *tefillin shel yad*, and when saying *v'hayu l'totafos ben einechem*," touch your *tefillin shel rosh*. Many have the custom to kiss their hand afterward.⁴⁵

Vayomer — Parashah #3

- **Tzitzis.** Upon reaching *Va'yomer*, hold your tzitzis jointly in your right and left hand. Every time you say the word "tzitzis," kiss them. When saying "*u're'isem oso*," look at your tzitzis. Some kiss them at the conclusion of *Kerias Shema*. Release your tzitzis upon reaching "*ne'emanim v'nechmadim la'ad*" (in *V'yatziv*).⁴⁶
- **Emphasize zayin.** When saying the words "*l'ma'an tiz'keru*," emphasize the letter *zayin* in order to prevent the word from sounding like *tish'keru* (lying), or *tis'keru* (reward). Similarly, emphasize the letter *zayin* in "*u'zechartem*."⁴⁷
- **Zecher l'yetzias Mitzrayim.** Before beginning parashah #3, you should have in mind that you will be fulfilling the mitzvah of remembering *yetzias Mitzrayim*, which is accomplished within this parashah.

Hashem Elokeichem Emes

- The word "*emes*" is not a part of *Kerias Shema* but rather the beginning of the paragraph that follows, "*Emes v'yatziv*." Nevertheless, based on a *pasuk* ("*Hashem Elokim emes Yirmiyahu 10:10*"), which juxtaposes *Elokim* and *emes*, we say them together without pausing in between.

1 מצוה (תכ"י). 2 ואתחנן (ז:י). 3 שו"ע (סג:א). 4 שו"ע (סג:ב). 5 שו"ע (כה:ד). 6 ברכות (יד:י) ותוספות שם 7 שו"ע (סב:ג). 8 שם 9 רמ"א (סא:כד). 10 שו"ע (סג:ו). 11 אשי ישראל (כז:ט). 12 מ"ב (סג:ק"יח). 13 שו"ע (סו:א) ועיני ביה"ד"ה שלא 14 שו"ע (סו:ה). 15 אשי ישראל (יט:ט). 16 עיני מ"ב (נט:ק"יח). 17 שו"ע (סא:כב). 18 טור בשם ר' עמרם סא"י. 19 שו"ע (סא:כ). 20 מ"ב (סא:ק"לב). 21 שו"ע (סא:כג). 22 מ"ב (סו:ק"ז). 23 מ"ב (כד:ק"ד). 24 מ"ב (סא:ק"ו). 25 רמ"א (סא:ג). 26 שערי תשובה (סא:ב). 27 רמ"א (סא:ג). 28 שו"ע (סא:ג). 29 מ"ב (סא:ק"ב). 30 שו"ע (סא:ד). 31 שו"ע (סא:ה). 32 שו"ע (סו:ה). 33 שו"ע (סג:ד). 34 מ"ב (סג:ק"ד). 35 שם 36 רמ"א (סא:ד). 37 מ"ב (סא:ק"ה). 38 שו"ע (סו:ו). 39 מ"ב (ה:ק"ג). 40 שו"ע (ה:א). 41 עיני ביה"ל (קא:ד"ה המתפלל). 42 שו"ע ורמ"א (סא:ד). 43 ערו"ש (סא:ו). 44 מ"ב (סא:ק"ל). 45 שו"ע (סא:כ) ומ"ב שם 46 שו"ע (כד:ד). 47 שו"ע (סא:ז).