

# THE HALACHAH SHEET

Compiled by Aryeh Leib Shapiro

## Birchos Krias Shema

### Barechu

- Barechu is a prayer of praise that was instituted to serve as an announcement to the *tzibbur* to join the chazzan to begin *birchos krias Shema*.
- **Procedure.** The steps of Barechu are as follows: **1)** The chazzan bows and says "*Barechu es Hashem haMevorach*" in a loud voice that the entire *tzibbur* can hear.<sup>1</sup> He should stand straight at the word "Hashem."<sup>2</sup> **2)** The *tzibbur* responds, in a quieter tone than the chazzan, "*Baruch Hashem haMevorach l'olam va'ed.*"<sup>3</sup> After this response, the *tzibbur* may sit down.<sup>4</sup> **3)** The chazzan echoes their response to include himself with them in this praise.<sup>5</sup>
- **Stance.** The *tzibbur* must stand when listening and responding to Barechu.<sup>6</sup> It's customary to bow while responding.<sup>7</sup>
- **Timing.** *L'chatchilah*, you should be ready to begin *birchos krias Shema* upon responding to Barechu.<sup>8</sup> However, you shouldn't skip parts of Pesukei D'zimrah to achieve this.<sup>9</sup>
- **Beginning Yotzer Ohr.** *Birchos krias Shema* begins as soon as you respond to Barechu (unless you're in the middle of Pesukei D'zimrah).<sup>10</sup> If during *maariv* you respond upon exiting the bathroom, wait until after davening to say Asher Yatzar.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, if you respond to a Barechu you overhear when you aren't actually planning on davening yet, have in mind that you don't want to begin *birchos krias Shema* with your response.<sup>12</sup>

### Birchos Krias Shema

- **The Takanah.** Chazal instituted berachos before and after *krias Shema* at *shacharis* and *maariv*. These are known as *birchos krias Shema*. We recite a total of seven *birchos krias Shema* every day (three during *shacharis*, and four during *maariv*), as the *pasuk* says, "*Sheva bayom hilalticha...*"<sup>13</sup>
- **Krias Shema.** Although you can be *yotzei* the mitzvah of *krias Shema* by reciting it on its own, nevertheless the mitzvah should ideally be fulfilled in its complete form, with its accompanying berachos.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, it's preferable to daven with a minyan that will enable you to say both *krias Shema* and its berachos before *sof zeman krias Shema*.
- **Zeman.** *Birchos krias Shema*, like *krias Shema*, can be said from *mish'e'yakir* (before *neitz*). The latest time they can be said is before the fourth halachic hour of the day.<sup>15</sup> Under extenuating circumstances, *birchos krias Shema* can be said until *chatzos*.<sup>16</sup>
- **Sitting.** Ideally, you should say *birchos krias Shema* in a sitting position.

### Interruptions

- **Hefsek.** It's forbidden to talk in middle of *birchos krias Shema*.<sup>17</sup> However, certain responses in *tefillah* are permitted.

- **Mid-paragraph.** In the middle of a paragraph (ideally after concluding a phrase), you can respond to the following:<sup>18</sup>
  - 1) Kaddish:** "*Yehei Shemei rabbah...*" and "Amen" to "*Da'amiran b'alma*";
  - 2) Kedushah:** "*Kadosh kadosh...*" and "*Baruch kevod...*";
  - 3) Barechu:** after *Yishtabach* and in response to someone's *aliyah*;
  - 4) Amen:** only to the berachos "*Atah Kadosh*" and "*Shomei'a Tefillah*" during *chazaras hashatz*, and to *birchas kohanim* (only to the *pesukim*, not to the berachah beforehand);
  - 5) Modim d'Rabbanan:** only say the words "*Modim anachnu lach*" and bow.
- **In between paragraphs.** In between paragraphs, in addition to the above responses you may answer amen to any berachah you hear.
- **Asher Yatzar.** If you use the bathroom during *birchos krias Shema*, hold off on saying Asher Yatzar until after you finish *Shemoneh Esrei*.<sup>19</sup>

### Breakdown

#### Light and Darkness (Yotzer Ohr, Hama'ariv Aravim)

- In the first of the *birchos krias Shema*, both in *shacharis* and *maariv*, we praise Hashem for illuminating and darkening the world on a daily basis.
- **Touching Tefillin.** When saying the words "*yotzer ohr*" you should touch your *tefillin shel yad*, and at "*u'vorei choshech*" touch your *tefillin shel rosh*.<sup>20</sup>
- **Precision.** The words of the berachah should be enunciated properly, especially in places where mispronunciation would change their implication. For example, pause slightly in between the words "*yotzer*" and "*ohr*" to avoid combining them into "*yotzror*".<sup>21</sup>
- **Kedushah.** The chazzan should say the Kedushah in the berachah of Yotzer Ohr aloud in order for the *tzibbur* to say it together with him.<sup>22</sup> If you're in the middle of *birchos krias Shema* when he says it, you shouldn't respond. However, if you're in the middle of Pesukei D'zimrah you should.<sup>23</sup>
- **Amen.** When possible, try and conclude the berachah before the chazzan to be able to answer amen to his berachah before you begin the next berachah.<sup>24</sup>

#### Torah (Ahavah Rabbah, Ahavas Olam)

- After acknowledging Hashem's hand in lighting up the world physically, we then move on to a berachah for Torah, the world's spiritual light.
- **Tzitzis.** At *shacharis*, upon reaching the words "*mei'arba kanfos ha'aretz*," hold your four tzitzis in your left hand between your pinky and fourth finger.<sup>25</sup>

- **Birchos HaTorah.** The berachah of Ahavah Rabbah could function as Birchos HaTorah (for instance, if you have a doubt whether you said Birchos HaTorah at *shacharis*), provided that you learn a little bit immediately after davening (so the berachah has something on which it can take effect).<sup>26</sup>
- **Success in Torah.** It is crucial to have proper kavanah for this berachah, as it aids in your ability to understand and internalize your Torah learning.<sup>27</sup>
- **Amen.** Ideally, conclude "*habocheh b'amo Yisrael*" with the chazzan so you begin *krias Shema* without having to interrupt with amen in between. If you did finish the berachah before the chazzan, answer amen to his berachah.<sup>28</sup>

congregations, the chazzan finishes "*ga'al Yisrael*" quietly so nobody hears the conclusion of the berachah. Alternatively, if you conclude the berachah in unison with the chazzan, you wouldn't be required to answer amen.<sup>37</sup>

- **Tefillah B'Tzibbur.** The requirement to be *somech geulah l'tefillah* is so important that it even takes precedence over *tefillah b'tzibbur*. For example, if you conclude "*ga'al Yisrael*" and realize that you don't have a minyan of people ready to begin Shemoneh Esrei with you, go ahead and begin Shemoneh Esrei by yourself to be *somech geulah l'tefillah* rather than wait for a minyan.<sup>38</sup>

**Krias Shema**

- After Pesukei D'zimrah and the first berachos of *birchos krias Shema*, which all acknowledge Hashem's existence in the physical and spiritual realms, one can properly fulfill the mitzvah of *krias Shema*, which is to accept Hashem's sovereignty over himself, surrendering to the source of his existence.

**Geulah (Emes V'Yatziv/V'Emunah, Hashkiveinu)**

- The prelude to Shemoneh Esrei is the berachah of *geulas Mitzrayim*. After preparing ourselves to stand before Hashem in Shemoneh Esrei, this berachah serves as a turning point — we now bring Hashem toward us.<sup>29</sup> Praising Him for Yetzias Mitzrayim triggers this because it was the point in history when Hashem took interest in us, chose us as His nation, and our relationship with Him was born. Immediately upon concluding the berachah, while we have His full, personal attention, we begin communicating via Shemoneh Esrei.
- **Content.** Four critical themes are mentioned in this berachah: **1) Yetzias Mitzrayim, 2) malchus, 3) krias Yam Suf, and 4) makas Bechoros.**<sup>30</sup> You should have these subjects in mind as you say the berachah.<sup>31</sup>
- **השכיבו.** At *maariv* we add the additional berachah of Hashkiveinu, which Chazal considered an extension of the theme of *geulah*. The previous berachah describes the redemption from Mitzrayim, and in this berachah we ask Hashem to protect us from harm associated with nighttime.<sup>32</sup>

**Transition into Shemoneh Esrei**

**Somech Geulah L'Tefillah**

- There is a mitzvah to start Shemoneh Esrei immediately after mentioning Yetzias Mitzrayim.<sup>32</sup> Chazal describe one who does so as a *ben Olam Haba*.<sup>33</sup>
- **Interrupting.** To enable an immediate transition between the berachah of *geulah* and Shemoneh Esrei, it is forbidden to interrupt verbally (including any response in davening), or even to silently pause.<sup>34</sup> (The three steps forward before Shemoneh Esrei isn't considered an interruption.<sup>35</sup>)

- **Exception.** It is debated whether the amen to the berachah of *ga'al Yisrael* is considered a *hefsek* between *geulah* and *tefillah*. Ashkenazim don't consider it an interruption and therefore should answer amen.<sup>36</sup> However, since it's a *machlokes*, it is recommended to obviate the need to say amen. Therefore, in many

**When**

- **Shacharis.** All agree that this obligation applies at *shacharis* (on a weekday), as the main *geulah* occurred in the morning.
- **Minchah.** At *minchah*, as well as *mussaf*, there is no obligation to be *somech geulah l'tefillah*. Therefore, we are allowed to add the *pasuk* "*ki shem Hashem ekra...*" unlike before other *tefillas*, when it would be considered a *hefsek*.<sup>39</sup>
- **Maariv.** At *maariv* we also juxtapose *geula* and *tefillah*.<sup>40</sup> (The *tefillah* of Hashkiveinu isn't considered an interruption, since it also relates to *geulah*.<sup>41</sup>) However, since the obligation of *maariv* is a *machlokes* it is treated more leniently. This has the following ramifications:
  - **Amen.** One should answer amen to the berachah of "*ga'al Yisrael*" at *maariv*, as well as "*shomer Yisrael la'ad*."
  - **Kaddish.** Kaddish, which is intended to separate different stages of davening, is said in between *birchos krias Shema* and Shemoneh Esrei at *maariv* (unlike at *shacharis*, where there is the concern of an interruption between *geulah* and *tefillah*.)
  - **Tefillah B'Tzibbur.** If you arrive late to *maariv* and saying *birchos krias Shema* would cause you to miss *tefillah b'tzibbur*, it is preferable to daven Shemoneh Esrei with the *tzibbur* and say *krias Shema* with its berachos afterward.<sup>42</sup> In contrast, at *shacharis*, when there is an absolute obligation to precede *tefillah* with *geulah*, one should never omit *birchos krias Shema*, even at the expense of *tefillah b'tzibbur*.
  - **Ya'aleh V'Yavo.** At *maariv*, unlike at *shacharis*, one may make an announcement immediately before Shemoneh Esrei to remind the congregations to insert *ya'aleh v'yavo*.<sup>43</sup>
- **Shabbos.** We are *somech geulah l'tefillah* on Shabbos as well. However, its obligation is also subject to *machlokes*, and therefore you should respond to any permitted response during *birchos krias Shema* in between "*ga'al Yisrael*" and Shemoneh Esrei.<sup>44</sup>

1. מ"ב (נד: סק"א) 2. כל בו (ס' ח) 3. שו"ע (נד: א) 4. אשי ישראל (טז: הע' פד) 5. מ"ב (נד: סק"ג) 6. מ"ב (קמ: סק"ח) 7. אשי ישראל (טז: ב) 8. ארוממר אלוקי המלך עמ' 39 שם 10. מ"ב (נד: סק"ג) 11. ע"פ מ"ב (סו: סק"ב) 12. ע"פ מ"ב (נד: סק"ד) 13. תהילים (קט: קסד) 14. מ"ב (מו: סק"לא) 15. הליכות שלמה (יח: ב) 16. רמ"א (תרפה: ז) 17. מ"ב (סו: סק"ב) 18. עיין אשי ישראל (יט: ז-ט) 19. שם 20. באה"ט (נט: סק"א) 21. מ"ב (נט: סק"א) 22. מ"ב (נט: סק"ג) 23. ארוממר אלוקי המלך עמ' 41 24. רמ"א (נט: ד) 25. עיין באה"ט (נט: סק"ג) 26. שו"ע (מז: ד) 27. סדר היום, עיין מ"ב (מו: סק"י) 28. מ"ב (נט: סק"כה) 29. רש"י (ברכות ד"ה זה הסומך) 30. מ"ב (סו: סק"ג) 31. הליכות שלמה ח: הע' 13 32. שו"ע (סו: ח) 33. ברכות (ד: ) 34. מ"ב (סו: סק"לח) 35. תהילה לדוד קיא 36. רמ"א (סו: ז) 37. עיין אשי ישראל (זי: הע' פג) 38. שו"ע (קיא: ג) 39. מ"ב (קיא: סק"א) 40. מ"ב (רלו: סק"ד) 41. שם 42. מ"ב (רלו: סק"ב) 43. רמ"א (רלו: ב) 44. רמ"א (קיא: א)