

עין יעקב

Ein Yaakov for Kids

Week 1 • Print pack

1. Day 1 • The Late-Night Shema Berachos 1:1

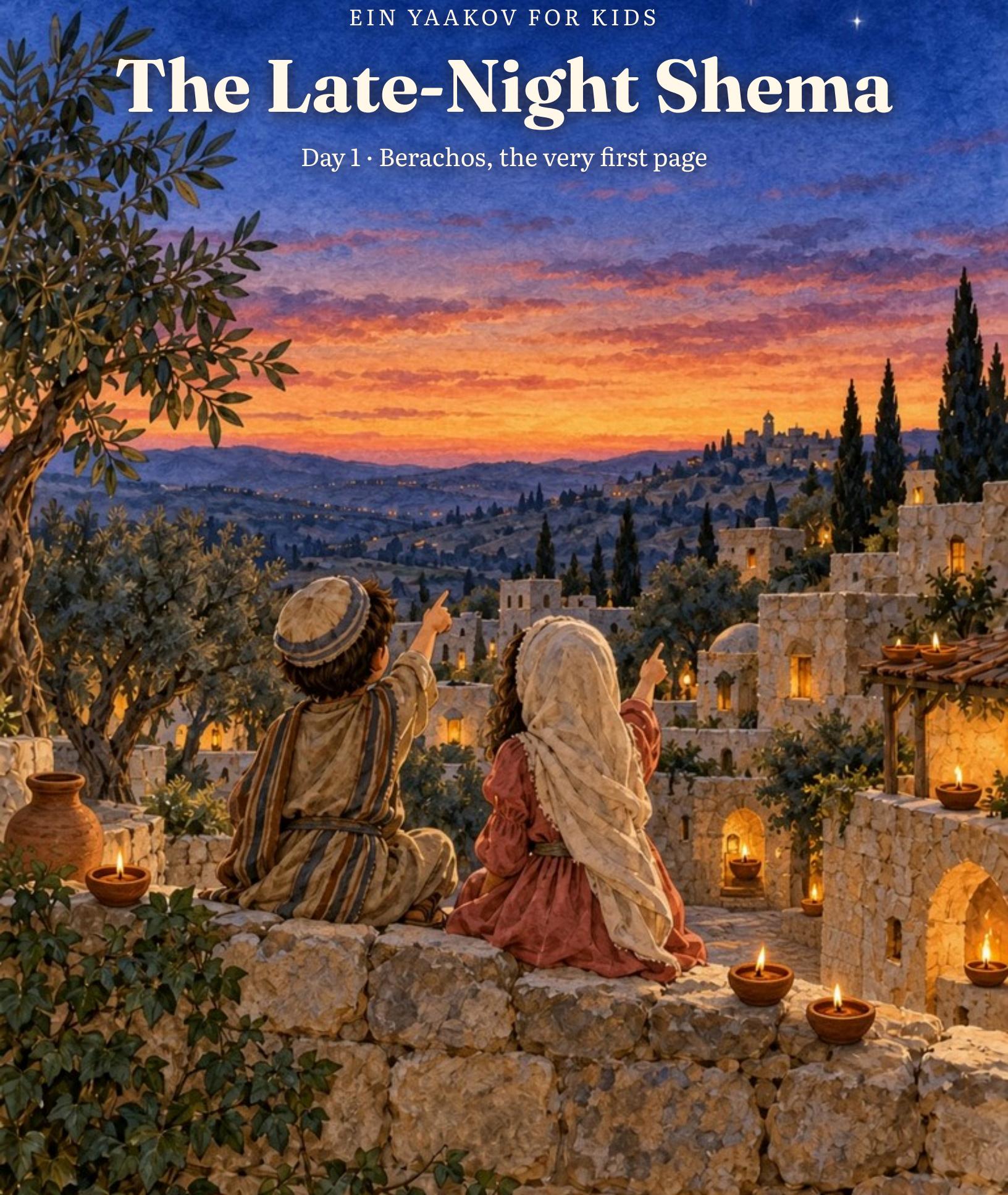
Read one story a night. The talk questions and sources for parents follow each story.

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EIN YAAKOV FOR KIDS

The Late-Night Shema

Day 1 • Berachos, the very first page





When Does Night Begin?

Every night before we go to sleep, we say Shema. But when does “night” begin?

That is the very first question in the whole Gemara, and it is where Ein Yaakov begins too:

מאימתי קורין את שמע בערבית

“From what time may we say Shema in the evening?”

You might expect the answer “when the stars come out.” Instead the Mishnah says something surprising: “From the time the kohanim go in to eat their terumah.”



The Kohanim Are Waiting

Terumah is a holy share of the harvest that only kohanim may eat, and only when they are tahor (pure).

Sometimes a kohen became tamei (not pure). Rashi explains what he did: he dipped in a mikveh, and then he waited for the sun to set. Only then could he eat his terumah again.

Picture the table. The Tosafos Yom Tov says the terumah was already set out in front of them, and nothing was missing except to eat!

Everyone watches the sky. The sun goes down... the stars come out... Now! The Gemara says that is the moment the kohanim may eat. And that is the moment the time for evening Shema begins.



How Late Is Too Late?

So we know when evening Shema starts. But until when may we say it? The Sages gave three different answers:

- Rabbi Eliezer: until the end of the first “watch” of the night. Rashi explains: the first third of the night.
- The Chachamim: until chatzos, midnight.
- Rabban Gamliel: until amud hashachar, the very first light of dawn.

Three great Sages, three answers. What should a person do if it gets very late? A story will show us.



A Wedding Under the Stars

One night, the sons of Rabban Gamliel went to a simcha. The Mishnah calls it a “beis hamishteh,” a feast, and the Steinsaltz commentary explains it was a wedding.

They danced in circles. They sang. They brought joy to the chassan and kallah, which is a big mitzvah.

The lamps burned, the music went on, and the hours flew by. By the time the brothers finally walked home, it was very, very late at night.

And then one of them stopped on the path. “Wait... we never said Shema!”



“Abba, Is It Too Late?”

The brothers hurried to their father. “We haven’t said Shema yet!” they told him.

The Bartenura explains why they were worried. They had heard the Chachamim say “until midnight.” Was it too late now?

Rabban Gamliel answered:

אם לא עלה עמוד השחר חייבין אתם לקרות

“If the dawn has not yet come up, you must still say it!”

As long as the night is still here, there is still time for Shema.



A Fence Around the Well

Then why did the Chachamim say “midnight”? Rabban Gamliel explains in the Mishnah:

כדי להרחיק את האדם מן העברה

“To keep a person far from doing wrong.”

Think of a fence around a well. The fence stands a few steps before the edge, so everyone stays safe.

If people thought “I have all night,” they might say “I still have time...” and then miss Shema completely (Rashi). So the Chachamim built a fence: say it early! The Bartenura adds that once the time for Shema comes, we don’t sit down to a meal or go to sleep before we say it.



◆ TODAY'S LESSON ◆

A Light in the Night

Why does the whole Gemara begin with night, and not with morning? The Gemara gives a reason from the story of Creation:

וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר

"There was evening, and there was morning."

In Hashem's world, the day begins at night.

The Rebbe taught a lesson from this: don't wait for the daylight. Even when it is dark, when things feel hard or sad or confusing, that is exactly the time to bring in light: a mitzvah, a word of Torah, a Shema said with your whole heart. Every moment is a chance. Just start!

Let's Talk About It

1. The kohanim were happy when night came. What good things can happen at night?
2. Rabban Gamliel's sons were busy with a big mitzvah, and they still remembered Shema. When is it hard for you to remember? What could help?
3. The Chachamim made a "fence" so we wouldn't miss Shema. Can you think of a fence you could make for yourself? (Like saying Shema before reading in bed!)

✦ A Chassidic Secret

The Chassidic sefer Mei HaShiloach asks: why is the sign for morning Shema something we see for ourselves, but the sign for night Shema is the kohanim? In the morning, Hashem's goodness is easy to see. At night it is hidden. So we look at the kohanim, waiting happily for the dark, and we learn that Hashem's kindness is there even at night.

Tonight's mission: When you say Shema, cover your eyes and picture one little lamp lighting up a whole dark room. That's you!

Sources for Parents

Today's story is the opening of Ein Yaakov on Berachos: the first Mishnah of Shas and the story of Rabban Gamliel's sons. Here is everything we drew from, so you can learn it with your children.

- Ein Yaakov, Berachos ch. 1 (opening section): Hebrew text and the older English translation, read on Sefaria. The story itself.
- Mishnah Berachos 1:1: the three opinions, the story, and “to keep a person far from doing wrong.”
- Gemara Berachos 2a: kohanim eat terumah when the stars come out; why the Mishnah opens with night (“there was evening, and there was morning”).
- Rashi, Berachos 2a: the kohen who went to the mikveh and waited for sunset; the first “watch” is a third of the night; the Sages’ limit is so no one says “I still have time” and misses it (ד"ה כדי להרחיק).
- Bartenura, Mishnah Berachos 1:1: the sons had heard “until midnight”; no meal or sleep once the time has come (“אסור לסעוד וכל שכן לישון עד שיקרא”).
- Tosafos Yom Tov, Mishnah Berachos 1:1: the terumah was already prepared before them, “nothing missing except to eat.”
- Steinsaltz on Berachos 2a: the “beis hamishte” was a wedding feast.
- Mei HaShiloach, vol. 2, Berachos 2a: why the sign for night Shema is the kohanim.
- The Rebbe, Toras Menachem vol. 27, p. 222: don't wait for daylight; bring light into the night. We read this only in an English adaptation (Y. Brown, lubavitch.com, Aug. 2022), not the original sicha.

Ours, not from a source: the kids' wording, the spoken lines (“Wait... we never said Shema!”, “Abba, is it too late?”), the brothers dancing at the wedding, the fence-around-a-well picture, the questions and tonight's mission. Every painting is an imagined scene. Named Sages are shown only from behind.

Not used this time: Iyun Yaakov, Etz Yosef / Anaf Yosef and Maharsha weren't available in the online library we used, so nothing here comes from them.