

Our Gemara presented a confusing variety of opinions regarding the beginning of the time for reciting *Shema*. The following is an arrangement of the differing opinions in their order according to the Gemara's conclusion, followed by some approaches regarding the respective rationales of these opinions:

	Before nightfall		Nightfall	Post-nightfall	
	1. Twilight (bein hashemashos)	2. Slightly before emergence of the stars	3. Emergence of the stars	4.	5.
a. Mishnah			When Kohanim may eat <i>terumah</i>		
b. Baraisa #1				When poor people go home to eat	
c. Baraisa #2			Sages: When Kohanim may eat <i>terumah</i>		R' Meir: When ordinary people go home to eat on Friday night
d. Baraisa #3	R' Eliezer: When Shabbos begins	R' Meir: When the Kohanim <i>immerse</i> to eat <i>terumah</i>	R' Yehoshua: When Kohanim may eat <i>terumah</i>	R' Chaninah: When poor people go home to eat	R' Achai: When ordinary people go home to eat

The order of the various opinions time-wise

1. R' Eliezer (cited in Baraisa #3): When Shabbos begins¹
2. R' Meir (cited in Baraisa #3): When the Kohanim immerse to eat terumah²
3. Mishnah; Sages of Baraisa #2; R' Yehoshua of Baraisa #3: When Kohanim may eat terumah (Nightfall—tzeis hakoachavim)
4. Baraisa #1; R' Chaninah of Baraisa #3: When poor people go home to eat³
5. R' Meir (Baraisa #2): When ordinary people go home to eat on Friday night⁴
6. R' Achai (Baraisa #3): When ordinary people go home to eat⁵

¹ This is the earliest of all opinions. According to *Rashi*, it refers to *bein hashemashos* (twilight), the intermediary period between day and night, at which time it is uncertain whether it is day or night. At this time, one must begin observing Shabbos, since night may have fallen. This is just a short time—approximately 13½ minutes—before *emergence of the stars*. According to *Rashba*, this refers to sunset, at which point it is definitely still day, yet it is the time that one *can* begin the Sabbath if one so wishes. This is 72 minutes before nightfall.

² This is before twilight. The Gemara concludes, however, that this does not refer to “twilight” as understood by R' Yehudah, which is some time before nightfall, but to twilight as understood by R' Yose, which is a mere moment before nightfall.

³ This is sometime later than the *emergence of the stars* (i.e. when Kohanim may eat terumah—1,3,7). Yet, it is earlier than when ordinary people eat, first because poor people, who do not have a candle, eat while there is still some daylight (*Rashi*). Alternatively, poor people do not have much food, so their meal does not take long to prepare (*Ritva*). See d4

⁴ This is later than *emergence of the stars* (i.e. when Kohanim may eat *terumah*—1,3,7). Yet, it is earlier than people eat on an ordinary night; for whereas on ordinary nights the meal is first prepared when they arrive home, on Friday night everything is prepared beforehand, minimizing the delay.

⁵ It is unclear whether this refers to the time that ordinary people eat on Friday night (parallel to R' Meir's opinion cited above); or to when ordinary people eat on regular days (which is sometime later). *Rashi* presents both possibilities. *Tosafos* tends to the former, while *Rashba* assumes the latter. [Thus, according to *Tosafos*, opinions #5,6 are the same, and #4 is earlier; according to *Rashba*, opinions #4,5 are the same, and #6 is later.] In either case, it is later than all [other] opinions.

The rationale of the differing opinions:

Rashi, Tosafos, Rosh: All Tannaim agree that the time for *Shema* is when people go to sleep. They differ in their assessment of when this time begins (i.e. the earliest time that ordinary people begin going to sleep).

Rav Hai Gaon, as explained by Rashba: There is a more fundamental debate between the Tannaim: Does the time for *Shema* begin when people go to sleep (as understood by the above commentators), or at nightfall per se? This debate branches into several opinions:

R' Eliezer, R' Meir, and R' Yehoshua (opinions 1,2,3) maintain that the time for *Shema* is at nightfall.

Yet they differ regarding the following:

R' Eliezer maintains that nightfall begins at sundown;

R' Yehoshua maintains that nightfall begins at the emergence of the stars;

R' Meir agrees with R' Yehoshua, but adds a miniscule amount of time before nightfall so that one may *finish* by nightfall.

R' Chaninah and R' Achai (opinions 5,6) maintain that the time for *Shema* is when people go to sleep, which they maintain is definitely *later* than nightfall.

R' Chaninah maintains that it is when poor people go home to eat, which is soon after nightfall; while R' Achai maintains that it is when ordinary people go home to eat, which is some time later.