



# FROM THE VIRTUAL DESK OF THE OU VEBBE REBBE

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## How to Time Vatikin?

**Question:** When *minyanim* closed, I started *davening vatikin* (starting *Shemoneh Esrei* (=SE) at *hanetz hachama* (sunrise=*netz*)). If I do not know precisely when *netz* is, is it better to err on the side of starting SE before or after *netz*?

**Answer:** That is a noble approach (see Living the Halachic Process II, A-5 on whether *vatikin* or a *minyan* has a greater impact). The *gemara* (Berachot 9b, see Tosafot ad loc.) considered it a rare feat to do *vatikin* precisely. While we have clocks and sunrise tables, it is still difficult because: most round to the minute; there are *machlokot* how to determine sunrise when there are topographical differences between one's locale and the horizon or between his location and the one in the city used for the table. For this reason, Rav Moshe Feinstein (cited by Tefilla K'hilchata 3:(34)) prefers *tefilla* with a *minyan* to an attempted tefilla k'vatikin.

There are many levels of preference for morning *Kri'at Shema* (=KS) and SE. The consensus of *poskim* (see Shulchan

Aruch, Orach Chayim 58:1) is that *vatikin* as practiced is an ideal way to *daven* and succeeding in being precise is a bonus (see above). (It is unclear what is considered precise and close enough to be *vatikin*, respectively.) Beyond that, the gradations are, for KS (from best to worst) – after *misheyakir* (50-60 minutes before *netz*) (Shulchan Aruch, OC 58:1-3); between *netz* and *sof z'man KS*; soon after *alot hashachar*. Regarding *tefilla* – clearly after *netz* before *sof z'man tefilla*; clearly before *netz*; soon after *alot hashachar*; after four hours into the day.

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Ostensibly, if one tries for *vatikin* and misses by a few minutes, this will make KS or SE, respectively not of the highest non-*vatikin* level. Which is our main goal and/or concern?

The *gemara* (Berachot 9b) praises *vatikin* because “they would finish [KS and its *berachot*] with sunrise, so that they would have the *beracha* of *geula* next to *tefilla* and their *tefilla* ends up in the day.” It continues that this

fulfills “they will fear You with the sun” (Tehillim 72:5). Most commentaries (including Rabbeinu Yona) understand that this puts stress on *tefilla* being soon after the sun appears, and this is the main reason to finish *KS* at that time. Furthermore, the *gemara* in Yoma (37a) tells that when the sun made the chandelier in the *Beit Hamikdash* courtyard sparkle, the masses of people knew it was time for *KS*. Tosafot (Berachot 9b) says that this refers to those who did not know how to time *vatikin*. Rabbeinu Tam (Tosafot, Yoma 37b), though, learns from here that the best time for *KS* is actually right after *netz*, to be followed by *SE*, and that “*vatikin*” is less preferred. He views the *pasuk* in Tehillim as going on *KS*. We do not *pasken* like Rabbeinu Tam. Tosafot (ibid.) posits that it is better for one who cannot implement *vatikin* to do *KS* and *SE* after *netz*, as *vatikin*’s proponents agree that *KS* is fully acceptable then.

Furthermore, the Shulchan Aruch (OC 89:8) views *SE* before *netz* as before its time and not justified without a good reason (see Be’ur Halacha to 89:1). The Pri Chadash (ad loc.) argues that if one misses the special level of *vatikin*, there is no difference between *tefilla* before and after *netz*. The Shulchan Aruch’s opinion is more accepted, and there

is much discussion as to whether it is better do *daven* with a *minyan* before *netz* or without one after *netz* (see Piskei Teshuvot 89:4).

Finally, while there may be some value in reciting *birchot KS* at the time of *KS* (see Mishna Berura 58:1), it is not critical (see Rama, OC 46:9; Mishna Berura 46:31). This is especially so if one has almost finished them and is waiting near “... *ga'al Yisrael*,” which connects to *SE* (see Tefilla K’hilchata 3:24; Yisrael V’hazemanim II, 7). Therefore, if you are just a couple minutes late, *KS* was said at its best time.

Based on the above, when one has a choice, it is better to be off by being late than earlier than the precise *vatikin*. However, the *minhag* is to follow one’s best information without worrying that it might be an inexact *vatikin*, which likely counts as *vatikin*. ■

## Having a dispute?



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