

December 1, 2019 - Deut. 6:4 – 7:11 - The Shema
Torah Reading: Deuteronomy 6:4 – 7:11 - The Shema
Psalm 116-117
Haftarah: Zechariah 14:9-11, 16-21

The Shema

Deuteronomy 6:4 - "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:"

Shema = "hear" or rather "to hear, understand and accept." To "hear under" in submission to what is about to be said.

This is Moses speaking to all of Israel. A person who recites the Shema by himself it is as if he were calling upon himself, saying: "Hear and listen, you who are a member of the people of Israel."

Originally, the Shema consisted of only one verse: Deuteronomy 6:4 (see Talmud Sukkah 42a and Berachot 13b)

The Shema when ritually recited comprises **Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21**, and **Numbers 15:37-41** (Mishnah Berachot 2:2-5). Traditionally Jews recite this twice a day, and it is a centerpiece of the morning and evening Jewish prayer services. The first verse encapsulates the monotheistic essence of Judaism: "Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one." It is traditional for Jews to say the Shema as their last words, and for parents to teach their children to say it before they go to sleep at night (**Deuteronomy 6:6-7**). It is alluded to from verses such as "Commune with your own heart upon your bed" (**Psalms 4:4**).

Reciting the Shema was considered equivalent to "receiving the yoke of the kingdom."

There are two larger-print letters in the first sentence (*'ayin* ך and *daleth* ט) which, when combined, spell "עד". In Hebrew this means "witness". The idea thus conveyed is that through the recitation or proclamation of the Shema one is a living witness testifying to the truth of its message. Modern Kabbalistic schools teach that when one recites the last letter of the word "*echad*" (אחד), meaning "one", he is to intend that he is ready to "die into God."

"Hear (*sh'ma*), O Israel: the LORD (*YHWH*) our God (*Eloheinu* - 1st person plural), the LORD (*YHWH*) is one (*echad*)."

There are several possible renderings:

"Hear, O Israel! YHVH our God YHVH one."
 "Hear, O Israel! Adonai is our God! Adonai is One!"
 "Hear, O Israel! Adonai is our God – Adonai alone."
 "Hear, O Israel! YHVH our God is one YHVH"—and not many YHVHs."

Hebrew normally expresses "alone" with *levad* rather than *echad*, as in "You alone [*levadekha*] are God of all the kingdoms of the earth" (**2 Kings 19:15**)

But the rabbis explain its use here by the numerical value of the letters that make up the word for "one" - "*echad*": Aleph=1, which stands for God's oneness; Chet=8, which stands for the seven heavens and earth; and Daled=4, which stands for the four corners of the earth.)

Zechariah 14:9 (haftarah for this passage) reads: "And the Lord shall be king over all the earth; in that day there shall be one Lord with one name."

In a sense, it means compared with the "truth of His existence," no other reality counts.

According to the Zohar, "YHVH our God YHVH" are the three degrees with respect to this sublime mystery: "in the beginning God (Elohim) created the heavens and the earth." The three forms (modes or things) which are one. ... When they are joined they are one in one unity; which is illustrated by the three names the soul of man is called by - the soul, spirit, and breath; and elsewhere they say the holy blessed God, and his Shechinah, are called one. (See Zohar in Gen. fol. 1, 3., in Exod. fol. 18. 3, 4., in Numb. fol. 67. 3., and Tikkune Zohar, Correct. 47. fol. 86. 2.)

After uttering the first verse of the Shema, it is an ancient custom to say "*Barukh shem kevod malkhuto le'olam va'ed*" - "May the Name of the glory of His kingship be blessed for ever and ever." But since this sentence is not written in the Torah, it is said in a whisper and not aloud, like the rest of the recitation (see Tractate Pesahim 56a). Only on Yom Kippur, when the Jews are like the ministering angels, do they say this sentence aloud.

A blessing follows the final paragraph as a kind of pledge of allegiance to God - "True, firm, established, obligatory, proper, lasting, satisfactory, favored, agreeable, pleasing, respected, revered, fit, accepted, good and valid is this word."

Deuteronomy 6:5 - "And thou shalt love the LORD (*YHWH*) thy God (*'elohiyim*) with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."

"love" = *'ahab* - to desire, to "breathe after," to long for, be inclined toward, to delight in, to spring up like a germinating plant or flower toward the sun.

"With all your heart" - The Sages said this means without reservation and hesitation, and with the whole of man's emotional makeup, even in the inclinations which are not good.

"With all your soul" is interpreted to mean "even if He takes your soul"

"And with all your might" means that this love should be great and strong, even greater

and stronger than the former statement – namely, even in things which man perceives as more difficult than death. Therefore our Sages state that this may mean “with all of your money”; man should be prepared not only for a one-time sacrifice, but for a life of sacrifice, even if it is a life of continuous poverty and suffering. For this is the essence of *me’od* (might): beyond all measure, beyond all boundaries.

Deuteronomy 6:6 - "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:"

Targum of Jonathan - "written on the table of the heart"

- **Jeremiah 31:33** - “But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

- **2 Corinthians 3:3** - "Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart."

"in thine heart" - not a matter of a one-time acceptance and consent, but they should be internalized and kept in one's continuing consciousness.

Deuteronomy 6:7 - "And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

Transmit this awareness to the next generation by making them clear through explanation, and implant them in their minds through repetition.

“And you shall talk of them” - Torah is for everyone, not a specialized class of scribes or professionals.

"when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way" - Torah is involved in your complete life, and should be the prism through which your thoughts and actions are mediated. Torah must emerge from your private thoughts and be spoken and discussed with others in your world.

"when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" - Traditionally this was interpreted to mean recited at night and in the morning.

Deuteronomy 6:8 - "And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes."

Orthodox Jews take this literally, binding tefillin (phylacteries - containers with tiny scrolls of **Deuteronomy 6:4**) on their arms and forehead.

Spiritually it means as above, mediating all your thoughts and actions through the truth

of the Shema as an expression of taking on the "yoke of the kingdom." For Christians we see the Shema fulfilled in the Cross.

Deuteronomy 6:9 - "And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates."

Like the blood of the Passover lamb placed on the doorposts at the Exodus.

Similarly, the posts and gates indicate the ways in and out of yourself - your mouth and your actions. Jews literally place a mezuzah on their door post, a small container of a scroll of **Deuteronomy 6:4**, which they touch or kiss on entering and leaving.

The image is of the Torah being tightly woven and intertwined throughout all aspects on our lives.

Jesus quoted the Shema in **Mark 12:28-34**

Beware lest thou forget the LORD!

Deuteronomy 6:10-12 - "And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage."

- **Proverbs 30:8-9** - "Keep falsehood and deceitful words far from me. Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the bread that is my portion. Otherwise, I may have too much and deny You, saying, 'Who is the LORD?' Or I may become poor and steal, profaning the name of my God."

When we're "full" with sustenance for our basic needs, there is a danger we will forget God, manufacture some dissatisfaction and start looking for gods that "tickle our ears," or appeal to either our baser instincts or to a loftier view of ourselves than we deserve.

Deuteronomy 6:13 - "Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name."

Jesus is probably quoting this in His temptation in the wilderness:

- **Matthew 4:9-10** - "And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."

A Jealous God

Deuteronomy 6:14-15 - "Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you; (For the LORD thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth."

God is intolerant. Like a jealous husband, He demands that His bride be faithful exclusively to Himself. He is not just a philosophical idea or an ideology. He settles for nothing less than an intimate, genuine relationship with his people/ his Bride. Still, instead of simply ordering or requiring our devotion, God spends a lot of time in the Torah as well as through the prophets trying to persuade and convince Israel of the futility of going after other gods, reminding them of their original love, appealing to reason, as well as to the fear of God.

The meaning of "zeal" is our "jealousy" on His behalf, to watch for and call out any infidelity that we see toward Him in ourselves - "revenging the disobedience" like Phinehas, and to convince and persuade His bride (i.e. one another) to return to faithfulness and love of God alone.

The Passover Haggadah Questions

Deuteronomy 6:20 - "And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD our God hath commanded you? Then thou shalt say unto thy son, We were Pharaoh's bondmen in Egypt; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand."

For Christians, the story of the Exodus becomes our personal story of an exodus from darkness and guilt to being forgiven of sin because of what Christ accomplished on the cross.

Deuteronomy 6:24 - "And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day."

The commandments were given "for our good always" not randomly or arbitrarily.

- **Psalm 34:9** (NIV) - "Fear the LORD, you his holy people, for those who fear him lack nothing."

Deuteronomy 6:25 - "And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the LORD our God, as he hath commanded us."

Failing to accomplish the doing of the Law, our righteousness must become His righteousness - putting on Christ and taking off our old man, the old Adam. Christ did "observe to do" the Torah in its complete meaning, and in Him we are seen by God as righteous.

Only Christ could keep all the commandments of God

- Romans 10:4-10 - "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them. For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them. But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

Deuteronomy 7

Israel is commanded to destroy the seven nations in the land of Canaan, and at the same time assured that God Himself will cast them out before them "little by little" over time.

Deuteronomy 7:2 - "And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them:"

This was meant only for the nations remaining in Canaan. But later, the rabbis extended this to all Gentiles.

Maimonides (Hilchot Abodath Cochabim, c. 10. sect. 1, 2.) says should a Jew see a Gentile perishing, or plunged into a river, he may not take him out, nor administer medicine to a sick person. Hence Juvenal the poet upbraids them with their unkindness and incivility; and says that Moses delivered it as a Jewish law, in a secret volume of his, perhaps referring to this book of Deuteronomy, that the Jews might not direct a poor traveller in his way unless he was one of their religion, nor one athirst to a fountain of water; and which led Tacitus, the pagan Roman historian, to claim that Jews entertained a hostile hatred against all other people.

Deuteronomy 7:3 - "Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son."

Unless they became proselytes, like Rahab or Ruth the Moabitess, and so any captive taken in war. Otherwise the example of Solomon's wives is there to show being snared and drawn aside into idolatry. Maimonides later expanded this prohibition to all Gentiles, not just those in the land of Canaan.

Deuteronomy 7:5 - "But thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire."

Spiritually we must see all the places within ourselves where we worshipped other gods as being destroyed and desecrated, and have no more power either to entice us or cause us fear. We can "walk upon our high places."

- **Habakkuk 3:19** - "The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places."

Deuteronomy 7:6 - "For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth."

"a special people unto himself"

- **1 Peter 2:9** - "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light"

God Loves His Holy People

The Shema commanded us to love God with all our heart. Here God pledges His love to His people.

Deuteronomy 7:7-8 - "The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."