
THE SHEMA – PART II

Say It Like You Really Mean It

The first Morasha class on the Shema discussed the importance and centrality of the Shema to Judaism, and gave an overview of the text of the Shema. In this second class on the Shema we will focus on when and how to say Shema, with particular emphasis on the importance of concentrating on the meaning of the first verse of the Shema. This shiur also explores some of the deeper meaning expressed by the Shema. Finally, this class discusses the significance of the Shema in the mitzvot of mezuzah and tefillin.

The following questions will be addressed:

- ☞ When is the Shema said?
- ☞ How should we say the Shema?
- ☞ What should one think about while reciting the Shema?
- ☞ What is the meaning of the different names of God found in Shema?
- ☞ Do the words of the Shema have any hidden messages that lend to its significance?
- ☞ What special messages are related through the mitzvot of the mezuzah and tefillin, which contain the words of the Shema?

CLASS OUTLINE:

- Section I: **When to Say the Shema**
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Part B. Before Sleep at Night
Part C. Additional Times During Prayers
Part D. Going Out to Battle
Part E. Kiddush Hashem
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- Section II: **How to Say the Shema**
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- Section III: **Contemplating the Shema**
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- Section V. **The Shema in the Mezuzah and Tefillin**

SECTION I: WHEN TO SAY THE SHEMA

As we learned in the previous Shema class, the Shema is the first verse taught to a child and the last verse uttered before death. In this section we will explore the times and situations throughout life when there is a mitzvah to recite the Shema.

PART A. TWICE A DAY

We learn from a verse in the first paragraph of the Shema that we must recite the Shema once in the morning and once at night. This mitzvah is fulfilled within the framework of the morning and evening prayer services (*Shacharit* and *Ma'ariv*).

1. **Devarim (Deuteronomy) 6:7 – We are to speak these words when we “lie down” and when we “arise.”**

Teach them to your children and speak of them when you are at home, when you travel on the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

ושונתם לבניך ודברת בם בשבתך בביתך
ובלכתך בדרך ובשכבך ובקומך:

2. **Talmud Bavli, Berachot 10b – The source of the mitzvah to recite Shema twice daily.**

Why does it say “When you lie down and when you get up”? [This tells us that the Shema should be recited] at the time when people are lying down [to sleep at night] and the time when people are getting up [from their night’s sleep].

למה נאמר ובשכבך ובקומך בשעה שבני אדם
שוכבים ובשעה שבני אדם עומדים.

PART B. BEFORE SLEEP AT NIGHT

There is also a rabbinic mitzvah to say the Shema before going to sleep at night even if one has already recited it earlier that evening (at *Ma'ariv*).

1. **Talmud Bavli, Berachot 4b-5a – A rabbinic mitzvah to say the Shema before going to sleep.**

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, “Even if a person has read the Shema in the synagogue [at the evening prayer] it is a mitzvah to read it before going to sleep [to provide extra protection during the night].” Rabbi

אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: אף על פי שקרא אדם
קריאת שמע בביהכ"נ, מצווה לקרותו על מטתו,
אמר ר' יוסי מאי קרא? רגזו ואל תחטאו אמרו
בלבכם על משכבכם ודומו סלה' (תהלים ד').

Yossi asked, “What is the source for this?” [He answered:] “Tremble, and sin not. Reflect in your hearts while on your beds and be utterly silent” (Tehillim/Psalms 4:5).

Rabbi Nachman said, “If one is a Torah scholar, then he need not do so [because the Torah protects him]. Abaye said, “Even a Torah scholar needs to say at least one verse of prayer, such as “into Your hand I entrust my soul” [Tehillim 31:6].

וא"ר נחמן: אם תלמיד חכם הוא אין צריך. אמר אב"י: אף תלמיד חכם מיבעי ליה למימר חד פסוקי דרחמי, כגון 'בידך אפקיד רוחי'.

At night we are most vulnerable and in need of special protection. Reciting the Shema provides protection for those who say it.

PART C. ADDITIONAL TIMES DURING PRAYERS

In addition to the regular recitation of the Shema in the morning, evening and before going to sleep, the Shema is also recited additional times in our prayers: in the mornings after *brachot* (the morning blessings); on Shabbatot and Festivals after removing the Torah from the *Aron Kodesh* (Holy Ark), before the public Torah readings and during the *Kedushah* of *Mussaf* (Additional Service); and at the conclusion of Yom Kippur.

1. The Complete ArtScroll Siddur, p. 28 – Reciting Shema after the morning blessings and as part of Shabbat Kedushah of Mussaf.

During the middle of the fifth century the Persian king, Yezdegerd II, forbade the Jews to observe the Sabbath and recite the Shema. His purpose was to eradicate belief in God as the Creator (which is symbolized by the Sabbath) and in His Oneness, as it is proclaimed in the Shema. To insure that the Shema would not be read in defiance of his decree, the king stationed guards in the synagogue for the first quarter of the day, when the Shema must be read. To counteract his design, the Sages instituted two recitations of the first verse of the Shema: one here (after the morning blessings), which was to be recited at home, and another as part of the Sabbath Kedushah of Mussaf.

Although these services only contain the first verse of the Shema (without the following three paragraphs), this is sufficient to fulfill the Shema obligation in cases of extreme emergency (Berachot 13b). Even when Yezdegerd was killed in response to the prayers of the Sages and his decree was lifted, these two Shema recitations remained part of the regular ritual, and the one that had been recited at home was moved to this part of the synagogue service.

2. **The Complete ArtScroll Siddur, pp. 436-7 – Reciting Shema upon taking out the Torah before readings on Shabbat and Festivals.**

שמע ישראל ה' אלוקינו ה' אחד

Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is the One and Only.

אחד אלוקינו גדול אדונינו, קדוש שמו.

One is our God, great is our Master, Holy is His Name.

גדלו לה' אתי ונרוממה שמו יחדיו.

Declare the greatness of God with me, and let us exalt His Name together.

Holding the Torah Scroll and facing the congregation, the chazzan leads them in reciting three verses that help set the majestic tone of reading publicly from the word of God. The verses form a logical progression: God is One; He is great and holy; therefore we join in declaring His greatness.

3. **Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, Rema, and Mishnah Berurah 623:6:11 – Reciting the Shema at the conclusion of Neilah on Yom Kippur.**

At the conclusion of the Neilah prayers we recite, “The Lord is God” seven times after having said Shema Yisroel one time and “Blessed is the Name of His glorious kingdom for all eternity” three times.

The reason we recite the “The Lord is God” seven times is to accompany the Shechina through the seven Heavens.

בסוף הסליחות אומרים (יא) ז' פעמים: ה' הוא האלהים (ופעם אחד: שמע ישראל, וג' פעמים: ברוך שם כבוד מל"ו).

הטעם ללות השכינה שמתעלה לעלות למעלה משבעה רקיעים:

4. **Mishna Berurah, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, 61:27 – Reciting the Shema at the conclusion of Neilah on Yom Kippur reaffirms our dedication to God.**

Reciting the Shema at Neilah is reaffirming our primary acceptance of our commitment and dedication to God.

בפסוק שמע שהוא עיקר קבלת עול מלכות שמים.

5. **The Complete ArtScroll Yom Kippur Machzor, p. 762 – Why we recite Shema at the conclusion of Neilah.**

The goal of Yom Kippur is not simply atonement for ourselves, but our resolve to use God's mercy properly. Therefore we end Neilah with Israel's historic declaration of loyalty to God. (Shelah).

6. **The Complete ArtScroll Yom Kippur Machzor, p. 762 – Why we recite Baruch Shem three times at the conclusion of Neilah.**

In a matter of seconds Yom Kippur will be over, and we will fall from the exalted level of angels. While we are still at this spiritual zenith, we proclaim this angelic praise loudly for the last time until next Yom Kippur. It is repeated three times to signify our acknowledgment of God's complete sovereignty, past, present and future.

Furthermore, many recite the Shema as part of the ceremony of Brit Milah. There is also a custom to have children come and recite the Shema the night before the Brit Milah, known as *Vach Nacht* (Watch Night), in proximity of the baby.

7. **Dei'ah ve Dibur, February 3, 2003 – Reciting the Shema by children the night before a Brit Milah**

The Chernobyler Rebbe spoke about the custom of saying Shema at a Vach Nacht (Watch Night) after an emotional first visit to his own ancestors' tziyun (gravesites) in Chernobyl. The reason is because the Talmud asks why we recite the parsha (paragraph) of Shema before the second parsha of Vehoyoh im shomo'a. The Talmud answers that it is because the first paragraph of the Shema signifies the acceptance of God's Kingship and this must precede Vehoyoh im shomo'a which reflects acceptance of the commandments. In the same way, on the night before the Brit Milah, children recite the first parsha of Kriat Shema in order to accept God's Kingship on behalf of the newborn, who will tomorrow fulfill the actual mitzvah of the Brit which is accepting the commandments.

PART D. GOING OUT TO BATTLE

Before entering a battle, the Kohen (Priest) addressed the soldiers with words of encouragement that included an allusion to protection afforded to them by the Shema – even if the soldiers only performed the mitzvah of Shema, they were protected from their enemies.

1. **Devarim 20:1-3 – The Kohen speaks words of encouragement to the troops on the eve of battle.**

When you go out to battle against your enemies, and see horses, and chariots, and people more numerous than you, you shall not be afraid of them; for the Lord, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, is with you. And before you come unto the battle, then the Kohen will approach and speak to the people, and shall say unto them: "Hear, O Israel, you are about to enter today into battle against your enemies; don't let your heart weaken; fear not, nor be alarmed, don't be afraid of them."

כִּי תֵצֵא לְמִלְחָמָה עַל-אֹיְבֶיךָ וְרָאִיתָ סוּס וְרֶכֶב
עִם רַב מִמֶּנּוּ לֹא תִירָא יִמָּהֶם; כִּי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ עִמָּךְ
הַמַּעֲלֶה מִמִּצְרָיִם מִצְרַיִם. וְהָיָה כִּשְׂרָרְכֶם אֵל
הַמִּלְחָמָה; וְנִגַּשׁ הַכֹּהֵן וְדָבַר אֶל הָעָם. וְאָמַר
אֲלֵהֶם שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל אַתֶּם קָרְבִים הַיּוֹם לְמִלְחָמָה
עַל אֹיְבֵיכֶם; אֵל יְרֵד לְבַבְכֶם אֵל תִּירְאוּ וְאַל תִּחְפְּזוּ
וְאַל תִּעְרָצוּ מִפְּנֵיהֶם.

2. **Talmud Bavli, Sotah 42a – The Kohen hints to them that the mitzvah of Shema affords protection in a time of war.**

Why does the Torah use the phrase “Hear O Israel” [in the Kohen’s address to the soldiers]? Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai: [It is as if] God says to the soldiers, “Even if you have only kept the mitzvah of reading the Shema in the morning and evening, they won’t defeat you.”

מאי שנא שמע ישראל אמר רבי יוחנן משום רבי שמעון בן יוחי אמר להן הקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל אפילו לא קיימתם אלא קריאת שמע שחרית וערבית אי אתם נמסרין בידם:

The Kohen begins his address with the words “Hear O Israel,” reminiscent of the words of Shema. The Sages understand that the Shema protects a soldier who has performed the mitzvah of Shema diligently.

PART E. KIDDUSH HASHEM

We mentioned in the first Morasha shiur on the Shema that the words “with all your soul” appear in both the first and second paragraphs of the Shema, **בכל נפשך** in the first and **בכל נפשכם** in the second. One of the explanations for the repetition is that we should be prepared to give our lives for God under the circumstance that the Torah demands for the sake of God’s honor in this world. The Shema is appropriate to recite by one who must give up his life.

1. **Talmud Bavli, Berachot 61b – The Shema recited by martyrs.**

When Rabbi Akiva was taken out for execution, it was the hour to recite the Shema, and while they combed his flesh with iron combs, he was accepting upon himself the kingship of Heaven. His disciples said to him: Our teacher, even now? He said to them: All my days I have been troubled by this verse, “with all thy soul,” [which I interpret,] “even if He takes thy soul.” I said: When shall I have the opportunity to fulfill this? Now that I have the opportunity, shall I not fulfill it? He prolonged the word *echad* (one) until he expired while saying it. A Heavenly voice went forth and proclaimed: Fortunate are you, Akiva, that your soul has departed with the word *echad*!

בשעה שהוציאו את ר' עקיבא להריגה זמן ק"ש היה והיו סורקים את בשרו במסרקות של ברזל והיה מקבל עליו עול מלכות שמים אמרו לו תלמידיו רבינו עד כאן אמר להם כל ימי הייתי מצטער על פסוק זה בכל נפשך אפילו נוטל את נשמתך אמרתי מתי יבא לידי ואקיימנו ועכשיו שבא לידי לא אקיימנו היה מאריך באחד עד שיצתה נשמתו באחד יצתה ב"ק ואמרה אשריך ר"ע שיצאה נשמתך באחד.

PART F. DEATH BED

Jews try to say the Shema on their deathbeds to accept the kingship of God as their last act in this world.

1. Rabbi Avraham Danzig, Chochmat Adam 151:12 – The last words recited before taking leave of this world

The order of confession on the deathbed is... he should say “Shema Yisrael...” and “Blessed is the Name of His glorious kingdom for all eternity.”

סדר וידוי שכיב מרע... ויאמר שמע ישראל וגו'
ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION I

- ☞ There is a mitzvah to say Shema once in the evening and once in the morning.
- ☞ There is also a mitzvah to say the Shema to afford us protection before we go to sleep at night.
- ☞ One who is careful about how he performs the mitzvah of Shema is also protected when he goes out to war.
- ☞ A person who faces martyrdom says the Shema before sanctifying the Name of God. Similarly, as a person returns his soul to his Creator, he says the Shema.

SECTION II. HOW TO SAY THE SHEMA

Having discussed when to say Shema, in this section we will focus on how to say it.

PART A. CONCENTRATION FOR SHEMA

Of course we should strive to pay attention to every word of the Shema that we utter. But if that proves too difficult, at least the first verse should be free of distraction.

1. Rambam (Maimonides), Hilchot Kriat Shema 2:1 – We must concentrate while saying the first verse.

One who reads the Shema and doesn't concentrate on the first verse, which is “Hear Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One,” has not fulfilled his obligation.

הקורא את שמע, ולא כיון ליבו בפסוק ראשון
שהוא “שמע ישראל: ה' אלוהינו, ה' אחד”
(דברים ו, ד) – לא יצא ידי חובתו.

2. Ibid. 2:8 – Do not engage in distracting activities

Someone who reads the Shema [should not distract himself; therefore] he must not hint with his eyes to someone else, or motion with his lips, or point with his fingers so that his reading should not be secondary [to anything else]. If he did so, even though he has fulfilled his obligation, it is considered disgraceful.

הקורא קרית שמע—לא ירמוז בעיניו, ולא יקרוץ בשפתיו, ולא יראה באצבעותיו, כדי שלא תהא קריאת עראי. ואם עשה כן—אף על פי שיצא ידי חובתו, הרי זה מגונה.

PART B. COVERING THE EYES

As is well known, we cover our eyes for saying the first verse of Shema.

1. Talmud Bavli, Berachot 13b – Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi was seen covering his eyes when reciting the first verse of the Shema.

It was taught: “Hear Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one” was the Shema of Rabbi Yehudah HaNassi [i.e. he only used to say the first verse, and leave out the remaining paragraphs]. Rav said to Rav Chiya [who were both students of Rabbi Yehudah HaNassi], “I didn’t see Rabbi accept the yoke of Heaven upon himself.” He replied, “Son of great ones! When he passed his hands over his eyes he accepted the yoke of Heaven.”

ת”ר שמע ישראל ה’ אלהינו ה’ אחד זו ק”ש של ר’ יהודה הנשיא א”ל רב לר’ חייא לא חזינא ליה לרבי דמקבל עליה מלכות שמים אמר ליה בר פחתו בשעה שמעביר ידיו על פניו מקבל עליו עול מלכות שמים.

2. Rabbi Mordecai Yoffe, Levush 60:5 – We should emulate Rabbi Yehudah HaNassi by covering our eyes when we say the first verse of Shema, to avoid any distractions.

If someone doesn’t concentrate during the first verse of the reading of the Shema...he has not fulfilled his obligation...therefore we cover our eyes with our hands in order not to look at anything that will prevent us from concentrating.

לפיכך הקורא את שמע ולא כיון לבו בפסוק ראשון ... לא יצא ידי חובתו ... וגם נוהגין ליתן ידיהם על פניהם בקריאת פסוק ראשון, כדי שלא יסתכל בדבר אחר שמונעו מלכוין.

3. Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair (ohr.edu) – In order to sense the reality that lies behind what our five senses tell us, we cover our eyes.

The message of Shema runs counterintuitive to everything that our eyes tell us. Our physical senses do not teach us that nothing else exists except for Him. Quite the

reverse. Our senses tell us that if anything exists at all - it's me. From my point of view, the world could be an Ultra-High-Definition 3D movie with Surround Sound. My instinctive perception is that nothing else exists except for me. The Shema is the way we reverse this paradigm; the Shema is the way the Jew "sees" beyond the picture that his five senses paint.

See further: Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner, Pachad Yitzchak, Yom Kippur 5.

PART C. KISSING THE TZITZIT

There is a custom to hold on to the tzitzit while reciting the Shema and to kiss them each time one says the word "tzitzit" during the third paragraph of Shema.

1. **Rabbi Yosef Caro, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 24:2 – One should hold the tzitzit while reciting the third paragraph in the morning.**

It is preferable to hold the tzitzit in one's left hand opposite his heart when he recites the Shema. A hint to this [is found in the words] "and these words...shall be upon your heart."

מצוה לאחוז הציצית ביד שמאלית כנגד לבו בשעת קריאת שמע. רמז לדבר, והיו הדברים האלה וגו' על לבבך.

The Shulchan Aruch (based on the Midrash Shochar Tov) asserts that the verse cited intimates that it is desirable to hold the tzitzit opposite one's heart when reciting the Shema. The practice is limited to the morning, since we are not obligated to wear tzitzit at night.

2. **Rabbi Yosef Caro, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 24:4, Rabbi Moshe Isserles (Remah) Ibid. – Kissing the tzitzit and placing them on the eyes.**

Some are accustomed to look at the tzitzit when saying the words (Bamidbar / Numbers 15:39) "That you may see it" and then place them on the eyes. This is a nice custom and reflects how endeared the mitzvah is. It is also the custom to kiss the tzitzit at the time one looks at them [while reciting the paragraph of tzitzit], and all [these practices] display how beloved the mitzvah is.

יש נוהגין להסתכל בציצית כשמגיעים לוראיתם אותו (במדבר טו, לט) וליתן אותם על העינים, ומנהג יפה הוא וחבובי מצוה. גם נוהגים קצת לנשק הציצית בשעה שרואה בם, והכל הוא חיבוב מצוה.

3. **Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, Mishnah Berurah, Ibid. 4- How to hold the tzitzit.**

It is written in the writings of the Arizal (Rabbi Yitzchak Luria) that one should hold

כתוב בכתבי האר"י ז"ל שיאחזם בין קמיצה לזרת, וכשיגיע לפרשת ציצית, יקחם גם ביד ימין

them between his ring finger and his pinkie, and when he reaches the paragraph of tzitzit he should take them in his right hand and look at them. And they should remain in his hand until he reaches [the words in the passage after the Shema] “faithful and delightful forever,” and then he should kiss the tzitzit and then let go of them.

ויביט בהם, ויהיו בידו עד שמגיע ל"נאמנים ונחמדים לעד", ואז ינשק הציצית ויסירם מידו.

4. Rabbi Avraham Eliezer bar Isaac, Sefer Minhagei Yeschurun – The importance of the kiss is the thought which it invokes.

The kissing should direct our thoughts towards heaven to facilitate our dedicating our hearts to God. A similar idea was brought when Moshe made the image of a snake so that anyone afflicted with the plague would look at it and be cured. The Sages tell us that the snake had no special powers; rather, someone who looked at the snake would use that as a stimulus to look further and accept the Yoke of God in Heaven. It was this that cured them.

והכל לחבוב מצוה אולם לא הנשיקה היא העיקר אלא הטעם כי בזה יסתכלו כלפי מעלה וישעבדו את ליבם לאביהם שבשמים. כיוצא בדבר נאמר: עשה לך שרף וגוי' וראה אותו וחי וכי הנחש ממית ומחיה אלא בזמן שישראל מסתכלין ומשעבדין ליבם לאביהם שבשמים וחיו.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION II

- ☞ It is crucial to concentrate properly while reciting the first verse of the Shema. One method that we employ to achieve this aim is to cover our eyes when we recite the first verse. Doing so helps us appreciate the hidden unity of the Creator.
- ☞ It is common practice to hold the tzitzit while saying the Shema, and some have the custom of kissing the tzitzit when the word is mentioned in the last paragraph. Doing so serves to focus our attention on God.

SECTION III. CONTEMPLATING THE SHEMA

As we saw above, it is crucial to concentrate on the first verse of Shema. In order to do that, one must have an understanding of the words of this verse and the intent behind them. To gain such insight will be the goal of this section. The following story relates how a creative writing class unexpectedly unlocked a deeper appreciation for the Shema.

Recently my wife and I began taking a creative writing class together at the local community college. In the class I planned to write some innocuous poems, and not wanting my every word to somehow be mistaken for “Jewish wisdom,” I always had a baseball hat on over my yarmulke.

But behind the scenes, Someone else had plans to take that baseball hat off.

One particular night the class was learning about the haiku, a type of short poem originating in Japan. There are several specific and essential qualities that make a poem a haiku. The structure consists of 3 lines, with a 5-7-5-syllable pattern. I had seen haikus before, usually in a humorous context, such as:

*No fins, no flippers,
the gefilte fish swims with
some difficulty.*

While these poems are funny, and follow the 5-7-5 pattern, that night in class we learned that haikus often convey a profound thought or insight.

Later that night, driving home from class, I noticed the darkness in the sky and the few stars out. I started thinking about the Shema – the most important Jewish prayer, the Jewish “pledge of allegiance,” which testifies to our belief in one God.

Some neurons thinking about class, and some neurons thinking about the Shema, must have greeted each other, because my heart started racing and my fingers went up in the air to count the syllables:

<i>She-ma Yis-ra-el</i>	<i>Hear O Israel</i>
<i>A-do-nay El-o-hei-nu</i>	<i>The Lord our God</i>
<i>A-do-nay E-chad</i>	<i>The Lord is One</i>

I gulped hard. 5-7-5 in the original Hebrew! I counted it in my head a few more times to make sure.

At times like these, when certain mundane things click together and form a Divine experience, I often think of the words Ani Yosef – “I am Joseph.” In the Torah, Joseph uttered these two words upon reuniting with his brothers (Bereishit/Genesis 45). They finally understood that the prime minister of Egypt was none other than their long-lost brother. All their confusion and doubt vanished, and God’s plan became clear.

In other words, I knew my baseball hat was coming off.

So there it was: The Jewish Haiku, the ultimate Jewish Poem. No jokes about bagels or gefilte fish. Here were all the key issues: who are we, who is God, what should we be doing

I told some friends about my discovery, and it reached one woman who's into Japanese poetry, not "Old World" Judaism. Framing the Shema as a haiku made it modern, "Zen"-like, poetic, and deep. She said it affected her more profoundly than anything else she'd encountered in Judaism. Indeed, Judaism is not Old World. It is timeless, applicable, and relevant at every moment.

I proudly submitted the Shema for my haiku homework, giving the Almighty full writing credit. (David Carasso, The Jewish Haiku, aish.com)

In this section and the next, we will focus on both the overt and hidden messages contained in the Shema.

PART A. SHEMA – HEAR

The first word of the Shema, which literally translates as “Hear,” has several possible meanings or connotations, among them are acceptance, knowledge, concentration and understanding. As such, the Shema is a call to internalize the fundamental to which it alludes.

1. Targum Onkelos, Devarim 11:13 – To listen is to accept.

“And if you will listen” – If you will accept.

והיה אם שמוע - והיה אם קבלא תקבלון

2. Rav Saadiah Gaon, Translation of the Torah, Devarim 6:4 – “Shema” means to know and internalize that there is only one God.

Know Israel, that the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.

דע ישראל, כי ה' אלקינו הוא ה' האחד.

3. Rabbeinu Bachaya ibn Pakuda, Commentary on the Torah, Devarim 6:4 – Service of the Heart: hearing and understanding.

You must know that the concept of God's unity is known as “Service of the Heart,” as the verse says, “To serve Him with all your heart” (Devarim 11:13). When a person says something, sometimes he pays attention, and sometimes he doesn't. Therefore, it says “Hear,” which implies both listening with your ear and also understanding in your heart. In other words, concentrate on the words which describe God's unity when you hear yourself saying them.

וצריך אתה לדעת כי ענין היחוד הוא הנקרא עבודה שבלב כענין שכתוב (דברים יא:יג) “ולעבדו בכל לבבכם”. ולפי שהמדבר ידבר דבריו, פעם שיתכוין בהם ופעם שלא יתכוין בהם. לכך הזכיר “שמע” שהוא לשון כולל שמיעת האוזן והבנת הלב, כלומר שיכוין לבו בדבריו בענין היחוד, כשהוא משמיע לאוזנו.

The Shema can be defined as “service of the heart” (as opposed to the Temple Service in Jerusalem). It is therefore of vital importance that we pay close attention to the words that we recite so that we serve God with our hearts.

PART B. ISRAEL – THE PERSON OR THE PEOPLE?

To whom does the second word in the Shema, Yisrael, refer: to Yaakov Avinu (Jacob our forefather) also known as Yisrael after his name was changed (Bereishit 32:29), or to the Jewish people?

1. Rabbi Norman Lamm, *The Shema: Spirituality and Law in Judaism*, p. 19 – Israel refers to the Jewish people.

Israel: The plain sense of this word in the biblical verse is fairly obvious: “Israel” here refers to the entirety of the people summoned by Moshe to hear the proclamation of Divine unity. Similarly, when an individual worshipper recites these words, he is making a public proclamation. He thereby testifies to his belief, as it were, before all Israel.

According to the plain meaning, then, Israel refers to the Jewish people. But in our last class, when we learned about the origin of the phrase “Baruch Shem,” we saw that “Israel” can also be a reference to our forefather Yaakov, who was also called by the name Israel.

2. Talmud Bavli, Pesachim 56a – The sons of Yaakov proclaimed the Shema to him.

Why do we say [the phrase “Blessed is the Name of His glorious kingdom for all eternity,” which is not in the Torah verses]?

Like Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish explained: It is written, “Yaakov called to his sons and said, ‘Gather and I may tell you what will happen to you,’” (Bereishit 49:1). [Before he was about to die] he wanted to reveal to them what would happen at the End of Days. [When he was about to do so] the Shechina left him. He said, “Maybe one of my children is unworthy, like Avraham who had Yishmael, or my father Yitzchak, who had Esav [and that is the reason for the Shechinah leaving].”

His sons said to him: “Hear, Yisrael [which was Yaakov’s other name], the Lord our God, the Lord is One.” [In other words] they said to him: “Just as there is only one God in

אנן מאי טעמא אמרינן ליה?

כדדריש ר' שמעון בן לקיש דאמר רשב"ל (בראשית מט) ויקרא יעקב אל בניו ויאמר האספו ואגידה לכם ביקש יעקב לגלות לבניו קץ הימין ונסתלקה ממנו שכינה אמר שמא חס ושלום יש במטתי פסול כאברהם שיצא ממנו ישמעאל ואבי יצחק שיצא ממנו עשו

אמרו לו בניו שמע ישראל ה' אלהינו ה' אחד אמרו כשם שאין בלבך אלא אחד כך אין בלבנו אלא אחד באותה שעה פתח יעקב אבינו ואמר ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד.

your heart, so in our hearts there is only one God.” When Yaakov heard this, he opened his mouth and said: “Blessed is the Name of His glorious kingdom for all eternity.”

A Midrash connects this incident with our practice of saying Shema.

3. **Devarim Rabbah 2 – With Shema we proclaim our allegiance to the heritage of our forefather Yaakov.**

Rabbi Levi said: And what does Israel (the Jewish people) say nowadays? – “Hear O Father Israel (Yaakov), we practice that which you commanded us: The Lord is our God, the Lord is one.”

אמר רבי לוי ומה ישראל אומרים עכשיו שמע
אבינו ישראל אותו הדבר שצויתנו נוהג בנו ה'
אלהינו ה' אחד.

4. **Rabbi Norman Lamm, The Shema: Spirituality and Law in Judaism, p. 21 – We still carry the torch of Yaakov.**

Our words, repeated twice daily, are addressed not to the general community, Klal Yisrael, but to our very personal, intimate forefather Jacob-Israel. In calling out to him across the chasm of the generations, we assure him and ourselves that the One God he worshiped is ours as well; that we continue his tradition, which he entrusted to his children; that we have not and will not falter as we strive to implement the “Kingdom of Heaven” in our own time and our own places; that three and a half millennia later we still carry aloft our grandfather’s torch of *yichud Hashem* (unification of His Name); and that we pledge to continue to do so even in an age of cynicism, confusion, and despair.

PART C. HASHEM ELOKEINU – THE NAMES OF GOD IN SHEMA

The first verse of Shema refers to God by two different names: Hashem and Elokeinu. What significance lies behind these names?

1. **Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, Nefesh HaChaim 3:11 – The four-letter Name of God signifies that creation does not affect His simple unity.**

We refer to God as *Elokeinu*, (“our God”), since He is the all-powerful, never-ending source and spiritual root of our souls and life-force. He also gives life to every creature in all the worlds.

שהוא יתברך הוא אלוקינו בעל הכוחות,
ומקור שורש נשמתנו וחיותנו, ושל כל הברואים
והעולמות.

Even though He made all of existence, all forces, worlds and creations, nevertheless He remains [just as He as was before creation, as it were], which is expressed as His Four Letter Name [י-ה-ו-ה] and is still One. All the creations do not affect His simple oneness which fills everything. Even now He is His Four Letter Name and is One [even though His other name *Elokeinu* is used to express His involvement with all the details of creation].

ואף שברא והמציא מציאות כחות ועולמות ובריות, עם כל זה הוא בבחינת הו"ה ואחד מצדו יתברך, שאין הברואים כלם חוצצים ח"ו כלל נגד אחדותו הפשוט יתברך הממלא כל, ונקרא גם עתה הו"ה ואחד.

We mention a name of God three times in the first verse of Shema. Each name refers to a different era of time: past, present, and future.

2. **Rabbi Eliyahu of Vilna (the Vilna Gaon), Aderet Eliyahu Bereishit 2:4 – The three times God is mentioned in the first verse are an allusion to three periods of world history: before Creation, during the existence of the world, and the future World to Come.**

“The Lord” indicates His supremacy before the creation of the universe. “Our God” indicates his supremacy at present. And the final phrase, “the Lord,” indicates his supremacy in the future.

ה' - מורה על קדמותו קודם בריאת העולם.
אלקינו - מורה על זמן ההווה....
וה' השני מורה על זמן העתיד.

God's names also indicate different aspects of His manifestation in the world.

3. **Sifri, Parshat VaEtchanan 31 – God's different names indicate that while now He is God of the Jewish People, in the future the entire world will recognize Him as God.**

[Why does the first line of the Shema say] “the Lord our God”? [Rather, it should just say], “the Lord is One”? What does “our God” come to teach us? (Since the essential idea is that God is One, why is it significant to add “our God”?)

[“Our God” teaches that] His Name is especially upon us [the Jewish people]... and the phrase “God is One” means that He is God upon all the inhabitants of the world.

[Another explanation is:] “The Lord our

ה' אלוקינו”, למה נאמר והלא כבר נאמר ה' אחד, ומה תלמוד לומר “אלוקינו”,

עלינו הוחל שמו ביותר ...
דבר אחר ... ה' אחד” על כל באי העולם,

ה' אלוקינו” בעולם הזה, ה' אחד” לעולם הבא.

God” refers to Him in this world. “God is One” refers to the World to Come. Similarly it says, “God will be King over the whole world. On that day [in the World to Come] God will be One and His Name will be One” (Zechariah 14:9).

וכן הוא אומר (זכריה יד:ט) "והיה ה' למלך על כל הארץ ביום ההוא יהיה ה' אחד ושמו אחד".

Currently, God is accepted by a small portion of humanity, the one People that represent His presence in this world. We believe that the day will come that God will be accepted by all of mankind.

PART D. ELOKEINU – OUR GOD

Elokeinu, the second name for God found in Shema, is a contraction of the words “Elokim Shelanu,” our God. What is the significance of calling Him *our* God?

1. **Rabbi Shlomo ben Aderet (Rashba), Responsa 5:55 – God is aware and involved with our day-to-day human activities.**

The non-Jewish philosophers mistakenly declare that God does not watch over the details of the lower worlds or even the human race. This is the implied meaning of the verse, “Thick clouds block Him so He cannot see. He walks about in the heavenly orbit” (Iyov/Job 22:14). Therefore we say in the Shema “Our God” to imply that He watches over us. It also implies that He directs our affairs, and not by means of a star, constellation, or one of the heavenly angels, but rather only Him, may He be blessed.

לפי שהמתפלספים משתבשין וגוזרין שהוא יתברך אינו משגיח בפרטים התחתונים ואפילו במין האנושי, והוא כדעת האומרים עבים סתר לו ולא יראה וחוג שמים יתהלך (איוב כב:יד) על כן אמר א-לקינו כי הוא משגיח בנו. ומצטרף לזה שהוא מנהיגנו, ולא כוכב, ולא מזל, ולא שר משרי מעלה, רק הוא יתברך.

When we say that God is *our* God, we focus on the intimate relationship we enjoy with Him.

2. **Chatam Sofer (Rabbi Moshe Sofer), Torat Moshe, Parshat VaEtchanan – Elokeinu expresses the unique relationship between God and the Jewish People.**

Every nation has its ministering angel on whom God pours His bounty, which the angel will pour onto that nation. In contrast God watches directly over us [the Jewish people] without any intermediary and He is the Lord Who is our God Who is One.

שמע ישראל ה' אלוקינו ה' אחד: כל אומה יש לה שר שהקב"ה משפיע עליו להשפיע לאומתו, אבל אנו הקב"ה הוא משגיח עלינו בלי אמצעי וגם אלוקינו שר שלנו והיינו ה' שהוא אלוקינו הוא אחד.

PART E. GOD IS ONE

The Unity of God and His Oneness are concepts that are central to Judaism, and require elucidation due to their complexity. God's existence was not affected when He created the universe and the forces that operate therein. The Four-Letter Name of God teaches that He remains alone and One in the universe just as before creation.

This complete "Oneness" is not just a unity of two diverse elements, but rather a simple unity in which there is only One. This means that all that exists, although it may appear separate – even alien or opposed to God Himself – really exists only because God has willed it to exist and continues to will it to exist. If the Divine Power stops infusing His will into a created object, it will cease to exist. As long as God infuses His energy into the universe, it will continue. Oneness means that all of creation is really a manifestation of God's will.

1. **Rabbi Shraga Simmons, Shema Yisrael, www.aish.com – The significance of the Principle of the Oneness of God**

Why is "oneness" so central to Jewish belief? Does it really matter whether God is one and not three?

Events in our world may seem to mask the idea that God is One. One day we wake up and everything goes well. The next day everything goes poorly. What happened?! Is it possible that the same God who gives us so much goodness one day can make everything go wrong the next? We know that God is good, so how could there be so much pain? Is it just "bad luck"?

The Shema is a declaration that all events are from the One, the only One. The confusion stems from our limited perception of reality. One way of understanding God's oneness is to imagine light shining through a prism. Even though we see many colors of the spectrum, they really emanate from one light. So too, even though it seems that certain events are not caused by God, rather by some other force or bad luck, they in fact all come from the One God. In the grand eternal plan, all is "good," for God knows best...

When a Jew says Shema, it is customary to close and cover one's eyes. The other time in Jewish tradition that one's eyes are specifically closed is upon death. Just as at the end of days we will come to understand how even the "bad" was actually for the "good," so too while saying the Shema we strive for that level of belief and understanding.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION III

- ☞ **The word "Shema" has the meaning of acceptance and understanding, internalizing and concentrating on these concepts.**
- ☞ **Proclaiming "Shema" to "Israel" is a public declaration of allegiance to the Jewish people. It is also a reference to our forefather Yaakov who was also known as Israel. In that regard Shema is a reassurance to our forefather that we are going in his ways.**

- ∞ The names of God found in Shema relate to His transcendence beyond space and time, as well as to His eminent presence in this world and in our lives.
- ∞ The words “our God” highlight the closeness of the Jewish People to God and the personal nature of His relationship to his People. He is also the God of the entire universe as we affirm by proclaiming God’s unity: “God is One.”

SECTION IV. HIDDEN SECRETS OF THE SHEMA

We will devote this section to some of the meaning hidden between the lines of the Shema.

PART A. THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

There is a connection between Shema and the Ten Commandments.

1. Talmud Yerushalmi (Jerusalem Talmud), Berachot 1:5 - There is parallel between the Ten Commandments and the Shema.

Why do we read these paragraphs every day? Because the Ten Commandments are included within them.

[The following pairs, the first phrase is from the Ten Commandments, and the second is from the Shema.]

- [1] “I am the Lord your God” = “Hear”;
- [2] “You shall have no other Gods” = “The Lord is One”;
- [3] “Don’t take God’s Name in vain” = “You shall love” - one who loves the King won’t swear falsely in His Name;
- [4] “Remember the day of Shabbat” = “you will thus remember”;
- [5] “Honor you father and mother” = “you and your children will long endure on the land”;
- [6] “Do not murder” = “you will rapidly vanish” - someone who murders will be murdered;

מפני מה קורין שתי פרשיות הללו בכל יום?
מפני שעשרת הדברות כלולין בהן:

אנכי - שמע ישראל;
לא יהיה לך - ה' אחד;

לא תשא - ואהבת. מאן דרחים מלכא לא
משתבע בשמיה ומשקר,

זכור את יום השבת - למען תזכרו....

כבד את אביך ואת אמך - למען ירבו ימיכם וימי
בניכם.

לא תרצח - ואבדתם מהרה מאן דקטיל
מתקטיל.

[7] “Do not commit adultery” = “You will then not stray after your heart and eyes”;

[8] “Don’t steal” = “you will have an ample harvest” – and not the harvest of someone else;

[9] “Don’t bear false witness against your fellow” = “I am the Lord your God”;

[10] “Do not covet your fellow’s house” = “On the doorposts of your house” – *your* house and not on your friend’s house;

לא תנאף - לא תתורו אחרי לבבכם ואחרי עיניכם...

לא תגנוב (דברים יא) ואספת דגן - ולא דגנו של חבירך.

לא תענה ברעך עד שקר - אני ה' אלהיכם...

לא תחמוד בית רעך - וכתבת' על מזוזות ביתך, ביתך ולא בית חבירך.

PART B. ENLARGED LETTERS

Along with the fundamental principles of faith found in the Shema, a wide range of ideas are hinted at *in between the lines* of the Shema.

1. Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher (Baal HaTurim), Devarim 6:4 – Why are there larger letters in the first sentence of the Shema?

One, **אֶחָד**: the letter *dalet* is big [when written in a Torah scroll] to teach you that you should make Him king over the heavens and earth and the four directions of the world [*dalet* has the numerical value of 4]. Also so that you should not confuse it with a reish [which would make the word *acher* – God is “other”]. Similarly the *reish* of the verse “you shall not bow to another god” (Shemot 34:14) is a big *reish*, so that you shouldn’t confuse it with a *dalet* [spelling the word *echad* – one].

Another explanation: the *ayin* [of **שְׁמַע**, Shema] and the *dalet* of **אֶחָד** [are both big to spell the word] **עד** – witness. This is based on the verse “You are My witnesses, says God” (Yeshaya 43:10). God is also a witness for Israel, as the verse says, “I will be a quick witness” (Malachi 3:5).

אֶחָד: דל"ת גדולה לומר לך שתמליכהו בשמים ובארץ ובד' רוחות העולם וגם שלא תטעה ברי"ש, וכן רי"ש "דלא תשתחוה לאל אחר" הרי"ש גדולה שלא תטעה בדל"ת.

ד"א עי"ן ודל"ת גדולים הרי "עד" וזהו "ואתם עדי נאם ה'" וגם הקב"ה הוא עד לישראל כדכתיב "והייתי עד ממחר".

The idea of the Jewish people serving as a witness for God is further explained below.

2. **Rabbi Eli Munk, The World of Prayer, p. 114 – The Jewish people are witnesses to God’s existence.**

The last letter of the word Shema and the last letter of the word אחד (One) form עד, meaning witness. They forever remind Israel of her function, among the nations, to be the witness to the one God...to live for the ideal of אחד and, if need be, to die for it. He reaches, as it were, beyond the confines of his own being.

PART C. THE NUMBER OF LETTERS

Our Sages have taught that the soul has 248 spiritual limbs which correspond to the 248 physical limbs of the human body. Saying the Shema allows the soul to be more connected to the physical body, which enhances the body’s health (Rabbi Reuven Leuchter). The next source elaborates.

1. **Midrash Tanchuma, Kedoshim 6 – The number of words in the Shema corresponds to the number of organs in the body.**

Rabbi Mani says: Don’t take the reading of the Shema lightly, because there are 248 words in it, including the phrase “Blessed is the Name of His glorious kingdom for all eternity” [as well as the phrase “The Lord your God is true” after the Shema]. These correspond to the 248 limbs [of the body and soul]. God said, “If you guard the 248 words of the Shema and read them properly, then I will guard your [248 limbs in your body and soul].”

אמר רבי מני, לא תהא ק"ש קלה בעיניך, מפני שיש בה רמ"ח (מאתים וארבעים ושמונה) תיבות כמנין איברים שבאדם, ומהן ברוך שם. אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא, אם שמרת את שלי לקרות ק"ש כתקנה, אני אשמור את שלך.

The *Chazzan* (who leads the services) repeats the last three words of the Shema and thus we have 248 words (Zohar Chadash Midrash Rut, Maamar al Kriat Shema). When praying alone, the words “Kel Melech Ne’eman” are added to the beginning of Shema instead.

2. **Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen Rabinowitz, Dover Tzedek, Section 8 – The Shema nourishes the soul like food for the body.**

The Talmud (Berachot 2b) likens reading the Shema at the right time with eating. This teaches that reading the Shema [does for the soul] what eating does for the body.

בברכות (ב:) מדמה קריאת שמע בזמנה לזמן אכילה, עיין שם. יש לומר שהקריאת שמע דוגמת אכילה לגוף.

A person’s soul seeks subsistence in mitzvot. The Shema, which the Torah commands to recite twice a day, is an important part of the daily diet of the soul.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION IV

- ☞ There is a parallel between the Shema and the Ten Commandments.
- ☞ The enlarged letter ayin of Shema and the enlarged letter dalet of Echad spell the word Eid, or witness. In saying Shema we bear witness to the existence of God.
- ☞ The letters of Shema can be understood as acronyms for various themes relevant to the meaning of the verse itself.
- ☞ The Shema is like nourishment for the soul. The correlation between the number of words in the Shema and the number of limbs in the human body indicates the power of the Shema to protect and insure the wellbeing of the body.

SECTION V. THE SHEMA IN THE MEZUZAH AND TEFILLIN

Until now we have focused on the content and meaning of the Shema in the context of reciting the Shema as a prayer. The mezuzot and tefillin also contain parchment with the Shema written on it, and it is the Shema that imbues these items with *kedushah* (holiness). What role does the Shema serve in these mitzvot? (For a fuller understanding of the mitzvot of mezuzah and tefillin, refer to the Morasha shiurim on these topics.)

PART A. THE SHEMA IN THE MEZUZAH

A mezuzah is a small box that contains a rolled-up parchment with the first two paragraphs of the Shema written on it. Mezuzot are placed on the doorposts of the home and rooms. The mitzvah of writing and placing the mezuzah in one's home is mentioned in both the first and second paragraphs of the Shema itself.

1. Devarim (Deuteronomy), 6:4-9 – The mitzvah of mezuzah in the first paragraph of the Shema.

4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God; the Lord is One. 5 And you should love the Lord thy God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might...

9 And you should write them upon the doorposts of your house, and upon your gates.

ד שְׁמַע, יִשְׂרָאֵל: ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ, ה' אֶחָד. ה וְאָהַבְתָּ, אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ, בְּכָל-לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ, וּבְכָל-מְאֹדֶךָ. ט וְכָתַבְתָּם עַל-מְזוּזוֹת בֵּיתְךָ, וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ.

2. **Ibid. 11:13-21 – The mitzvah of mezuzah in the second paragraph of the Shema.**

13 And it shall come to pass, if you shall listen diligently to My commandments which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, 14 that I will give the rain of your land in its season, the early rain and the late rains, that you may gather in your corn, and your wine, and your oil... 20 And you shall write them upon the doorposts of your house, and upon your gates...

יג וְהָיָה, אִם-שָׁמַעַתְּ תִשְׁמְעוּ אֶל-מִצְוֹתַי, אֲשֶׁר
אֶנְכִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם, הַיּוֹם--לְאַהֲבָה אֶת-ה'
אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, וּלְעַבְדוֹ, בְּכָל-לְבַבְכֶם, וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁכֶם.
יְד וְנָתַתִּי מְטֵר-אֲרֻצְכֶם בְּעִתּוֹ, יוֹרֵה וּמְלַקֹּשׁ;
וְאִסַּפְתָּ דָגְנָהּ, וְתִירְשָׁהּ וְיִצְהַרְהָ. כ וּבִתְבִתֶּם עַל-
מְזוּזוֹת בֵּיתְךָ, וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ...

What are the messages that the mezuzah is telling us?

3. **Rambam, Hilchot Mezuzah (Laws of Mezuzah) 6:13 – The mezuzah wakes us up to live a meaningful Jewish life.**

A person is obligated to be careful with the mitzvah of mezuzah since it is continually incumbent upon each person. Each time that one enters and leaves [his home] he should concentrate on the Oneness of the Name of the Holy One, Blessed be He, and remember His love, and be aroused from his sleep and his mistaken [involvement] in the meaningless use of time. And one must know that the only thing which lasts forever is the knowledge of God.

חייב אדם להזהר במזוזה מפני שהיא חובת הכל תמיד. וכל זמן שיכנס ויצא יפגע ביחוד שמו של הקדוש ב"ה ויזכור אהבתו ויעור משנתו ושגיוותיו בהבלי הזמן. וידע שאין דבר העומד לעולם ולעולמי עולמים אלא ידיעת צור העולם.

As discussed regarding the first two paragraphs of the Shema in the Morasha Shema I class, the mezuzah projects fundamentals of Jewish belief.

4. **Rabbeinu Bachaya, Devarim 6:9 – Core principles of Jewish faith are written in the mezuzah.**

You must know that many fundamentals of faith are explained to us through the mitzvah of mezuzah: The creation of the world, Divine providence and prophecy. The concepts of the unity of God and learning Torah are in the first paragraph, and the second paragraph has the truth of reward and punishment (which itself alludes to) the Exodus from Egypt when

וצריך אתה לדעת כי מתוך המצוה הזאת יתבארו לנו עקרי התורה באמונה: חדוש העולם, וההשגחה, והנבואה, שהרי בפרשה ראשונה נזכר ענין היחוד ותלמוד תורה, ובפרשה שניה אמתת עונש ושכר, וזכרון יציאת מצרים שבו נעשים האותות והמופתים והנסים המפורסמים מחייב העקרים האלה ומעיד על שלשה דברים הללו שהן יסוד האמונה ושרשה, והם: החדוש, וההשגחה, והנבואה.... ומטעם זה נקראת בשם

many famous signs, wonders and miracles were performed. These fundamental principles obligate and testify to the following three fundamental principles of faith: creation, providence and prophecy.. For this reason it is called “mezuzah,” which has the same numerical value as God’s name *Adonai* (65). Moreover, He is called the “Guardian of Israel.” The mezuzah protects a person from outside the home, while he is inside.

According to the simple explanation, the reason that we write the name “*Shadai*” on the mezuzah is because the nations of the world think that the success of a house’s [protection] is dependent upon the influence of the stars. This name conquers and overcomes any astrological portents. Therefore, it is written to remind us that all goodness flows into our homes from God, not from the stars.

”מזוזה” שהוא במספר שם אל”ף דל”ת, והוא גם כן נקרא שומר ישראל, וכן המזוזה תשמור האדם מבחוץ והוא מבפנים.

ולפי פשוטו טעם היותנו כותבין שם של שדי במזוזה לפי שהאומות חושבים שהצלחת הבתים תלויה במערכת הכוכבים, ומפני שהשם הזה משדד ומנצח המערכת, על כן נכתוב אותו לרמוז כי ממנו השפע והטוב נכנס אל הבתים לא מן המערכה.

PART B. THE SHEMA IN TEFILLIN

The command to wear tefillin is found four times in the Torah. These four Biblical passages thus form the content of both the arm and head tefillin boxes. The first two passages deal with the Exodus from Egypt. The second two passages in the tefillin are the first and second paragraphs of the Shema.

1. Devarim, 6:4-8 - The first paragraph of the Shema mentions the mitzvah to wear tefillin on the arm and head.

4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God; the Lord is One. 5 And you should love the Lord thy God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. 6 And these words, which I command you this day, shall be upon your heart; 7 and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and you shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up. 8 And you shall bind them for a sign upon your hand, and

ד שְׁמַע, יִשְׂרָאֵל: ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ, ה' אֶחָד. ה' וְאֶהְיֶה, אֵת ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ, בְּכָל-לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ, וּבְכָל-מְאֹדְךָ. וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם--עַל-לְבָבְךָ. וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבְנֶיךָ, וְדַבַּרְתָּ בָם, בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלִקְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ, וּבְשֹׁכְבְךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ. ה' וְקִשְׂרָתָם לְאוֹת, עַל-יָדְךָ; וְהָיוּ לְטֹטְפֹת, בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ.

they shall be for frontlets between your eyes.

2. **Ibid. 11:13, 18 - The second paragraph of the Shema states the mitzvah to wear tefillin on the arm and head.**

13 And it shall come to pass, if you shall listen diligently to My commandments which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul...
18 Therefore you should place these words in your heart and in your soul; **and you shall bind them for a sign upon your hand, and they shall be for frontlets between your eyes.**

יג והיה, אם-שמע תשמעו אל-מצותי, אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם, היום--לאהבה את-ה' אלקיכם, ולעבדו, בכל-לבבכם, ובכל-נפשכם. יה ושמעתם את-דברי אלה, על-לבבכם ועל-נפשכם; וקשרתם אתם לאות על-ידיכם, והיו לטוטפת בין עיניכם.

The four biblical passages (*parshiyot*) of both the arm and the head tefillin are contained within black leather boxes called *batim* which are then wrapped onto the body with black leather straps called *retzu'ot*. What is the significance of the Shema in the tefillin?

3. **Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Tefillin – Tefillin serve as the physical reminder of God's love for us and offer a tangible way to feel that bond.**

Have you ever felt so close to another human being that every moment together was precious? Where every letter and memento from this person was something to be treasured? What if this person gave you a meaningful gift? Every time you looked at it or used it, would it not remind you of this special relationship?

Tefillin are a sign of [the] bond of love [between God and mankind]. Faith and love are very tenuous things. We can speak of them and think about them. But unless we do something about them we tend to forget; tefillin serve to help us remember.

If you would open a pair of tefillin, you would find that they contain four parchments. One of these parchments consists of the famous Shema – “Listen Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.” Tefillin concretize for us that God created the universe, orchestrates world history and is intimately involved with our daily lives.

The essence of the Torah is its commandments, *mitzvot* in Hebrew. The word *mitzvah* comes from the root meaning “to bind.” Every commandment or mitzvah serves to draw us close to God and strengthen this connection. With every mitzvah we forge a spiritual bond with God. In the case of tefillin, this bond is physical as well as spiritual. We literally bind God's love symbol to our bodies. Thus, our Sages teach us that the commandment of tefillin encompasses all others. Here, we can actually see and feel the bond.

4. Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi, Sefer HaKuzari 3:11 – Tefillin focus our thoughts and feelings on the fundamental concepts contained within them.

[A Jew] connects his mind with the Divine Influence through various means, some of which are mitzvot written in the Torah, while others are received tradition: He wears tefillin on his head, the seat of thought and memory, with the straps falling down over his arm so that he can see them at all times. He wears the arm tefillin next to the source of his faculties, that is, the heart...Inside the tefillin are written [verses describing] God's Unity, reward and punishment, and the remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt, because they furnish the irrefutable proof that the Divine Influence is attached to mankind, and that Providence watches them and keeps record of their deeds.

וקושר מצפוננו בעניין האלוקי בתחבולות, מהם מצוות כתובות ומהם מקובלות, והוא נושא התפילין על מקום המחשבה והזיכרון מהראש, ואוצל מהם רצועה מגעת אל ידו, כדי שיראה אותה עם השעות, ותפילין של יד על מבוע הכוחות, רוצה לומר הלב...והכתוב בתפילין, הייחוד והגמול והעונש וזכר יציאת מצרים, מפני שהיא טענה שאין בה מדה, כי לעניין האלוקי התחברות בכרואים והשגחה עליהם וידיעה במעשיהם.

Binding tefillin on the arm serves two symbolic purposes: (1) it recalls the “strong hand” and the “outstretched arm” that the Torah uses as metaphors for the display of God's control over nature and His Providence over the Jewish People, respectively; (2) placed on the upper left arm, the tefillin sit close to the heart, thereby signifying the intent to focus one's thoughts and desires on the fulfillment of God's Will. The head tefillin sit opposite the brain to absorb the holiness of the Divine Influence into one's intellect.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION V

- ☞ A mezuzah contains the first two paragraphs of the Shema written on parchment, rolled, inserted into a container, and then placed on the doorpost of the home and rooms. The mitzvah of writing and placing the mezuzah in one's home is contained in both the first and second paragraphs of the Shema itself.
- ☞ Many fundamentals of Jewish faith are taught to us through the mitzvah of mezuzah including the unity of God, creation, Divine providence and prophecy and the productive use of time.
- ☞ The command to wear tefillin is found four times in the Torah. These four Biblical passages thus form the content of both the arm and head tefillin boxes. The first two passages deal with the Exodus from Egypt. The second two passages in the tefillin are the first and second paragraphs of the Shema.
- ☞ Tefillin concretize for us that God created the universe, orchestrates world history and is intimately involved with our daily lives. The tefillin of the arm sits close to the heart, thereby signifying the intent to focus one's thoughts and desires on the fulfillment of God's Will. The head tefillin sits opposite the brain to absorb the holiness of the Divine Influence into one's intellect.

CLASS SUMMARY:

WHEN IS THE SHEMA SAID?

The Shema is said twice a day, every day (in the morning until four seasonal hours [hours calculated according to Jewish law], and in evening after the appearance of the stars), as well as just before going to sleep, and at the time of death.

HOW SHOULD WE SAY THE SHEMA?

At the very minimum, at least the first line of “Shema Yisrael...” should be said with complete concentration. While saying the first line, we cover our eyes with our hand to avoid any distractions and remind us that there is a deeper reality than meets the eye. To show how beloved the mitzvah is, we hold the tzitzit next to our heart and kiss them upon mentioning the word “tzitzit.”

WHAT SHOULD ONE THINK ABOUT WHILE RECITING THE SHEMA?

- One should concentrate intently on the meaning of the words in Shema, as the word Shema itself actually means “concentrate” or “internalize.”
- Shema should be said with complete concentration on accepting God’s total control and mastery over every detail of creation, referred to by the Sages as: “accepting the kingship of Heaven.”
- When we say “Israel,” we are making a public declaration to the Jewish people and confirming our allegiance to our ancestors.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE DIFFERENT NAMES OF GOD FOUND IN SHEMA?

- The names of God refer to the different ways we relate to God, indicating both that He transcends this world and yet remains in control and intimately involved with it. They also convey mankind’s awareness of God, now as God of the Jews and in the future as recognized by the whole world.
- In the Shema God is called “our God” to focus us on his involvement in our daily lives.

DO THE WORDS OF THE SHEMA HAVE ANY HIDDEN MESSAGES THAT LEND TO ITS SIGNIFICANCE?

There are many hidden messages in Shema, including enlarged letters, acronyms, and number correspondences to various ideas related to the meaning of the Shema.

WHAT SPECIAL MESSAGES ARE RELATED THROUGH THE MITZVOT OF THE MEZUZAH AND TEFILLIN WHICH CONTAIN THE WORDS OF THE SHEMA?

The mitzvah of mezuzah teaches us the unity of God, creation, Divine providence and prophecy and the productive use of time. Tefillin concretize for us that God created the universe, orchestrates world history and is intimately involved with our daily lives.

RECOMMENDED ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Rabbi Eliyahu E. Dessler, Michtav M'Eliyahu, Vol. VI, pp. 433-440

See Maharal Gur Aryeh on Bereishit 46:29 where he explains why Yaakov said Shema when he saw Yosef again after 22 years.

Lisa Aiken, The Hidden Beauty of the Shema

Norman Lamm, The Shema: Spirituality and Law in Judaism

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