Some people may wish to pause here for a moment. Some may close their eyes; others may place a hand over their eyes. The intention is to concentrate on God’s oneness.

In the absence of a minyan, we add the following:

יהוה א ?>> אלountains יי ויהי יי יי יי

Recited quietly:

ברוך שם ב création כל שבת ויום טוב.

and:

ברוך לארץ ישראל וגו'

and:

ברוך לארץ ישראל וגו'

and:

ברוך לארץ ישראל וגו'

and:

ברוך לארץ ישראל וגו'

Covers his eyes came to be seen as a sign of deep contemplation, and so it became the custom of many to cover the eyes while reciting the Sh'ma, as a moment to meditate on God’s unity.

GOD IS A FAITHFUL SOVEREIGN. These words form an acronym of amen. When we recite the Sh'ma with a minyan, the leader concludes with the words Adonai eloheikhem emet, “Your God truly”; when, in the absence of a minyan, that affirmation is not recited, we add this private affirmation at the beginning of the Sh’mah. The Kabbalists noted that the Sh’mah contained 245 words and so, by adding three additional words, we reach 248—the number of limbs in the body, according to the belief of the ancient rabbis. Thus we affirm, whether by adding words at the beginning or the end of the Sh’mah, that our entire being is dedicated to God.

SH'MA YISRAEL. To whom are these words addressed? Certainly, we are speaking to ourselves, enjoining ourselves to truly hear what our lips are saying. We may also be speaking to each other—the collective people Israel—reminding each other that we are a people united by values, nurturing our own sense of peoplehood. A moving midrash imagines these words recited by Jacob’s sons, addressed to their father Jacob/Israel, reassuring him on his deathbed that they remain true to his teachings, and that the God of Jacob is and will remain “their God” (Genesis Rabbah 98:3). And so, we too may be speaking to our forebears, reassuring our ancestors (all the way back to Jacob) that their legacy continues in us.

ONE. The Hebrew word ehad, “one,” has been variously interpreted. It can mean that God is totally unified and not made up of parts, as is the case with everything else we encounter in the universe. It can mean unique, that God is different from all else we encounter. It can mean “only” that there is no other being who is divine. Mystics interpret it as meaning that God is one with the universe—or in another formulation, present throughout the universe.

PRAISED BE THE NAME. This phrase is not part of the biblical text but was the customary response of those assembled to hearing the name of God as part of priestly prayers in the Temple. To differentiate it from the actual biblical text, it is recited silently. In the legend mentioned above, this sentence constituted Jacob’s response to his children’s affirmation, and so it is voiced differently.

INSCRIBE THEM UPON THE DOORPOSTS. The observant Jew lives a life surrounded by the Sh’mah: reciting it in the morning upon arising and at night before going to sleep, walking past its inscription on the mezuzah when entering one’s home, and even adorning oneself with the words on weekday mornings upon one’s head and near one’s heart when putting on t’fillin, phylacteries.