

קְרִיאַת שְׁמַע

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 our relationship with God's oneness. In the absence of a minyan, we add the following: אֵל מֶלֶךְ נֶאֱמָן.

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד.

Recited quietly: בְּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.

וְאַהֲבַת אֵת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל-לִבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ

וּבְכָל-מַאֲדֶךָ: וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצֻוֶּה

הַיּוֹם עַל-לִבְּךָ: וְשָׁנַנְתָּם לְבִנְיָךְ וְדִבַּרְתָּ בָם בְּשַׁבְּתֶךָ

בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלִכְתֶּךָ בְּדֶרֶךְךָ וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ:

וּקְשַׁרְתָּם לְאוֹת עַל-יָדֶךָ וְהָיוּ לְטָטְפֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ:

וּכְתַבְתָּם עַל-מְזוֹזֹת בֵּיתְךָ וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ:

דברים ו:ד-ט

THE SH'MA. The Sh'ma comprises three paragraphs from the Torah, selected because they express basic Jewish beliefs and behaviors. According to the ancient rabbis, the first of the three paragraphs proclaims recognition of the sovereignty of heaven, עוֹל (ol malkhut shamayim); the second speaks to our behavior, עוֹל (ol mitzvot); and the third reminds us of the Exodus, יְצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם (y'tzi-at mitzrayim), our primary sacred story.

Because the first paragraph itself commands us to speak these words when we lie down and when we arise, and the second paragraph repeats these very

words, the Sh'ma is recited twice daily, in both the evening and in the morning.

HEAR שְׁמַע. Seeing emphasizes the external; hearing, the internal. We are asked to internalize our experience of God. The point is emphasized by the custom of covering one's eyes during the recitation of the Sh'ma.

ONE אֶחָד. As an affirmation about God, the word *ehad* can be understood in multiple ways. This translation emphasizes the unity of God. Some translate *ehad* as "unique," emphasizing God's otherness and singularity. Still others translate it as "alone," emphasizing Judaism's monotheistic claim.

Mystic commentators expand the meaning of "one," interpreting it as describing the unity of heaven and earth, saying that we are ultimately all part of the One. In a similar vein, some rabbinic authorities recommended that when reciting the Sh'ma, one should meditate on all four directions, as well as above and below, in acknowledgment that God is everywhere (Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 13b).

PRAISED BE THE NAME שְׁם בְּרוּךְ. According to the Mishnah, when God's name was pronounced by the High Priest on Yom Kippur, the people would respond, "Praised be the name . . ." (Yoma 3:8). Since this is a response but not part of the biblical text, it is normally not recited out loud, in order not to interrupt the flow of biblical verses—though the memory of how it was recited in the Temple remains with us in a whisper.

YOU SHALL LOVE וְאַהֲבַת. Repeatedly the Torah instructs us to love: to love God, to love our neighbor, and to love the stranger. We might well take the word "love" to imply an intense inner emotion, but the ancient rabbis frequently understood the biblical injunction to "love" in a more concrete and behavioral sense: love consists of acts of empathy, care, and kindness as well as behavior toward others that is just and righteous. To love God is certainly to recognize our conscious relationship to God. Equally, it may mean that we behave in ways that are pleasing to God—acting morally and fulfilling what God desires of us, to walk through life lovingly.