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:

 aloud שמחה יראת יԷרה אלוהים: יどんな steht.

Recited quietly: ברכת שמחה יראת י_hero אלוהים: יどんな steht.

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, י陸לו מלקות שמחים (al malkut shamayim); the second speaks to our behavior, י昉ו מלקות (al mitzvot); and the third reminds us of the exodus, יראי יזיר (y’zi-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 שמחה. 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’mah.

One מ déc. As an affirmation about God, the word ench can be understood in multiple ways. This translation emphasizes the unity of God. Some translate ench 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’mah, 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 שמחה! 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 שמחה! 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.
IF YOU WILL HEAR אֲשֶׁר אֶלֶּה יִשְׁמַעְתָּם. This description of reward and punishment has been a source of theological struggle for every Jewish generation, including those of the biblical era itself, and many Reform and some Reconstructionist congregations omit this paragraph. While our life experience often belies a belief in direct and immediate reward and punishment, in reciting this passage we may open ourselves to the suggestion that the consequences of our moral and immoral behavior resound in the world—though in ways that we may not grasp and that are beyond our comprehension. Jews, who have seen empires come and go, are witnesses to the inner decay wrought by corruption, injustice, and unbounded power.

ADONAI SAID TO MOSES יְרוּם יִתְנָה. The ancient rabbis emphasized that the last words of this paragraph, about remembering the exodus from Egypt, are the prime reason for its inclusion in the Sh’mah. In Jewish theology, the exodus anticipates the redemption in the future: true freedom. The means of achieving redemption, we are taught here, is remembering our responsibility to live lives that are holy.

NOT BE SEDUCED BY YOUR EYES AND HEARTaira an Turns. The sages comment that it is the heart that directs the eyes. What we see depends on our perspective, our point of view.

The Torah אֵלֶּה יִשְׁמַעְתָּם. This is the essence of the Torah: to lead a holy life.