

שמע Shema

What does it mean to you? When do we say it?



Section 1: Shema is central in our lives

A. Talmud Bavli, Succah 42a – As soon as a child can speak, we teach Shema.

a child...who knows how to speak, his father teaches him the phrase, "Torah Tziva lanu Moshe Morasha Kehillas Yaakov [Devarim/Deuteronomy 33:4] and the first verse of the Shema.	קטן... יודע לדבר, אביו למדו תורה [צוה לנו משה מורשה קהלת יעקב] וקריאת שמע
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B. Rabbi Avraham Danzig, Chochmat Adam 151:12 –The last words recited before taking leave of this world.

The order of confession (on the deathbed)...he should say "Shema Yisrael..." and "Blessed is the Name of His glorious kingdom for all eternity."	סדר ודוי ... ויאמר שמע ישראל וגו' ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד
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C. Rabbi Boruch Leff, Forever His Students – Start and end of life

We begin life with the Shema. From our earliest days, our parents said it with us as they put us to sleep in our cribs. We were trained to say the Shema as soon as we were able to speak (as per the law in Rambam Talmud Torah 1:6). We say it (at least) twice daily in our prayers. And in the end, we die with the Shema on our lips.

D. R' Tzadok Hacohen Rabinowitz, Tzidkat HaTzadik 4: Bar/Bas Mitzva

The first mitzva that a man is obligated in when he becomes Bar Mitzva is reading the Shema in the evening [when it is dark] ...	מצוה ראשונה שנתחייב האדם כשנעשה בן י"ג שנה הוא קריאת שמע של ערבית....
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E. Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz, Shema Yisrael, Introduction, ArtScroll Mesorah – The Shema infuses our life with purpose.

Morning and night, the Jew shuts his eyes and proclaims the Shema - Hashem is ours and He is One. Life's most meaningful moments are punctuated with the Shema: when he dedicates his new day and surrenders to helpless sleep in the unknown night, when the Jew prepares to read the Torah on Sabbaths and festivals, at the climax of Yom Kippur, and at the culmination of life when his soul leaves its earthly host. In the mezuzah, the Shema sanctifies his home and in his tefillin it sanctifies his intellect and strength.

F. Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky, Parshas Terumah, www.torah.org

Rabbi Eliezer Silver (Rabbi of Cincinnati, Ohio) came to the Alsace-Lorraine region of France after World War II he found Jewish children in monasteries



Yakov Shweky song: Shema Yisrael (Scan QR code)

G. Dr. Lisa Aiken, The Hidden Beauty of the Shema, Introduction – Surrounds our day and the purpose of life.

The commandments to which the Shema refers - *tefillin* (leather boxes containing parchments that are put on a man's head and arm), *mezuzah* (a parchment with Torah verses that we put on our doorposts), *zitzis* (fringes that are put on a four-cornered garment), and remembering the Exodus from Egypt - are also part of our daily lives.

Thus, the Shema literally accompanies us from cradle to grave....
The Shema can help us regain our spiritual bearings and infuse us with tremendous spiritual energy only if we appreciate and concentrate on what we are saying.

H. 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 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; don't be afraid....."

כִּי־תֵצֵא לַמִּלְחָמָה עַל־אִיְבֹיֶיךָ....
וְאָמַר אֱלֹהִים שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל אַתֶּם
קִרְבִּים הַיּוֹם לַמִּלְחָמָה עַל־
אִיְבֵיכֶם אֶל־יְיָ לְבַבְכֶם אֶל־
תִּירָאוּ

Covering our eyes

I. Rabbi Mordecai Yoffe, Levush 60:5 – We should cover 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 else (that will prevent them from concentrating.)

לְפִיכֶן הַקּוֹרֵא אֶת שְׁמַע וְלֹא כִּיּוֹן לְבוֹ
בְּפֶסוּק רִאשׁוֹן. .. לֹא יֵצֵא יָדָיו חוּבְתוֹ. .. וְגַם
נוֹהֲגִין לִיתֵן יָדֵיהֶם עַל פְּנֵיהֶם בְּקִרְיַת
פֶּסוּק רִאשׁוֹן, כְּדִי שֶׁלֹּא יִסְתַּכֵּל בְּדַבַּר אַחֵר

J. Rambam Hilchos Krias Shema 2:8 – Don't get distracted

Someone who reads the Shema, 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.

הַקּוֹרֵא קִרְיַת שְׁמַע לֹא יִרְמַז בְּעֵינָיו,
וְלֹא יִקְרוֹץ בְּשִׁפְתָיו, וְלֹא יִרְאֶה
בְּאֶצְבָּעוֹתָיו, כְּדִי שֶׁלֹּא תִהְיֶה קִרְיַת
עֲרָאִי. וְאִם עָשָׂה כֵן-- אֵף עַל פִּי
שְׂיֵצֵא יָדָיו חוּבְתוֹ, הֲרִי זֶה מְגַנָּה.

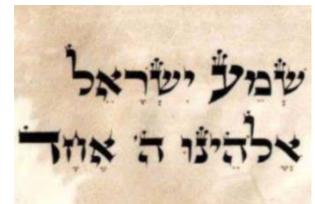
K. Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair (ohr.edu) – In order to sense the reality that lies behind what our five senses tell us, we cover our eyes.

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.

Section 2: The Words of Shema – Paragraph 1
Devarim 6:4-9 Vaeschanan

<p>Listen, Israel, the Lord is our Gd, the Lord is One. <i>(Blessed is the Name of His glorious kingdom for all eternity.)</i> You shall love the Lord your Gd with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. These words which I am commanding you today must remain in your heart. And you shall teach them to your children and speak of them when you are at home, when traveling on the way, when you lie down and when you get up. And you shall bind [these words] as a sign on your hand, and let them be an emblem between your eyes. And you shall write them on [parchments affixed to] the doorposts of your houses and gates.</p>	<p>שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד: <i>(בְּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד):</i> וְאֶהְבֵּתָ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל / לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל מְאֹדְךָ: וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם עַל- / לִבְבְּךָ וְשִׁנְתֶם לְבַנְיֶיךָ וְדַבַּרְתָּ בָם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלִכְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ: וְקָשַׁרְתָּם לְאוֹת עַל יָדְךָ וְהָיוּ לְטֹטְפֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ: וְכָתַבְתָּם עַל מַזְזוֹת בֵּיתְךָ וּבִשְׁעָרֶיךָ:</p>
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- A. **שְׁמַע אַחַר**
- B. **the numbers 4 and 8**
- C. **Baal Haturim** A Jew bears witness to the oneness of Hashem



שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד

D. Six constant Mitzvos

To Know There is a Gd	Shemos 20:2 (2) I the LORD am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt	שמות כ':ב' (ב) אֲנִכִּי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
Not to Believe in gods of others	Shemos 20:3 (3) You shall have no other gods besides Me.	שמות כ':ג' (ג) לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל-פְּנֵי
To Know That Gd is One	Devarim 6:4 (4) Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.	דברים ו':ד' (ד) שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד:
To Love Gd	Devarim 6:5 (5) You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.	דברים ו':ה' (ה) וְאֶהְבֵּתָ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל-לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל-מְאֹדְךָ:
To Be in Awe of Gd	Devarim 10:20 (20) You must revere the LORD your God: only Him shall you worship, to Him shall you hold fast, and by His name shall you swear.	דברים י':כ' (כ) אֶת-ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ תִירָא אֹתוֹ תַעֲבֹד וְכֹוּ תִדְבֹק וּבִשְׁמוֹ תִשָּׁבַע:
Not to Be Led Astray by Our Desires	Bamidbar 15:39 (39) ...do not follow your heart and eyes in your lustful urge.	במדבר ט"ו:ל"ט (לט) ...וְלֹא-תִתְּרוּ אַחֲרֵי לִבְבְּכֶם וְאַחֲרֵי עֵינֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר-אַתֶּם זֹנִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם:

E. Rambam, Sefer HaMitzvos, Positive Mitzva 2 – The meaning of belief in the unity of Gd.

<p>Reciting the Shema is the commandment that we are obligated to believe in the unity of Gd. This means that the ongoing Sustainer of existence and the original Cause for the universe are One. This is what is expressed by "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our Gd, the Lord is One." [Devarim 6:4].</p>	<p>היא הצווי שְׁצוּנוּ בְּאִמּוֹנַת הַיְחוד וְהוא שְׁנֵאָמִין כִּי פּוֹעֵל הַמְצִיאוֹת וּסְבֵתוֹ הָרֵאשׁוֹנָה אֶחָד וְהוא אִמְרוּ יִתְעַלָּה שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד.</p>
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F. Sifri, Parshas Vaeschanan 31 –Hashem is now the Gd of the Jewish People, in the future the entire world will recognise Him as Gd.

<p>[Why does the first line of the Shema say] "the Lord our Gd"? [Rather, it should just say], "the Lord is One"? What does "our Gd" come to teach us? (Since the essential idea is that Gd is One, why is it significant to add "our Gd"?) ["Our Gd" teaches that] His Name is especially upon us [the Jewish people]... and the phrase "Gd is One" means that He is Gd upon all the inhabitants of the world.</p> <p>[Another explanation "The Lord our Gd" refers to Him in this world. "Gd is One" refers to the World to Come. Similarly it says, "Gd will be King over the whole world. On that day [in the World to Come] Gd will be One and His Name will be One" (Zecharia 14:9).</p>	<p>ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְמָה נֵאָמַר וְהֵלֵא כָּבֵר נֵאָמַר ה' אֶחָד וְמָה תִּלְמֹד לִוְמַר אֱלֹהֵינוּ עֲלֵינוּ הוֹחֵל שְׁמוֹ בְּיִתְרָה ... דְּבַר אַחֵר... ה' אֶחָד עַל כָּל בְּאֵי הָעוֹלָם</p> <p>ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה, ה' אֶחָד לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא. וְכֵן הוּא אוֹמֵר (זְכָרְיָה י"ד:ט) וְהָיָה ה' לְמֶלֶךְ עַל כָּל הָאָרֶץ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יִהְיֶה ה' אֶחָד וְשְׁמוֹ אֶחָד.</p>
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היה הוה יהיה

G. Sefer Hachinuch Mitzva 417 – The entire Torah is predicated on the ideas in the Shema.

<p>One who transgresses this commandment and does not believe in the unity of the Blessed One, also negates all the other mitzvot in the Torah, for they are all dependent on belief in Gd and His unity...</p>	<p>וְעוֹבֵר עַל זֶה וְאֵינוּ מֵאֲמִין בְּחֵדוֹ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּטֵל עֲשֵׂה זֶה, וְגַם כָּל שְׂאֵר מִצְוֹת הַתּוֹרָה, כִּי כָּלֵם תְּלוּיֹת בְּאִמּוֹנַת אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְיִחְדוּ...</p>
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H. ArtScroll Siddur, Commentary on "the One [and only]", p. 91 – Harmony in all of Gd's actions.

<p>The word (One) has two connotations: (a) There is no other Gd other than Him (Rashbam); and (b) though we perceive Gd in many roles -- kind, angry, merciful, wise, judging, and so on -- these attitudes are not contradictory, even though human intelligence does not comprehend their harmony. Harav Gedaliah Schorr likened this concept to a ray of light seen through a prism. Though one sees a myriad of different colours, they are all a single ray of light. So, too, Gd's many manifestations are truly one.</p>
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If you have any questions or comments please email chava@wulwick.co.uk