

# The Sh'ma

**Sh'ma Yisrael Yahweh Eloheinu, Yahweh Echad  
Baruk Shem Kavod Malkuto L'olam Vaed.  
(Devarim 6:4-9)**



## INTRODUCTION

- a. Before saying the Shema in the morning and evening prayers, one must have in mind that he is going to perform the Mitzvot of 1) reciting the Shema and of 2) accepting Yahweh as King over us and our lives.
- b. The Shema should be said clearly and distinctly, pausing slightly between a word that begins with the same sound that the previous one ended, like *al levavecha* or *vechara af*.
- c. One must hear every word he recites and concentrate only on its meaning and that Yahweh is One.
- d. In the morning, when saying the words, "Vahavi'enu leshalom [Bring us in peace]," in the prayer before the Shema, we gather the four Tzitzit. They are then held close to the heart, between the fourth and fifth fingers of the left hand.

### 1. KEL MELECH NE'EMAN – ELOHIM FAITHFUL KING

When praying without a Minyan, these three words are added, to make up 248 words, since there is no Chazzan to repeat the last three words of the Shema. This number corresponds to both the number of the positive Mitzvot and the number of the organs in our body. When saying these words, we must think: 1) Yahweh has unlimited power and mercy; 2) He is the King Who watches over everything; 3) He is absolutely fair to everyone.

### 2. HEAR O YISRAEL YAHWEH OUR ELOHIM, YAHWEH IS ONE

We recite this sentence out loud and with our right hand covering the eyes, for special concentration. One should think about the first two Mitzvot of the Ten Words: "I am Yahweh your Elohim," and "You shall have no other gods." "Yahweh" is mentioned twice here: As He is now the Elohim of the Yisraelite people, in the future He will be recognized also by all other people as the One Elohim (Rashi). When saying YAHWEH, one should think that He is Master over everything, and that He is, was and will always be. ELOHIM means that He can do anything and that He controls all the forces. We stretch out the word ECHAD [One], concentrating on Yahweh being One Who rules on earth and the seven heavens and in all four directions (, north, south, east and west.)

### 3. BLESSED BE HIS NAME AND HIS GLORIOUS KINGDOM IS FOREVER

After declaring that Yahweh is our King, we thank Him for the opportunity to serve Him. Unlike the rest of the Shema, this sentence is not in the Torah. That's why we say it in a whisper (Pesachim 56a) and pause slightly before continuing. Also, since Moshe Rabbeinu learned it from the malakim according to tradition, we do not say it out loud as they do, except on Yom Kippur (Tur), when we act like them (by not eating and not sinning, etc.).

### 4. AND YOU SHALL LOVE YAHWEH YOUR ELOHIM..

We should have the intention of fulfilling the Mitzvah of loving Yahweh Who created everything and watches over it. How does one "love" Yahweh? - By learning His Torah, by doing His Mitzvot, by bringing others to Torah and the Moshiach, by setting a good example through good behavior, and by loving Talmidei Chachamim (Torah scholars).(Studying Torah; doing Mitzvot - Tzedakah, Kibbud Av, etc.; helping a scholar.)

## **5. WITH ALL YOUR HEART...**

We must love Yahweh with all our powers and feelings. Since "heart" is spelled l'vaveka and not lev, this implies that we should serve Him with both our Yetzer Hatov and Yetzer Hara. . For example, if we have feelings of jealousy, be jealous of scholars; if we are angry, take out our anger on sinners (Rashi).  
(Running to do a Mitzvah; demonstrating against Chillul Shabbos, etc.)

## **6. AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL...**

We must also love Yahweh with all our will and desires. If we have to, it even means that we must give up our life, as Yizchak was willing to do or as our Rebbe Yahshua did.

## **7. AND WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT (STRENGTH)**

We should not love money or property more than we love Yahweh. M'odeka could also mean "measures," so that we must love Yahweh regardless of whether He gives us much or little, happiness or sadness. He always knows and does what is best for us.

## **8. AND LET THESE WORDS WHICH I COMMAND YOU TODAY [BE] UPON YOUR HEART**

"These words" means all of Yahweh's Mitzvot, but especially the one just mentioned: "You shall love Yahweh." EVERY DAY they should be to you as if they were just said to you TODAY! Also, if you are always aware of Torah and Mitzvot, you will automatically be full of love for Yahweh.  
Remember to pause between HAYOM (today) and AL (upon), otherwise you'll be saying that these words shall be upon your heart only today!

## **9. AND YOU SHALL TEACH THEM DILIGENTLY TO YOUR CHILDREN**

Of course, in order to teach the Torah "diligently" one must first study it carefully and then review it constantly to know it well. "Your children" refers to other students as well.

## **10. AND SPEAK OF THEM WHEN SITTING AT HOME, WALKING ON THE WAY, LYING DOWN OR GETTING UP**

Our main speaking should be words of Torah. By always talking in Torah, we'll remember it well. It should be our guide and focal point no matter what we are doing, day or night. From here we also learn that we must recite the Shema in the morning and in the evening (Berachos 2a),

## **11. AND BIND THEM AS A SIGN UPON YOUR ARM**

Both the arm and head Tefillin contain the four Torah sections (the parchment on which they're written is the "sign") which mention this Mitzvah. They also contain the concepts of Yahweh being our Elohim; His unity; the Mitzvot; reward and punishment; and the Exodus from Egypt. Tefillin shel Yad are put onto one's "left" arm, on the large muscle, opposite the heart, to show that our strength and feelings must be dedicated to Yahweh. We keep the arm Tefillin covered up. It is a custom to touch and kiss the Tefillin shel Yad when saying the above words.

## **12. AND THEY SHALL BE totafot [TEFILLIN] BETWEEN YOUR EYES**

Totafot (a double plural - Sanhedrin 4b) implies that the head Tefillin are written on four parchments. These are located in four separate sections in the box, which must be placed above the beginning of the hairline, and kept centered between the eyes. This symbolizes that our brain and thoughts must also be dedicated to Yahweh. It is a custom to touch and kiss the Tefillin shel Rosh when saying the above words.

### **13. AND YOU SHALL WRITE THEM UPON THE DOORPOSTS OF YOUR HOUSE AND UPON YOUR GATES**

The Mezuzah is a piece of parchment which contains the two sections of the Torah that mention this Mitzvah (Devarim 6:4-8 and 11:13-21). It is placed on the upper third of the right doorpost of our entrances. The Mezuzah reminds us that Yahweh is the true owner of our property, that we must consider our house as a holy place, and that He protects us and expects us to think of Him (and not come to sin) at home as well as away. It is customary to touch the Mezuzah and kiss our fingers when entering or leaving the house.

### **II. VEHAYA IM SHAMO'A** (Devarim 7:13-21)

#### **INTRODUCTION**

- a. The second part of the Shema speaks of reward for doing the Mitzvot and punishment for violating them.
- b. In the first part, we accepted Yahweh as the One King over us. Here, we take upon ourselves to obey His Mitzvot (Berachos 13a).
- c. In this paragraph, Yahweh speaks to the Yisrael in the plural - all together. There are things which we do alone and for which Yahweh judges us as individuals (for example, putting on Tefillin, making a Bracha on food, honoring parents, giving charity).

There are also things, which we should do in groups, such as praying or reading the Torah. For all the above, Yahweh also judges entire Yisrael as one, so that our own behavior affects how He will treat others and us as well!

### **14. AND IT WILL COME TO PASS, IF YOU WILL DILIGENTLY LISTEN TO MY MITZVOT**

Yahweh promises to reward Yisrael when they obey Him. This verse begins with "Vehaya" which implies joy: Yahweh will surely reward us for doing the Mitzvot with happiness. The verb "listen" is used twice - "shamo'a tishme'u" - to teach us that once we listen it will become easier and easier to do so in the future.

### **15. WHICH I COMMAND YOU TODAY**

The Mitzvot should always be fresh in your eyes, as if you got them today! This means that they ought to be done eagerly, today, and not be postponed. And whenever you perform them, remember that it is not just due to the fact that they are good or logical, but because Yahweh Who wants us to observe them gave them.

### **16. TO LOVE YAHWEH YOUR ELOHIM AND TO SERVE HIM WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL**

Do the Mitzvot because you love Yahweh, not for personal gain or honor. We serve Yahweh "with our heart" by praying to Him (Ta'anis 2a) every day, especially with a group ("your heart" and "your soul" are in the plural). With "all your heart" means that we must concentrate on the prayers and not let our thoughts wander! We must also put our "soul" - all our energy - into serving Yahweh.

\*\*Remember to separate the sounds between the two words *b'chol l'vavchem*.

### **17. [THEN] I WILL GIVE RAIN FOR YOUR LAND AT THE RIGHT TIME**

If you perform the Mitzvot with love, I will reward you for well. People, animals, plants - the whole world - needs rain for its sustenance, health and beauty. The rain will fall "at the right time" for the crops, and when it is most agreeable, for example, on Friday nights when people are home.

## **18. THE FALL AND SPRING RAINS**

Yahweh will provide rain after the planting season, when the seeds and plants need it most, right up to springtime when the crops are ready to be harvested. This is especially important in Eretz Yisrael which depends so much on Yahweh to send His rain "at the right time," in the fall and winter!

## **19. SO THAT YOU MAY GATHER IN YOUR GRAIN, YOUR WINE AND YOUR OIL**

"You" will gather in your crops and not your enemies. Also, you may gather in your own, but be careful not to take someone else's ("Your grain," etc., is in the singular, to remind each individual of this). Of course, the real reward for keeping Yahweh's Mitzvot will be given in Olam Haba. By giving us rain, food, etc., Yahweh is only making it easier for us to keep His Mitzvot, since we are showing Him that that is what we really want to do!

## **20. AND I WILL GIVE GRASS IN YOUR FIELD FOR YOUR CATTLE**

You will have so much from your own fields that you will not have to lead your cattle far away to feed them (Rashi). This will also make it easier for you to spend more time learning Torah and doing Mitzvot.

## **21. AND YOU WILL EAT AND BE SATISFIED**

You will be satisfied and full after eating the good food Yahweh will give you (Rashi). You will have good crops and animals (meat) to eat. Your cattle will also be satisfied, so that they will do good work for you. Since "grass...for your cattle" is mentioned before "you will eat," the Rabbis taught that we must feed our animals before eating our own meal (Berachos 40a).

## **22. BE CAREFUL LEST YOUR HEART BE TEMPTED**

When all is going well and people are satisfied, there is a danger that they will forget about Yahweh and not be careful to remember that their success comes only from Him. This can lead to tragedy, as the Shema goes on to tell us....

## **23. AND YOU TURN ASTRAY AND SERVE OTHER GODS AND BOW TO THEM**

When one turns away from the Torah, he will turn to substitutes, to "false gods" which cannot really help him. He will waste his time and begin doing things, which are bad, and destructive, leading to his own ruin.

## **24. THEN YAHWEH WILL ACT ANGRILY WITH YOU**

Of course, Yahweh does not "get angry" like people do. But someone who rebels against Him will feel like He is acting angry at him. Yahweh loves us and tries to teach us to change our behavior when we're wrong. His punishment is a lesson of love. A smart person will take it to heart! The same applies when Yahweh gives warnings to the people in Eretz Yisrael.

\*\*Remember, when saying this verse, to separate between the first two words (Vechara af).

## **25. HE WILL RESTRAIN THE SKIES AND THERE WILL BE NO RAIN**

When the people don't act according to the Torah, Yahweh withholds rain so that they will do Teshuvah (repentance). This is especially true in Eretz Yisrael, where "the eyes of Yahweh...are on it at all times" (Devarim 10:12).

## **26. AND THE GROUND WILL NOT GIVE ITS PRODUCE**

What grows will not even replace the seeds that you planted. The Land of Yisrael is supposed to be "flowing with milk and honey" (Shemot 3:8, etc.) - very fruitful. Sadly, our sins can cause it to literally "dry up."

## **27. AND YOU WILL QUICKLY BE CAST OUT FROM THE GOOD LAND WHICH YAHWEH GIVES YOU**

If we don't repent when there is no rain or food, Yahweh will remove us from the Land. Rashi says that this will happen fast, not like the long warning given to the world at the time of the Mabul (Flood), because, unlike them, we have people who can teach us to live better.

Remember to separate between the words va'avad'tem mehera.

## **28. PUT THESE WORDS OF MINE UPON YOUR HEART AND UPON YOUR SOUL**

Even if Yahweh exiles you from Eretz Yisrael, you must be different from the Goyim -- practice the Mitzvot (for example, lay Tefillin, and put Mezuzot on your doorposts) -- you will come back to keep them in the Land.

\*\* Remember to separate the words Vesamtem es

\*\* Remember to separate the words al levavchem

## **29. AND BIND THEM AS A SIGN UPON YOUR ARM**

Since this follows the words, "upon your heart," we learn that the Tefillin are placed on the arm facing the heart.

This reminds us to dedicate our strength and feelings to Yahweh. The Tefillin shel Yad is kept covered up.

It is customary to touch and kiss the Tefillin shel Yad when saying these words.

## **30. AND THEY SHALL BE TOTAFOT [TEFILLIN] BETWEEN YOUR EYES**

Check that the Tefillin remain centered between the eyes and above where the hairline starts. (Bald people should imagine where the old hairline used to be!) They are placed there to remind us that our brain and thoughts must be directed to Yahweh. It is customary to touch and kiss the Tefillin shel Rosh when saying these words.

## **31. TEACH THEM TO YOUR CHILDREN, TO SPEAK [OF] THEM**

We, ourselves, must study Torah very well, so that we might eventually fulfill the Mitzvah of teaching it to our children (and other students). Also, if others see that we take our learning seriously, they will be encouraged to follow our example.

We should teach our children Torah and Hebrew ("to speak them") --.

## **32. WHEN SITTING AT HOME, WALKING ON THE WAY, LYING DOWN OR GETTING UP**

Study and review the Torah wherever and whenever you can. (Of course, make sure that you and the place are clean!) The Shema must be recited both in the evening and in the morning. We do not have to rise or sit down before saying it.

## **33. AND YOU SHALL WRITE THEM UPON THE DOORPOSTS OF YOUR HOUSE AND UPON YOUR GATES**

Again, the Mezuzah reminds us that Yahweh is the true owner of our property, that we must consider our house as a holy place, and that He protects us and expects us to think of Him (and not come to sin) at home as well as away.

It is customary to touch the Mezuzah and kiss our fingers upon entering or leaving the house.

### **34. IN ORDER THAT YOUR DAYS AND THE DAYS OF YOUR CHILDREN WILL BE PROLONGED**

By going to Shul in the morning and evening, one can live long.  
If you learn Torah and fulfill the Mitzvot, Yahweh will prolong your days.

### **35. UPON THE LAND WHICH HASHEM SWORE TO GIVE TO YOUR ANCESTORS, AS LONG AS HEAVEN IS ABOVE THE EARTH**

Our living in Eretz Yisrael (staying in it, being exiled or returning to it) depends on our observance of the Mitzvot. Yahweh swore to give the Land "to them [your ancestors]" -- this proves that the Torah promises Techiyas Ha-Meisim, that the dead will again live. Yisrael and the Torah are a pair, as heaven and earth. One has no meaning without the other. Also, by observing the Torah, Yisrael will bring the heavenly (kedushah -- holiness) down upon earth and lift up the earth to high heaven.

### **III. VAYOMER YAHWEH** (Bamidbar 15:37-41)

#### **INTRODUCTION**

- a. The Gemara (Berachos 12b) points out that these verses make up the third section of the Shema because five Mitzvot are mentioned in them: 1) Tzitzit; 2) Remembering the Exodus from Egypt; 3) Accepting the Mitzvot and not heretical (Apikorsus -- anti-Torah) ideas; 4) Not to think about sinning or 5) following other gods.
- b. Unlike Tefillin, Tzitzit are worn even on Shabbos as a constant reminder to keep Yahweh's Mitzvot.
- c. Before starting this section in the morning, it is customary to take hold of the strings of the Tzitzit with the right hand, while still keeping the knotted parts in the left.

### **36. AND YAHWEH SAID TO MOSHE, SAYING: SPEAK TO THE CHILDREN [SONS] OF ISRAEL AND SAY TO THEM**

"Saying" -- literally, "to say" -- implies that the Torah is to be said and taught to every generation, because it applies to all times! As the Rambam says: "I believe...the entire Torah we now have is the one that was given to Moshe...and there will never be another Torah."

### **37. THAT THEY MAKE FOR THEMSELVES TZITZIT [TASSELS] ON THE CORNERS OF THEIR CLOTHES**

There are four doubled-over strings (8), containing 39 twists (7, 8, 11 and 13) and five double knots on each corner. By putting tzitzit on the four corners of our clothes, we have an opportunity to fulfill a Mitzvah all day just by wearing them! When saying the word "tzitzit," it is customary to kiss them.

### **38. THROUGHOUT THEIR GENERATIONS**

Tzitzit are to be worn by all Yisraelites.

### **39. AND THEY SHALL PUT ON THE TZITZIT OF EACH CORNER A STRING OF T'CHEILET**

The color of T'cheilet comes from the Chilazon -- a rare snail-like fish that was seen only once every seventy years. Rambam says that it was the color of a clear blue sky.  
(Remember to kiss the tzitzit.)

#### **40. THIS SHALL BE TZITZIT FOR YOU, SO THAT YOU MAY SEE IT**

After kissing the tzitzit here, we look at them and think of the Mitzvah to do so. Many then touch them to the eyes. Many people wear their tzitzit in a way that they can easily be seen at all times by wearing a tallit katan.

#### **41. AND REMEMBER ALL THE MITZVOT OF YAHWEH AND DO THEM**

The Rabbis give several reasons why the tzitzit remind us of Yahweh and His Mitzvot. For example, the bluish color of T'CHEILET is like that of the sky, or Yahweh's "Throne of Glory." Also, the gematria (numerical value) of Tzitzit (600), plus the 8 strings and 5 knots, equals 613, the number of Mitzvot in the Torah!

Of course, the purpose of thinking of the Mitzvot is that we be reminded to do them.

#### **42. AND YOU WILL NOT STRAY AFTER YOUR HEART AND AFTER YOUR EYES WHICH MISLEAD YOU [AWAY FROM ME]**

We must not think about or look at forbidden things, because this will cause us to do them. Also, even if we are unable to understand Yahweh and His ways, we must not doubt Him or His Torah.

Some people pass the tzitzit over the eyes when saying "and after your eyes."

#### **43. IN ORDER THAT YOU REMEMBER AND KEEP ALL MY MITZVOT**

By avoiding bad thoughts, you will be able to think of Yahweh's greatness and His loving-kindness, and perform His Mitzvot out of love and respect. Hopefully, if we remind ourselves of Yahweh's Mitzvot every time we look at the tzitzit, we will come to think of them and to perform them even without this reminder!

#### **44. AND BE HOLY TO YOUR ELOHIM**

By performing the Mitzvot, and refraining from thinking about and doing bad things, we will become the "Am Kadosh" -- Holy Nation -- Yahweh wants us to be.

The Ramban says that being "holy" means limiting our enjoyment even from things that are allowed, like eating, sleeping or playing. In other words, practicing self-control -- not having "too much" of something.

#### **45. I AM YAHWEH YOUR ELOHIM**

The Name "Yahweh" implies that He rewards those who follow His Mitzvot. "Elohim" reminds us that He punishes those who sin.

#### **46. WHO BROUGHT YOU OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT TO BE YOUR ELOHIM**

Just as Yahweh saved us from Egypt, He will always watch over us.

Since it is a Mitzvah to recall Yetzias Mitzrayim (the Exodus) every day and night, when saying this verse we should have in mind to fulfill this Mitzvah.

\*\*Be careful to separate the "M" sounds between the words "es'chem mei'eretz."

#### **47. I AM YAHWEH YOUR ELOHIM -- EMET [TRUE].**

Why is "I am Yahweh your Elohim" repeated?

-- We no longer have any choice about accepting or rejecting the Mitzvot -- Yahweh is our Elohim, period (Rashi).

-- Even if we were to go into exile again, it would be temporary, because Yahweh will redeem us as He did from Egypt (Malbim).

The word "Emet" is added to give the Shema 248 words. We make only a slight separation between the "M" sound at the end of "Elo-him" and the "E" of "Emet."  
Many kiss the Tzitzis at the end of Shema.

