

# שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד

בְּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מְלָכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד

*Hear, O Israel, G-d is our G-d; G-d is One.*

*Blessed is the name of the honor of His kingdom for all eternity.*

The Shema is really about awareness of G-d – that He is one G-d, and not more, and that He alone is the singular and unique unifying force of everything.

The Shema itself consists of the six-word mantra of Jews worldwide – our declaration of G-d's oneness and uniqueness. The line that appears after it, is said in a whisper. Afterwards follow three paragraphs. The first is about **loving G-d**; the second is about **reward and consequences**; and the third is about **remembering G-d and His commandments**. These famous words are written in scrolls inside of mezuzah cases and tefillin (phylacteries) that are wrapped with black straps around the head and arm while praying.

וְאֶהְבֶּתְּ אֵת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל  
מְאֹדְךָ. וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוְךָ  
הַיּוֹם עַל לְבָבְךָ. וְשָׁנַנְתָּם לְבָנֶיךָ וְדַבַּרְתָּ בָם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלַכְתְּךָ  
בְּדֶרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ. וְקִשְׁרָתָם לְאוֹת עַל יָדְךָ וְהָיוּ לְטַטְפֹּת בֵּין  
עֵינֶיךָ. וְכָתַבְתָּם עַל מְזוּזוֹת בֵּיתְךָ וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ.

***You** shall love G-d, your G-d, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. May these words that I am commanding you today be on your heart. Teach them to your children, and speak of them when you sit in your home and when you travel on the road; when you lie down and when you arise. Tie them as a sign on your arm, and may they be phylacteries (tefillin) between your eyes. And write them on mezuzah scrolls on the doorposts of your homes and gates.*

G-d, the concept of loving You can be hard – how does one love a "Being" that cannot be grasped with the five senses? But I am going to try, G-d – with all my heart, soul, and energy. I would like to become more connected to this idea, not just at synagogue, but at home. Not just for me, but to speak of it openly with my children. Not just on special occasions, but daily. And G-d, when I see the mezuzah on my door, whose scroll contains these concepts, I will remember that my home is an oasis of spirituality and G-d-awareness in a sad and sometimes empty and confusing world. Thank You, G-d, for the gift of loving You.



וְהָיָה אִם שָׁמַעַתְּ מְצֻוֹתַי אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם לְאַהֲבָה אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וּלְעַבְדּוֹ בְּכָל לְבַבְכֶם וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁכֶם. וְנָתַתִּי מִטֶּר אֶרְצְכֶם בְּעֵתוֹ יוֹרֵה וּמִלְקוֹשׁ וְאִסְפֹּת דְגָנְךָ וְתִירֹשֶׁךָ וְיִצְהָרְךָ. וְנָתַתִּי עֵשֶׂב בְּשִׂדְךָ לְבַהֲמֹתֶיךָ וְאִבְלֹת וְשִׁבְעֵתָּ. הִשְׁמְרוּ לָכֶם פֶּן יִפְתָּה לְבַבְכֶם וְסָרְתֶם וְעַבַדְתֶּם אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם לָהֶם. וְחָרָה אַף ה' בְּכֶם וְעָצַר אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלֹא יִהְיֶה מִטֶּר וְהָאֲדָמָה לֹא תִתֵּן אֶת יְבוּלָהּ וְאִבְדֹתֶם מְהֵרָה מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר ה' נָתַן לָכֶם. וְשִׁמְתֶם אֶת דְּבָרֵי אֱלֹהֵי לְבַבְכֶם וְעַל נַפְשְׁכֶם וּקְשַׁרְתֶּם אֹתָם לְאוֹת עַל יְדֵיכֶם וְהָיוּ לְטוֹטְפֹת בֵּין עֵינֵיכֶם. וְלִמְדֹתֶם אֹתָם אֶת בְּנֵיכֶם לְדַבֵּר בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלֶכְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשִׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ. וְכַתַּבְתֶּם עַל מְזוּזוֹת בְּיַתְדְּךָ וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ. לְמַעַן יִרְבוּ יְמֵיכֶם וְיָמֵי בְנֵיכֶם עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע ה' לְאַבְתֵּיכֶם לָתֵת לָהֶם בְּיָמֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם עַל הָאָרֶץ.

**And** it shall be, if you will listen well to My commandments that I'm commanding you today, to love G-d, your G-d and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul – then I will give rain to your land in its time, the early and late rains, and you will gather your grain, wine, and oil. I will give grass in your fields for your animals, and you will eat and be satisfied. Watch yourself, or your hearts will swerve, and you'll turn and worship false gods and bow down to them. G-d will become very angry with you, and He will close up the heavens and there will be no rain, and the earth will not give its bounty. You will be quickly banished from the good land that G-d gave you. Put these words on your heart and on your soul; tie them as a sign on your arms; let them be phylacteries between your eyes. Teach them to your children to speak of them, when you are sitting in your homes or traveling on the road; when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorposts of your homes and gates – in order that your days and the days of your children be many on the land that G-d promised your ancestors to give them, like the days of the heavens on the earth.

G-d, you have promised in Your Torah that our actions matter. Our good deeds, when we soar above our nature, and listen to our small, still, soul-voice, will be rewarded. And, our mistakes and misdeeds will incur consequences. I know I need to be careful. I need to learn to avoid people and situations that don't bring out the best in me. I have to remind these words to travel from my head to my heart so I can become the best me. I need to teach them to my children, and discuss them regularly, again, not just at synagogue, but at home. When I get up and go to bed. These are the most important concepts of life.



**וַיֹּאמֶר** ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לְאמֹר. דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ  
 אֲלֵהֶם וַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם צִיצִית עַל כַּנְּפֵי בְּגָדֵיהֶם לְדֹרֹתָם  
 וְנָתַנּוּ עַל צִיצִית הַכַּנָּף פֶּתִיל תְּכֵלֶת. וְהָיָה לָכֶם לְצִיצִית וּרְאִיתֶם  
 אֹתוֹ וְזָכַרְתֶּם אֶת כָּל מִצְוֹת ה' וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם וְלֹא תִתְּרוּ אַחֲרַי  
 לְבַבְכֶם וְאַחֲרַי עֵינֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם זֹנִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם. לְמַעַן תִּזְכְּרוּ  
 וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֶת כָּל מִצְוֹתַי וְהֵייתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים לְאֱלֹהֵיכֶם. אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם  
 אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְהִיּוֹת לָכֶם לְאֱלֹהִים אֲנִי ה'  
 אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.

**And** G-d said to Moses as follows: Speak to the people of Israel, and tell them to make themselves tzitzis – fringes – on the corners of their clothing forever. They should tie onto the fringes of each corner a blue string called "t'chaylet." It will be fringes for your, and you'll see them and remember all the commandments of G-d, and do them, and you will not turn after your heart and after your eyes, which you're straying after. In order that you may remember and do all of My commandments, and be holy to your G-d. I am G-d, your G-d, Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt to be your G-d. I am G-d, your G-d.

G-d, in this final paragraph of the Shema, the least-known one, You ask us to remember all that You've instructed us. And You've given us a pretty specific method to remember: to wear tzitzit. This is a mitzvah that when we wear a four-cornered garment, we should tie fringes in a special way on each corner. That some fringes should be blue. Then when we look at that color blue, we will remember the heavens and ultimately, You. But whether I have four-cornered garments or not, I recognize, G-d, how important it is to remember. To remember that which is important and not let it get swept away in all the silly urgencies of our lives. To make sure that no matter who we are, how we think, or what makes us tick, we will do what it takes to remember these ideas: that You, G-d, made us. That You love us. That You expect us to take the high road. Not to follow our hearts and whims but instead to listen to our minds and souls... and to be proud, today and always, to be called Your people.

Translations and explanations adapted from "Conversations with G-d: Prayers for Jewish Women" by Ruchi Koval











