

Introduction to the Sh'ma (Shema)

If one accepts the Traditional and Messianic Hebraic perspective that deep within the Sacred Shabbat is encapsulated the quintessence of the relationship between G_D and Israel - between G_D and humanity⁽¹⁾ ... then it might be worth pondering the importance and relevance of the foremost cited and revered Hebraic prayer ... generally referred to as the “Shema/V'ahavta” in as much that this prayer serves as the quintessential Jewish profession of faith and prayer life ... and as will be seen so very much more!

(1) Note: the understanding of Shabbat's critical importance to the faith and G_D's plan can be found within the book available at this website: “Festivals Of ADONAI”

It must be noted that the Shema is an aggregation of a few key Scriptures found within the Tanakh ... which include the “Shema/V'ahavta” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) ... The “V'haya im shamo'a” (Deuteronomy 11:13-21) ... and “Vayomer” (Numbers 15:37-41) respectively. The complete prayer is provided below herein!

Sh'ma - Deuteronomy 6:4-9

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֶחָד:

Sh'ma Yisrael Adonai Elohaynu Adonai Echad.

Hear, Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.

In an undertone:

בָּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד:

Barukh Shem k'vod malkhuto l'olam va-ed

Blessed be His Name and His glorious kingdom for ever and ever

וְאַהַבְתָּ אֵת יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל מְאֹדְךָ:

V'ahavta et Adonai Elohecha, b-chol l'avcha/ u-v-chol naf'sh'cha/ u-v-chol m'odecha.

And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם עַל לְבָבְךָ:

V-hayu ha-d'varim ha-ayleh/ asher anochi m/'tzav'cha ha-yom/ al l'avvecha.

And you shall have these words that I command you today shall be in your heart.

וְשִׁנַּנְתֶּם לְבַנְיֵיךָ וּדְבַרְתָּ בָם
בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלֶכְתְּךָ בַּדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ:

V-shinantam l-vanecha v-dibarta bam

b-shivt'cha b-vaytecha u-v-lecht'cha ba-derech, u-v-shachb'cha u-v-kumecha.

And you shall teach them diligently to your children, and you shall speak of them when you sit at home, and when you walk along the way, and when you lie down and when you rise up.

וּקְשַׁרְתֶּם לְאוֹת עַל יָדְךָ וְהָיוּ לְטֹטְפוֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ:

U-k'shartam l'ot al yadecha,, v-hayu l-totafot bayn aynecha.

And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be for frontlets between your eyes.

וּכְתַבְתֶּם עַל מְזוֹזוֹת בַּיְתְּךָ וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ:

U-chtavtam al m'zuzot baytecha u-vi-sharecha.

And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

V'haya im shamo'a -Deuteronomy 11:13-21

וְהָיָה אִם שָׁמַעַתְּ תִשְׁמְעוּ אֶל מִצְוֹתַי
אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם לְאַהֲבָה אֶת יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
וּלְעַבְדוֹ בְּכָל לְבַבְכֶם וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁכֶם:

V'haya im shamo'a tish'mu el mitzvotai

*asher anochi m'tzaveh etchem ha-yom, l-ahavah et Adonai Elohaychem,
u-l-avdo b-chol l'vavchem u-v-chol nafsh'chem.*

And it shall come to pass if you surely listen to the commandments that I command you today, to love the Lord your God, and to serve him with all your heart and all your soul,

וְנָתַתִּי מִטַּר אֶרְצְכֶם בְּעֵתוֹ יוֹרֵה וּמִלְקוֹשׁ
וְאֶסַּפְתָּ דְגָנְךָ וְתִירוֹשְׁךָ וַיִּצְהַרְךָ:

V-natati m'tar artzchem b-ito, yoreh u-malkosh;

v-asafta d'ganecha, v-tirosh'cha v-yitzharecha.

that I will give rain to your land, the early and the late rains, that you may gather in your grain, your wine and your oil.

וְנָתַתִּי עֵשֶׂב בְּשַׂדְּךָ לְבְהֵמְתְּךָ וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ:

V-natati aysev b-sad'cha li-b'hem'techa; v-achalta v-savata.

And I will give grass in your fields for your cattle and you will eat and you will be satisfied.

הִשָּׁמְרוּ לָכֶם פֶּן יִפְתָּה לְבַבְכֶם
וְסִרְתֶּם וְעַבַדְתֶּם אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם לָהֶם:

Hishamru lachem, pen yifteh l'vavchem,

v-sartem va-avadtem elohim achayrim, v-hishtachavitem lahem.

Beware, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn and serve other gods, and worship them.

וְחָרָה אַף יי בָּכֶם וְעִצָּר אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלֹא יִהְיֶה מָטָר
וְהָאֲדָמָה לֹא תִתֵּן אֶת יְבוּלָהּ
וְאֲבַדְתֶּם מִהָרָה מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר יי נָתַן לָכֶם:

V-charah af Adonai bachem, v-atzar et ha-shamayim v-lo yihyeh matar,

v-ha-adama lo titayn et y'vulah;

va-avadtem m'hayrah mayal ha-aretz ha-tovah asher Adonai notayn lachem.

And anger of the Lord will blaze against you, and he will close the heavens and there will not be rain, and the earth will not give you its fullness, and you will perish quickly from the good land that the Lord gives you.

וְשַׂמְתֶּם אֶת דְּבָרֵי אֵלֶּה עַל לְבַבְכֶם וְעַל נַפְשְׁכֶם
וְקִשַּׂרְתֶּם אֹתָם לְאוֹת עַל יְדֵיכֶם וְהָיוּ לְטוֹטְפוֹת בֵּין עֵינֵיכֶם:

V-sam'tem et d'varai ayleh al l'vavchem v-al naf'sh'chem;

u-kshartem otam l-ot al yedchem, v-hayu ltotafot bayn aynaychem.

So you shall put these, my words, on your heart and on your soul; and you shall bind them for signs on your hands, and they shall be for frontlets between your eyes.

וְלִמַּדְתֶּם אֹתָם אֶת בְּנֵיכֶם לְדַבֵּר בָּם
בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלֶכְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ:

V-limadtem otam et b'naychem l-daber bam

b-shivt'cha b-vaytecha, u-v-lecht'cha baderech, u-v-shachb'cha u-v-kumecha.

And you shall teach them to your children, and you shall speak of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk on the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up.

וְכָתַבְתֶּם עַל מְזוּזוֹת בֵּיתְךָ וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ:

U-ch'tavtam al m'zuzot baytecha u-vi-sharecha.

And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

לְמַעַן יִרְבוּ יְמֵיכֶם וְיְמֵי בְנֵיכֶם עַל הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יי
לְאַבְתֵיכֶם לָתֵת לָהֶם פְּיַמֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם עַל הָאָרֶץ:

L'ma'an yirbu y'maychem vi-y'may v'naychem al ha-adamah asher nishba Adonai

la-avotaychem latayt lahem ki-y'may ha-shamayim al ha-aretz.

In order to prolong your days and the days of your children on the land that the Lord promised your fathers that he would give them, as long as the days that the heavens are over the earth.

Vayomer - Numbers 15:37-41

וַיֹּאמֶר יי אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:

Vayomer Adonai el Mosheh laymor.

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying...

דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם
וַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם צִיצִית עַל כַּנְּפֵי בְגֵדֵיהֶם לְדֹרֹתָם
וְנָתַנּוּ עַל צִיצִית הַכַּנֵּף פְּתִיל תְּכֵלֶת:

Daber el b'nay Yisrael v-amarta alayhem,

v-asu lahem tzitzit al can'fay vi-g'dayhem l-dorotam,

v-natnu al tzitzit ha-canaf p'til t'chaylet.

Speak to the children of Israel and say to them, they should make themselves tzitzit (fringes) on the corners of their clothing throughout their generations, and give the tzitzit of each corner a thread of blue.

וְהָיָה לָכֶם לְצִיצִית וּרְאִיתֶם אֹתוֹ וּזְכַרְתֶּם אֶת כָּל מִצְוֹת יי
וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם וְלֹא תִתּוּרוּ אַחֲרַי לְבַבְכֶם
וְאַחֲרַי עֵינֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר אֲתֶם זֹנִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם:

V-hayah lachem l-tzitzit, u-r'iytem oto u-z'chartem et kol mitzvot Adonai,

va-asiytem otam v-lo taturu acharay l-vavchem

v-acharay aynaychem, asher atem zonim acharaychem.

And they shall be tzitzit for you, and when you look at them you will remember all of the Lord's commandments and do them and not follow after your heart and after your eyes, which lead you astray.

לְמַעַן תִּזְכְּרוּ וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֶת כָּל מִצְוֹתַי וְהֵייתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים לֵאלֹהֵיכֶם:

L'ma-an tiz'k'ru v-asitem et kol mitzvotai, vi-h'iytem k'doshim laylohaychem.

In order to remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God.

אֲנִי יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
 לְהִיּוֹת לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים אֲנִי יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם

Ani Adonai Elohaychem, asher hotzaytiy etchem mayeretz Mitzrayim,
 li-h'got lahem laylohim. Ani Adonai Elohaychem.
 I am the Lord, your God, who lead you from the land of Egypt
 to be a god to you. I am the Lord, your God. Ahmein!

So what then is this “Shema” prayer all about and why is it so vitally important to Israel in a Hebraic perspective? To start let us look at Deuteronomy 6:4-9 ... we should see how it begins with the critical Hebraic word **Shema** ... which means:

#8085 שָׁמַע shama` {shaw-mah'}

a primitive root; TWOT - 2412, 2412a

v

1) to hear, listen to, obey

1a) (Qal)

1a1) to hear (perceive by ear)

1a2) to hear of or concerning

1a3) to hear (have power to hear)

1a4) to hear with attention or interest, listen to

1a5) to understand (language)

1a6) to hear (of judicial cases)

1a7) to listen, give heed

1a7a) to consent, agree

1a7b) to grant request

1a8) to listen to, yield to

1a9) to obey, be obedient

1b) (Niphal)

1b1) to be heard (of voice or sound)

1b2) to be heard of

1b3) to be regarded, be obeyed

1c) (Piel) to cause to hear, call to hear, summon

1d) (Hiphil)

1d1) to cause to hear, tell, proclaim, utter a sound

1d2) to sound aloud (musical term)

1d3) to make proclamation, summon

1d4) to cause to be heard

n m

2) sound

The prayer thus starts out with an axiomatic mandate to listen up and take to your very deepest inside human element the truth that Israel's G_D is ADONAI ... He stands alone above all else ... He is the very essence of all that is!

We see where this truth is not just about mental affirmation ... the prayer represents a mandate to take this very truth into the heart. Take this truth and make it a way of life ... having this truth and having it manifest at all times ... having this truth and passing it down faithfully from generation to generation ... having

this truth guide our very existence and finally having this truth formally codified by marking the house and gates of our dwellings!

What we see in the “Shema ” is essentially the core element of Israel’s Kingdom Constitution. What we see is what essentially constitutes being a Jew is all about ... being a person that is in a relationship with the living G_D ... a person that is single-mindedly aligned with G_D ... a person that is a member of Kingdom Israel. Hence we should gain insights into the deeply intrinsic importance of what “Shema Yisrael” means to a faithful Jewish person ... to the faithful Jew there is no existence without Shema Yisrael!

On a deeper and more complex note please be aware that within the Torah there are two larger-print letters in the first sentence (‘ayin ע and dalet ד) which, when combined, spell “דע” (pronounced “ed”. In Hebrew this means “witness”. The idea thus conveyed is that through the recitation or proclamation of the Shema one is a living witness testifying to the truth of its message ... clearly the underlying importance of this declaration from Moshe (Moses) was well understood in the Hebraic culture! When this little piece of information is coupled with the fact that “the people” ... “haAM” are most often communally referred to as “haEDAH ... the witnesses”, we should begin to get a clearer picture of the Jewish mindset! Or at least one can hope as much!

So then ... we should recognize how important the “Shema” is to Israel and understand why a faithful Jew is expected to recite the prayer minimally twice a day ... when you arise and when you lie down to sleep. We should see how the Shema can be representative of the individual offering up the twice daily “olah” (Perpetual Daily Burnt Offering) to ADONAI! ... Simply a wonderful picture is it not?

Moving along ... the V’haya im shamo’a -Deuteronomy 11:13-21 portion of the prayer presents us with a little bit of different dynamic in that the prayer now moves more towards a more communal/national/kingdom perspective and does so clearly within the auspices of the Everlasting Covenant and the promises made to Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya’acov (the Fathers).

We see clearly where there are continued blessings associated with heart felt compliance and conversely we see where there are harsh penalties if Kingdom Israel wavers in their faith. Consequently this portion of the prayer brings to mind the responsibilities associated with being the chosen people Israel.

It must be remembered that Israel was raised up by ADONAI to serve Him as the mechanism for restoration of His creation. Israel by design was intended to stand in the gap for the nations ... to be the light to the nations and therefore manifest ADONAI’s glorious character upon the Earth. This portion of the prayer calls into mind the responsibility of Nation Israel!

The final major component of the prayer consists of the Vayomer -Numbers 15:37-41 segment wherein we see ADONAI's great call to Israel ... "Be Holy for ADONAI is Holy" ... but clearly ADONAI does so while making Israel understand that conforming to His Holiness is not something that is innate to a fallen humanity ... even Israel. Herein we see ADONAI clearly define the propensity of fallen man and the need to be constantly reminded of this propensity.

But there is more going on here as well. Within Vayomer we must realize that the command to wear tzitzit (fringes) on their clothing is also a tangible means of separation between the ways of this temporal world ... olam hazeh ... and the ways of ADONAI! In many respects the tzitzit represent the most visible and tangible testimony of either being with G_D ... or with the world.

Conclusion: As is often the case with the personal commentaries provided on these diverse matters ... the information provided is done so at a high level ... hopefully depicting some major points worth noting. Quite frankly a comprehensive study on Hebraic/Jewish prayer would entail books.

What is important however is for the reader to gain an appreciation for the importance of this "Shema" prayer from a Hebraic perspective. And please note as well that this importance remains critical and relevant for adherents of the Messianic Jewish faith. For the Messianic believer the previously detailed points of interest are even more important in light of the completion of our faith within the glory of the only begotten Son ... Yeshua HaMashiach.

There should be no doubts that Yeshua's glorious works were delivered within the auspices of the Everlasting Covenant. There should be no doubts that G_D remains alone above all else within a B'rit Chadasha framework. There should be no doubts that "Shema Yisrael" continues to represent the fundamental manifestation of a true believers' faith ... or at least for a member of Kingdom Israel.

Shalom Aleichem ... P.R. Otokletos