



The Shema -

Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God is one LORD.

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|----------|--------|---------------------|----------|------------|---------|------------|--------|------------|--------|------------|--------|-----|
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| א | יְהוָה | אֱלֹהֵינוּ | יְהוָה | אֱלֹהֵינוּ | יְהוָה | אֱלֹהֵינוּ | יְהוָה | אֱלֹהֵינוּ | יְהוָה | אֱלֹהֵינוּ | יְהוָה | |
| (2) | (1) | (1) | (4) | (3) | (2) | (1) | (1) | (3) | (2) | (1) | (2) | (1) |
| e-chad | Adonai | e-lo- hey nu | Adonai | yis-ra-el | she-ma' | | | | | | | |
| one LORD | | our God (is) | The LORD | O Israel | Hear! | | | | | | | |

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. (Deut 6:4)

THE SHEMA is the central prayer in the Jewish prayerbook (Siddur) and is often the first section of Scripture that a Jewish child learns. During its recitation in the synagogue, Orthodox Jews pronounce each word very carefully and cover their eyes with their right hand. Many Jews recite the Shema at least twice daily: once in the morning and once in the evening. It is also sometimes said as a bedtime prayer ("the bedtime Shema").



The Complete Shema

The Shema is actually more than just the famous six words *Shema Yisrael, Adonai eloheinu, Adonai echad*, but is composed of three parts linked together into a unity:

1. **Shema** (Deuteronomy 6:4-9): The core Hebrew prayer. Special emphasis is given to the first six Hebrew words of this passage (*Shema Yisrael, Adonai eloheinu, Adonai echad*) and a six-word response is said in an undertone (*barukh shem kevod malkhuto le'olam va'ed*). After a pause, Deuteronomy 6:5-9 is then recited, which stresses the commandment to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, and might.
2. **Vehayah** (Deuteronomy 11:13-21): This moving passage stresses the blessings that come through obedience to Adonai and the consequences that come through disobedience.
3. **Vaiyomer** (Numbers 15:37-41): This passage concerns the use of the tallit, a rectangular prayer shawl with four fringes (called *tzitzit*). One *tzitzit* is attached to each corner of the tallit. The reason for wearing the *tzitzit* is to remind oneself to observe all of the commandments of the Lord.



Enlarged Letters

The two letters Ayin and Dalet are enlarged in the first sentence of the Shema. Together, these letters form the word 'ed, which means "witness," suggesting that the Shema is a testimony of the sovereignty of God:

שמע ישראל יהוה אלהינו יהוה אחד

Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one

This statement marks the declaration that God is One. Interestingly, the word *echad* in Hebrew can imply a unity in diversity (the word for one and only one, i.e., unique, is more often rendered as *yachid*). For example, in Exodus 26:6 the various parts of the Tabernacle (*mishkan*) are to be constructed so that "it shall be one (*echad*) tabernacle," and Ezekiel spoke of two "sticks" (representing fragmented Israel) as being reunited into one: "and they shall be one (*echad*) stick in My hand" (Ezek 37:19).

Mezuzot Scrolls

The first two parts of the Shema are written in STA”M script on a small scroll which is then rolled up and put inside a mezuzah:

