

PRAYING with Fire

PRAYER POINTS

HEAR O ISRAEL: PART 1

The message of the Sh'ma is applicable to everyone at all times, at every conscious moment. It embodies one of the most profound concepts known to man: The Oneness of God.

by [Rabbi Pinchas Winston](#)

Sh'ma Israel, Adonai Elohainu, Adonai Ehad. "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One."

The Sh'ma prayer comes toward the middle of the morning and evening services, and represents what being Jewish is all about. It is not yet what we would call the "peak" of the prayer service -- that is the Shemoneh Esrei -- but, it is a Torah-based commandment that requires a lot of concentration and intention.

The message of the Sh'ma is applicable to every Jew at all times, at every conscious moment. Indeed, embodied in the Sh'ma is one of the most profound and mystical concepts known to man: Yichud Hashem -- the Oneness of God.

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What this means is that the reality of God and our perception of Him may not be equal. He is more here than we sense. In fact, God, for the sake of allowing man to have and use his free-will, allows the world to mask His Being so much so that human beings can even doubt His Existence.

Even though, in the end, good always triumphs, the fact that evil can often be successful in the short-run deceives people into believing that even if God is there, He doesn't interfere in the affairs of man.

The *Sh'ma* hints to this entire idea for, this is the meaning of "the Lord is One." Everything in creation is a function of God's will, and He is the force behind all forces.

THE ULTIMATE ONE

While scientists pursue the "Theory of Everything," the *Sh'ma* reminds us that God is the "Fact of Everything," the Ultimate One who gives life to all that exists and all that happens, whether we can see how this is true or not.

This also reminds us of the mission of the Jewish people in this World. If the Jewish people were taken out of Egypt for any reason at all, it was to be a "light unto nations." And, if there is any light that we need to project, it is the light of this understanding that allows humanity's perception of God to merge with the reality of God.

How do we do this?

A major part of saying the *Sh'ma* is to give testimony to its message.

If you look at how the *Sh'ma* is written in a Sefer Torah and in the Siddur, you will find that the letter *ayin* at the end of the word *Sh'ma*, and the letter *dalet* of the word *echad* are written larger than normal. The rabbis explain that, when put together, the two letters spell the word *aid*, meaning "witness." A major part of saying the *Sh'ma* is to give testimony to its message: No matter what it appears like, God is alive, well, and heavily involved in the affairs of human beings.

This is the meaning of the "Lord is One." Nothing can happen that He is not aware and taking note of, and, for that matter, involved with. Implied in the *Sh'ma* is the concept of personal Divine Providence, for, "One" means that nothing in life can happen randomly.

LIVING THE SH'MA

Our lives should be living examples of this belief. How? Just ask yourself, "If I really believed that God cares about all I do, and keeps track of my actions, how would I live?" This too is part of the *Sh'ma's* message to all of us.

The words of the *Sh'ma* teach: The same God Who works through nature is the same God Who created and sustains everything; don't be fooled by the automation of the natural world.

We'll look at another level of this message, encoded in the very letters of the *Sh'ma* itself in the next installment of these series.