

# The Shema

People often say that ‘seeing is believing’, but did you know that scripture teaches the opposite—that listening is more important than seeing? We can see it presented perfectly in the words of the *Shema*.

The Shema is a declaration of faithfulness is a type of marriage vow if you will, as well as a hymn of praise to Yahuah. You can read it in the book of Deuteronomy, as a part of a speech that Moshah (Moses) gave to the Yahsharalites (Israelites):

“Hear (Shema), O’ Yahsharal (Israel): Yahuah our Aluah/Alahym, Yahuah is echad (one).” (**Deut. 6:4**)

## The Hebrew Meaning of Shema

*Shema*, in the simplest terms, means ‘to hear’. The Hebrew word pronunciation sounds more like “sh’-mah”. But it also means to obey and take action. So, to hear Alahym is to obey Alahym—and to obey Alahym is to hear Alahym.

## Loyalty and Obedience

Mosah (Moses) specifically declares that there is echad (one) Aluah/Alahym only. The Yahsharalites (Israelites) have a significant history of being surrounded by people worshiping many different alhym (gods). From their early days in Canaan, through many years in Mitsrym (Egypt), to the 40 years wandering the wilderness, they have been enclosed by polytheistic cultures.

It is made absolutely clear to the people that loyalty to, obedience of and love for their one true Alahym is the only way from here on out. Divided allegiance could be a huge threat to Yahsharal (Israel)’s future, therefore Moshah (Moses) lays the foundation with this guiding truth.

Many translations of **Deuteronomy 6:4** use “hear” for the word *Shema*. However, the English understanding of “hear” doesn’t quite do this Hebrew word justice. Nor does it help us to internalize its meaning.

In Hebrew, the word “Shema” means hearing but also the effect of it. Which is taking heed, being obedient, and moreover doing what is asked.

## Shema Yasharal

Nevertheless, hearing is not just listening with one's ears. It is also listening, heeding and obeying. Which elicits a response. It is a call to action, to listen and obey. Not simply to hear and do nothing or listen and then forget – “in one ear and out the other.” Quite the opposite.

In Hebrew, “hearing” and “obeying” are essentially one in the same. Moshah (Moses) isn't just telling the people, “hey, listen up!” (although it's certainly part of it!). He's saying, “live these words, embody them, fulfill with all your being and with all that you've got”.

**James 1:22** perfectly echoes this sentiment by imploring us with these words:

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. *“Don't just listen to the Word of Truth and not respond to it, for that is the essence of self-deception.”*

*So always let his Word become like poetry written and fulfilled by your life!”* We see this principle in action when Moshah (Moses) tells the people that they should *“love Yahuah your Alahym with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”* (**Deut. 6:5**)

You might even recall Yahusha repeating this commandment in **Matthew 22:36**, but He adds a bit more. *“You shall love Yahuah your Alahym with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”* This is the first (1st) and Great Commandment. And the Second (2nd) is like it: *‘You shall Love your neighbor as yourself.’* On these two (2) Commandments hang all the Turah (Law) and the Prophets.”

## The Great Commandment

The Shema begins in **Deuteronomy 6:4** just before Yahuah gives His Great Commandment to the entire nation of Yahsharal (Israel). He calls to them directly because He's about to give it to them straight. He says, “Hear, O Yahsharal (Israel): Yahuah our Alahym, Yahuah is echad (one)!”

“You shall Love (157 ahab; beloved like, friend) Yahuah your Alahym (God) with all (3605: the whole, all) your **Heart** (3824: inner man, mind, will), with all (3605: the whole, all) your **Soul** (5315: a soul, living being, life, self, person, desire, passion, appetite, emotion), and with all (3605: the whole, all) your **Strength**

(3966: muchness, force, abundance). And these words which I Command you today shall be in your **Heart**. *You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in our house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*"

## Hearing

**Deuteronomy 6:4** begins with Yahuah using the word "hear." Some translations use "listen." In Hebrew, "hear" is "shema," and it has a deeper meaning than what we have in the English language.

Most of us will think Yahuah is using "hear" as how Dictionary.com defines it: "to perceive by the ear." But in Hebrew, Shema means listening, paying attention, understanding and comprehending, obeying, and responding with action.

Later in the New Testament, Yahusha would often say, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear (**Mark 4:9**). What He was really saying was, "If you have ears that work and have heard Me, respond by obeying." Remember that we are called to be doers of the Word, not just listeners.

## One Alahym (God)

Following His command for us to shema (listen), Yahuah reminds us of who He is. He says, "Yahuah our Alahym (God), Yahuah is echad (*one*)!" The Hebrew word for "one" is "echad." It can mean alone, single, unique, or unified, one. Why is that a big deal?

Replacing "one" with "alone" changes the meaning of the verse. Now, instead of simply proclaiming there is only one, singular Alahym (God), He is telling us He alone is Aluah (God) and there is no other. He alone is the one we should worship and serve.

## Shema is Love

Yahuah tells the Yahsharalites (Israelites) to “love Yahuah your Alahym (God) with all your **Heart**, with all your **Soul**, and with all your **Strength**.”

In Hebrew culture, love isn't just an emotion, it denotes an action or a response. In this case, love means faithfulness and commitment.

Remember Shema means listening and obeying. Put Shema with love and you have someone who listens and faithfully responds out of obedience and loyalty to Yahuah. Not because of some old covenant legalism, but because we are actively seeking Him in our lives.

We long for His commands. We want to listen and respond. Not because we can't think for ourselves as some might argue, but because His ways are smarter, better, and have a more long-term perspective than ours, and we know it. We are not called simply to believe in His oneness, but to respond by putting Him in the center of our lives out of love and loyalty.

## How to Love Yahuah

In **Deuteronomy 6:6**, Yahuah commands us to...

- Teach His words diligently to our children
- Talk about them when we sit down, go for a walk, lay down, and rise up
- Bind them as a sign on our hand
- Put them as frontlets between our eyes
- Write them on the doorposts and gates of our homes

Why does Yahuah tell us to do so much? Why can't we just declare our loyalty without all the work? The answer is it's because He's trying to drive us to put Him first in our lives. He needs to be at the center of everything we say and do all day, every day.

If we can't put Yahuah first, then it is very difficult to listen and respond to Him, or to show our dedication to Him. And quite frankly, it can mean that perhaps we have put something or someone else ahead of Him. That would be idolatry.

**John 14:21** says, "He who has My Commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."

And, why do we love Yahuah? Because He first loved us (**1 John 4:19**). This is why the Shema is so important. When we pray the Shema, we are saying we recognize that Yahuah first loved us, so we listen to His commands and respond out of love to Him knowing His ways are higher than our ways (**Isaiah 55:8-9**).

Following Yahuah and serving Him is always out of gratitude and humility for all He has done to save us from sin and death. It's simply all about love.

### **Taking a Vow via the *Shema* Prayer**

Moshah (Moses) wants the people to understand that their commitment to Yahuah is active and is demonstrated by how they choose to live. Just as a man and a woman, when exchanging their wedding vows, pledge the action encompassed in their words, so the speaker proclaims the words *Shema Yahsharal*.

### ***Shema* in the New Testament**

Did you know that this concept from the *Shema* continues into the New Testament? In fact, it was one of Yahusha's most fervent followers, Shaul (Paul), wrote that our "Amunah (faith) comes from hearing" and not by what we see. **Romans 10:17** So Amunah (faith) comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Ha Mashiach.

Perhaps that's why Scripture describes Yahuah's voice in such detail. So we know what to listen for. And through speaking people hear the gospel. By hearing they are saved, if they so choose. (**Romans 10:14**)

Additionally, James, (Yaakov) the brother of Yahusha teaches on this in his letter:

*“But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not just hearers who deceive themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who has looked intently at the perfect Torah (law), the Torah (law) of freedom, and has continued in it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an active doer, this person will be Baruk (Blessed) in what he does.” James 1:22-26*

### **Shema – Instructions put into Practice**

James encourages the readers to walk out their Amunah (faith). He encourages to walk out, heed and obey the Scriptures – to *Shema* – to listen to them and obey.

Of course, we can't do this in our own strength, and this is why we need the Ruach HaQudesh to help us. We know that Yahuah is compassionate and merciful with us, as we are human and fallible.

*“For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things just as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let's approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace for help at the time of our need.” Hebrews 4:15*

This is a wonderful encouragement to us that through the Ruach Ha Qudesh (Holy Spirit), we can grow into His likeness more and more each day. As we *Shema* – listen, hear and obey the voice of Yahuah in our lives.