

**Tefillah Focus Of The Week:**

**שמע**

*Keeping the Faith*

**MEANING:** The simple translation of the prayer

And it will come to pass that if you continually **hearken to My commandments** that I command you today, to love Hashem, your G-d ...

והיה אם שמע תשמעו  
אל מצותי אשר אנכי  
מצוה אתכם היום לאהבה  
את ה' אלקיכם...

**WORD TO THE WISE:** Meaning within the word



The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabah*) teaches that the word והיה, as it is used in the Torah, represents *simcha*. This explains why this section of the Shema, in which one accepts upon himself the “yoke” of mitzvos (“...if you continually hearken to My commandments...”), begins with the word והיה. We are told, והיה אם שמעו אל מצותי אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם, we should perform the mitzvos with as much *simcha* as possible, as there is no comparison between performing a mitzvah with *simcha* and without *simcha*. Moreover, *Sefas Emes* explains, the level of *simcha* one has when he performs the mitzvos influences the level of his observance of the mitzvos.

Hashem, your G-d, amid gladness and goodness of heart, when everything was abundant.” Rav Simcha Zissel of Kelm explains that the Torah inflicts such terrible suffering for doing mitzvos without *simcha* because this leads a person to eventually lose his desire to perform them, which causes him to lose his connection to Hashem.

In one of his tapes, Rabbi Avigdor Miller introduced a “bargain” opportunity. He explained that while a person does the many good deeds involved in his or her everyday life, it costs nothing to add *simcha*:

*“A person is taking out the garbage anyway, feeding the children anyway, doing homework with his children anyway, doing laundry for the family, davening anyway, doing carpool anyway, cooking for Shabbos anyway.”*

With the added ingredient of *simcha*, daily chores and obligations are instantly transformed into a simple and beautiful way to serve Hashem.

On the other hand, a lack of *simcha* has dire results. The Torah (*Devarim 28:47*) reveals the reason why terrible punishments were imposed on the Jewish people: תחת אשר לא עבדת את ה' אלקיך בשמחה -- “Because you did not serve

**THEME:**

An essential concept of the prayer

**The Key to Happiness**

Taking on the commitment to perform Hashem’s mitzvos brings happiness.

**INSIGHT:**

Deeper meanings of the theme

**No Turning Back**

As stated in “Word to the Wise,” we are commanded to “serve Hashem with happiness” (*Tehillim 130:2*). Yet, the Gemara (*Berachos 13a*) states that the foundation of our entire service to Hashem is our willingness to accept the “yoke of heaven.”

*A “kabbalah” is the acceptance of a yoke, similar to the wooden beam placed on a pair of oxen to enable them to pull a load (oxen generally work in pairs). Once the ox is under the yoke, it must do its master’s will. It is unable to turn around and go in another direction.*

All beginnings are difficult and are prone to setbacks. Accepting the “yoke of heaven” enables us to counter the *yetzer hara’s* efforts to get us to excuse ourselves from performing various mitzvos. No matter what argument the *yetzer hora* proposes, we need merely respond, “that may be true, but I am already under the yoke.” This neutralizes much of the internal back-and-forth that weakens our resolve is

doing the mitzvos. Therefore, in our service of G-d, we should first make a *kabbalah* to accept the “yoke of heaven”. By doing so, we ensure that we stay on track. That is why the first section of *Shema* in which we commit ourselves to the “yoke of Heaven,” precedes this section והיה אם שמע תשמעו אל מצותי אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם, in which we commit ourselves to obey the commandments.

For a person to succeed in performing mitzvos, his *initial* motivation should be to acquire a solid foundation. Once he begins to serve Hashem with dedication and consistency, he then can focus on continuing to perform mitzvos with happiness. This lesson is stated in our portion of Shema: והיה אם שמע תשמעו אל מצותי. If one desires to serve Hashem out of *simcha*—והיה, then he must first make sure to continually hearken to Hashem’s commandments--שמע--תשמעו אל מצותי.

**VISUALIZE:**

Images that bring the prayer to life

**Playing the Scales**

When eight-year-old Elisheva sat down at her parents’ piano and began banging out melodies, she felt like a master musician. Little by little, she learned to play more songs, and began adding left-hand harmonies as well. Eventually, however, she reached the limits of her innate ability. If she wanted to master this instrument and push her talents to the limits, she needed lessons. Her parents happily agreed to find her a teacher



and she soon began lessons. They were torture. Her teacher spent many hours teaching her the proper placement of her fingers on the keys, the proper way to play the scales and how to read music. She reluctantly adhered to a 20-minute daily practice schedule. “It’s such a waste of time!” Elisheva complained. But she stuck with the lessons, and within a year, she was playing more

*beautifully than she had ever imagined possible, and the joy she experienced at the piano soared to unforeseen heights.*

The “yoke of the mitzvos,” like the piano lessons, is a discipline and commitment that seems at first to squelch our enjoyment. But when we keep at it, we transform ourselves into people who are G-dly, who are attached to a spiritual world in which our capacity for joy is far greater than we could experience by just doing what comes naturally.

**Try This!**

► The mitzvos are a path for a Jew to follow in his journey through life. Imagine a path carved into the earth. The path leads from where you are today all the way to a beautiful, golden horizon off in the distance. Imagine yourself progressing down that path day by day, safe from all the traps and dangers that lurk outside the path. Think of this image as you say והיה אם שמע תשמעו אל מצותי.

**Did You Know**

► **Out Loud**

Although some have the custom to recite the entire Shema out loud (except for ‘*Boruch Sheim k’vod*), our custom is to recite it quietly. Nevertheless, the first verse of Shema, שמע ישראל ה' אחד, should be said out loud in order to arouse one’s full concentration

(Orach Chaim 61:4,26). It is customary for the chazzan to lead the congregation in reciting שמע ישראל ה' אחד to enable all to proclaim the Kingdom of Heaven together (Darkei Moshe to Orach Chaim 61; 62:5).