

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

שמע
One G-d

MEANING: The simple translation of the prayer

Hear, O Israel: Hashem is our G-d, Hashem, the One and Only.
[Recited in an undertone]—Blessed is the Name of His glorious kingdom for all eternity.

שמע ישראל,
ה' אלקינו, ה' אחד.
[בלחש] ברוך שם כבוד
מלכותו לעולם ועד.

WORD TO THE WISE: Meaning within the word



In the Torah scrolls, the last letter of the first word of שמע - 'ע', and the last letter of the last word ד - 'ד', are larger than the other Hebrew letters written. The significance is that these two letters together spell the word עד - witness. This alludes to the concept that we, the founders of monotheism, are the witnesses of the fact that there is a G-d in this world. Through our beliefs and the way that those beliefs are expressed in our lives, we serve as

witnesses to Hashem's intimate involvement in this world (*Kli Yakar*, Devarim 6:4). *Abudraham* teaches that the enlarged letters עד allude to the idea that by reciting שמע, every Jew bears witness to Hashem's unity and declares it to the world. Finally, as stated in 'Praying With Passion', Issue 106, Shema 1, (last week's issue, "Word to the Wise"), our generation bears witness that ה' אלקינו ה' אחד, as the knowledge of G-d that was revealed at Mount Sinai was transferred from generation to generation.

THEME:

An essential concept of the prayer

Unity

G-d is the sole power of the universe.

INSIGHT:

Deeper meanings of the theme

Two Names, One G-d

The Gemara (*Pesachim 50a*) teaches, "This world is not like the World to Come. In this world, on hearing good news one says, 'Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the Universe, Who is good and does good' (*HaTov V'HaMeitiv*). Upon hearing bad news one says, 'Blessed are You ... the True Judge' (*Dayan haEmes*). In the World to Come, however, all the blessings will be "*HaTov V'HaMeitiv*." The Gemara uses this teaching to explain the verse (*Zecharia 14:9*), "And Hashem will be King over the entire world; on that day His Name will be One and He will be One."

G-d sometimes appears merciful and sometimes appears as a strict Judge. Yet, we believe that ultimately it all comes from the name ה' (י-ה-וה) – the Name associated with Mercy. The suffering that G-d sometimes visits upon man is intended for his good—to subdue his Evil inclination or to purify his soul so that he will be fit to enjoy his full measure of reward in the World to Come. In this world, however, man does not always appreciate the

long-term benefit of suffering and tragedy. It is only in the next world that he will look back in retrospect at that which he had perceived as bad and recite "*HaTov V'HaMeitiv*."

The Gemara's point is that G-d's Oneness is not always fully appreciated in this world, since it is difficult to reconcile suffering and tragedy with G-d's attributes of mercy and kindness. In the next world, though, where man will experience only good, he will fully appreciate that G-d is One (*Tzalach, Pesachim 50a*).

The belief that G-d always does what is good, is essentially what we express when we recite שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד, Hear O Israel, Hashem our G-d (אלקינו), Hashem is One. We know that the word אלקינו is the Name of G-d that represents His attribute of Judgment. The name ה' (י-ה-וה) is the Name that represents His attribute of Mercy. The declaration of שמע ישראל, "Hear, O Israel," is that the Name ה' and the Name אלקינו are אחד, all for the good.

VISUALIZE:

Images that bring the prayer to life

Getting a Clear Picture

There was a children's toy popular a generation ago, which was comprised of pictures drawn in green ink and red ink, superimposed on each other. To the unaided eye, the picture looked like a mess of scribbles. When the child looked through a green film, the green lines in the drawing were rendered invisible and the



picture drawn in red became crystal clear to him. There was no longer a mass of confusing scribbles, but rather a neat, easily discernible image.

Through the lens of the World-to-Come, we will be able to discern the true picture embedded in what can seem

to us, in this world, like a confusing mass of random events. The picture that will emerge is one of complete goodness and kindness. Saying the Shema proclaims our belief that there is One Sole Power, guiding all events, for the good. We trust that when we are finally able to see through the confusion, the image we will behold will be one of perfect beauty.

Try This!

▶ If a person joins an army, he wants to place himself under a winning commander – someone with the power and wisdom to lead him through battle. While saying the Shema, think of yourself as a soldier attaching yourself to Hashem and thereby attaching yourself to the One and Only power, the One and Only intelligence that has the ability to lead your *neshamah* through its journey in this world.

Did You Know

▶ **Correct Kavannah**

One's intention when saying the words of the שמע should be: "Hear, Israel: We accept G-d (Who Was, Is, and Will be and is Master of all) as our King, and there is none like G-d." (*Siman 60:5; Mishneh Berurah, Ibid:11*). The verse "ברוך שם כבוד", which is recited silently, must also be recited with kavannah as to its meaning (*Mishneh Berurah, 63:11*). A person who does not concentrate during the first verse of שמע and "ברוך שם כבוד" must recite it again with concentration (either in a low voice or after a brief pause) (*Ibid, 61:22; 63:12,14*).