Global Day of Jewish Learning
Curriculum

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1 WORLD. 1 PEOPLE. 1 DAY.
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A Project of the Aleph Society
The Global Day of Jewish Learning
A project of the Aleph Society

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“Grandchildren are the crown of their elders, and the glory of children is their parents.”

– Proverbs 17:6

In honor of my grandchildren and great-grandchildren: their lives burnish the glory of those who perished in the Shoah.

For my parents, Benjamin and Charlotte Gottesfeld z”l, these children are the greatest reward…

Charlotte Eliora Hanin
Chana Hanina
Galia Hanina
Sarah Rose Warren
Joseph Nathan Warren

Children of Shira and Steve Stein

Simcha Meir
Tamara Yocheved
Eliyahu Aryeh
Eitan Yosef

Children of Aliza and Zev Ganz

Shmuel Yoel
Atara Rina
Daniel Yomtov

Children of Tamar and Josh Heller

Yakira Eliyana
Gaviella Talia
Yehuda Meir

Son of Laura and Adam Hanina

Samuel Azriel Hanina

And in tribute to Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, whose work has opened the doors of Jewish learning to our generation and those to come.

– Fanya Gottesfeld Heller
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**Shema: The Unity of Jewish People**  
Curriculum Guidebook 2011

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The Global Day of Jewish Learning was initiated as a one-time event to coincide with the completion of Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz’s monumental translation and commentary on the Talmud—but you, the communities throughout the world wanted us to write another story. Communities large and small participated in the Global Day of Jewish Learning in 2010 and engaged with thousands of people throughout the world—you, the communities, said there needs to be another Global Day—a day on the calendar where Jews around the world are united through our sacred text—the Jewish people’s legacy. Therefore this year we will be continuing the Global Day of Jewish Learning to ensure that the Jewish people can continue to study and learn our Jewish texts together.

As Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz recently said, “As a mark of the unity of our people, it is time to put learning and study back on the world-wide Jewish agenda. I frequently urge people to “take a step ahead” in their Jewish learning, practice and commitment. Clearly for the many thousands of people who participated last year, a step was taken. Now, it is time for the next.”

Both the Global Day and this curriculum are the work of many hands, internationally and in communities large and small. We extend special gratitude to Beth Cousens and Rabbi Avi Weinstein for developing and creating the classes that comprise the Global Day Adult Curriculum. An additional thank you to Rabbi Benjamin Berger, Sarah Gershman, Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg, Aliza Sperling, and Dena Weiss for their valuable contributions. The early childhood curriculum has been prepared by The PJ Library. We also appreciate the hard work of Lizzy Bentley, Communications and Social Media Coordinator for this year’s Global Day.

The Aleph Society, which spearheads the Global Day of Jewish Learning, is an affiliate of the Shefa Institute, a world-wide consortium that promotes the work of Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz. We are grateful to Rabbi Menachem Even-Israel, its Executive Director for his guidance and creativity.

Several agencies and individuals were instrumental in the planning and outreach for the Global Day. Our deepest thanks go to Steve Schwager, Gideon Taylor, and Julian Voloj at the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

Margy-Ruth Davis & Rachel Weiss-Berger

*The Aleph Society*
The Global Day of Jewish Learning is spearheaded by the Aleph Society, which was founded in 1990 to further Rabbi Steinsaltz’s mission of “Let My People Know.” The Global Day of Jewish Learning and the other programs supported by the Aleph Society share a common goal: the development of Jews and Jewish communities worldwide. These programs have given many thousands of Jews access to fundamental texts, the skills with which to understand those texts, the motivation to study, and an appreciation of the contribution of fellow Jews of all backgrounds.

The Global Day of Jewish Learning is the first global venture for the Aleph Society. Building upon its success of bringing Jewish learning and texts to communities across the world, the Aleph Society is beginning to develop additional programs for communities.

This year, we are launching our first Talmud Circle/Aleph Fellows program in Northern California. We are partnering with Lehrhaus Judaica to bring together 120 adult learners from across the Bay Area Talmud study and a retreat with Rabbi Steinsaltz. We hope to have additional Talmud Circle/Aleph Fellow cohorts across North America in the coming years.

We continue to engage with an online audience through the Big Questions campaign. The Big Questions allow us a way to communicate and connect the broader Jewish community in discussions about important issues that matter to us all, within a context of Jewish ideas and resources.

All of the programs that the Aleph Society produces go to the core of Rabbi Steinsaltz’s philosophy that all of the Jewish people should take “a step ahead” (wherever they may be) in their Jewish journey. We hope that our programming within communities and online assists in that journey.
The Global Day of Jewish Learning is a day that unites the Jewish people and community from around the world. This year’s theme is the unity of the Jewish people through the words of the Shema. As a Jewish people there are many things that divide us as a people – yet the benediction of the Shema are words that unite us as a Jewish people. Through the words of the Shema Yisrael, we have developed a curriculum to reach all levels of learners with focusing on our central text—the Talmud.

As the theme of the 2011 Global Day, Shema Yisrael offers a similar ground. In the words of Rabbi Steinsaltz:

For the Jewish people, the Shema is a call, a slogan, a sign of identification and an expression of great emotions. It is a declaration of bond, principles and identity. Shema Yisrael, “Hear O Israel,” has been with us from the very beginning of our history. These words have accompanied our people for thousands of years—in its homeland and in exile, in times of peace and war, in the gas chambers and along with the cries of triumph. This was our “password”; it is how Jews recognized each other—despite geographical, linguistic and cultural differences.

In this theme, we have an opportunity to look at this historic text, at the ideas it represents, and at its meaning for us today. We can open ourselves to challenge from Rabbi Steinsaltz, who proposes that we adopt this text as a central mantra. We open ourselves to questions embedded in the text, about the nature of God and of the one God, about Israel as homeland and people, about hearing and witnessing, and about what Shema as daily or bedtime prayer and ritual means for us, personally. We have an opportunity to come together, to debate, challenge, and disagree, and, perhaps most significantly, learn from colleagues and friends and to glory in our ability to grapple with each other and with our intellectual tradition, within the playground that is the Jewish conversation.
The Global Day classes are intended for those relatively new to Jewish text study, but who have a basic understanding of one of the following: the Torah, Mishnah, or Talmud, and who have studied Jewish texts at least a few times before.

If you have an audience that is primarily new to Jewish text study, or an audience that approaches texts from a unique lifestage, we recommend using the class resources in these ways:

### Beginning Adult Learners

- Base a class on Rabbi Steinsaltz’s essay, “What Is Talmud Torah?”. You might want to split the paragraphs up among participants—give a few paragraphs to each participant. After they read and parse the paragraphs, go around the room and create a summary of the essay from the participants’ feedback.
- Use the following discussion questions.
  - What is unique about the Talmud, according to Rabbi Steinsaltz?
  - How does the Talmud work?
  - Why are the Torah and Talmud central to Jewish tradition? What do you learn from this essay?
  - What is interesting or challenging to participants about text study?
- Look at a few texts about the Shema, so as to engage in the Global Day theme and to practice some of what you just learned about Talmud study. We recommend the following.
  - Ketubot 110b is a relatively straightforward text about an issue relevant for our idea: aliyah to Israel. It can be found within the class “Israel and Jewish Home.”
  - In the class “Israel and the Jewish Home” there is a Tosaphot commentary on this Talmud text. Participants can look at this, aiming to study the text and understand how commentators built on previous texts.
- Close by asking participants about their experience of text study, debriefing and helping participants look forward to studying again.

### High School Students

- Base a class on Rabbi Steinsaltz’s essay, “A Call for Shema.” Discussion questions follow the essay.
- Combine the conversation and the class on “The Nature of God” and “Our Ideas about God.” Focus on participants’ understandings of God, giving teenagers the opportunity to talk about what they pray to when they pray. Look particularly at Berachot 7a (in the class “The Lord is My God: Exploring our Ideas about God”), which will direct participants’ attention to how they imagine God and what God is. You might also want to incorporate the ideas from Rabbi Steinsaltz that are included in these classes.
- Take high school students through “Bedtime Shema,” and ask participants to share their responses to several texts, particularly HaMapil and Ribono Shel Olam. Focus them on what it means to review the good and bad of one’s day and to consider daily what they need be forgiven for and their own capacity to forgive.
College Students

Use “Bedtime Shema,” as it stands, or combine the classes on “The Nature of God” and “Our Ideas about God.” Each of these will engage college students at the intersection of their ideas about their lives and Jewish historic ideas and concepts.

At the close of the conversation, you might want to debrief the experience of studying texts together. What is it like? What are our associations with Jewish text study? What would it mean to study more? What do Jewish texts bring to our lives? What are our big questions about Judaism—how might we explore these through texts?
The *Shema* is a declaration of connection, of faith and of confidence. It is a promise and a call: We are here, we belong, we continue, we have a past and a future.

— Rabbi Steinsaltz

Shema: An Introduction and Overview
On the Bedtime Shema
A Conversation: Call for Shema
A Conversation: Bedtime Shema
Advanced Class: The Shema’s Place in Jewish Liturgy
The Shema is undoubtedly the uncontested statement of faith for the Jewish people’s relationship with God. Yet most people say it so reflexively that it is often more a rote recitation than a profound statement of faith. The simple sentence belies the profundity that these words declare.

This class is designed as an overview and introduction to the Shema as a totality. The Shema will be depicted not only as a statement, but also as an experience. Both ancient and modern commentaries are offered side by side in an attempt to offer a deeper understanding of this prayer.

Text #1: Zecharia 14:9

And the Lord will be King over all the earth,
On that day the Lord will be One and His name will be One.

1. What implications do these words have for how we understand the Shema?
2. Zecharia was not talking about his present-day; he is projecting (“one day”). What does this infer about the nature of prayer to God during Zecharia’s times? What kind of time is he projecting?

Text #2: Rashi—Deuteronomy 6:4

God our God, God is One—God who is “our God” now but not the God of the other nations, God is destined to be the “One God,” as it says, “For then I shall change the nations to speak a clear language so that they may all call out in the Name of God; on that day God will be One and God’s name will be One.”

1. How is this comment similar to that of Zecharia?
2. How does this idea help to explain why the Shema is so central to Jewish life?
3. How else does this text shed light on the Shema?
Text #3: Abraham’s Promise, Michael Wyschograd (Page 40)

The task of Israel is to proclaim that only The Lord [the Lord] is God. The Lord is thus identified by a proper name not by the noun God. “Only The Lord is God” asserts that the one specific person described in the Bible is God. And the specificity of The Lord can only be expressed through the stories recorded in the Bible.

He is the God who created heaven and earth, chose Abraham, brought the children of Israel out of Egypt. This is the reason that the history of the Jewish people plays such an essential role in the definition of The Lord while, in one sense, “creator of heaven and earth” alone defines Him uniquely, in the broader sense only a relatively adequate recounting of His deeds determines that we are speaking about the particular The Lord who is the only God. Without such a recounting, we are likely to be referring to God as an abstract noun rather than to God who does not hesitate to assume a proper name. When a proper name of God recedes into the background, we move into the realm of first causes and unmoved movers, the God of pure reason rather than the covenant partner of Israel.

1. Why does it mean to adopt the Shema as a mission statement?
2. Why say the Shema and make this declaration, according to Wyschograd?

Text #4: Saadiah Gaon—Commentary on the Torah

Shema: Know
Shema: Accept

1. What is the difference between knowing, and accepting?
2. Why might knowing come first?
3. What does this understanding of the Shema add to our understanding of the Shema?

Text #5: The Shema, Rabbi Norman Lamm (Page 16)

Saadía’s second sense of this word is *kabbel*, “accept,” implying faith, commitment, and obedience, as in the Talmudic expression for the Shema, *kabbal’ol malkhut shamayim*, the acceptance of the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven. The recitation is not to be a disembodied intellectual declaration, a mere academic exercise, but must represent a profound spiritual, existential commitment to the content and implications of this first verse of the Shema. That is, we are summoned not only to listen but to listen to.

1. Summarize what Rabbi Lamm says here. What does it add to how we understand the Shema?
2. What is the difference between “listen” and “listen to”?
3. How do we act if we “listen to”? 
When reading K’riat Shema, after finishing the first verse, one quietly says: “Barukh Shem K’vod Malkhuto L’olam Va’ed” (Blessed is the Name of the Glory of His Kingdom forever), after which he resumes reading in his usual fashion “V’Ahavta et Adonai Elohecha” (You shall love the Lord your God) until the end.

Why do we read this? We have a tradition that at the time that Jacob, our forefather, assembled his sons in Egypt at the time of his death, he commanded and exhorted them regarding the unity of God and the way of God which Abraham and Isaac, Jacob’s grandfather and father, followed. Jacob asked them and said to them: “My sons, is it possible that there is among you someone unfit who does not share my belief in the unity of God?”, as Moses Rabbenu said: “It may be that there is among you a man or woman...” (Deuteronomy 29:17). They all responded and said: “Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad” (Hear Yisra’el! The Lord is our God, The Lord is One) in other words: “Hear from us, our father, Yisra’el, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.” The elder responded and said: “Barukh Shem K’vod Malkhuto L’olam Va’ed”. Therefore, all Jews have the custom to say the praise with which the elder Yisra’el praised, after this verse.

Text #7: Worship of the Heart, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (Page 110)

What message does this narrative convey to us? First, that the creed of Shema goes back to the very origin of our history, to the dawn of our collective existence. The solemn declaration is perhaps the first truth, which our great Patriarchs discovered. It became their motto and dominant motif in life. It is not merely a theoretical truth, a philosophical pronouncement, a religious dogma, a norm, however central and endowed with meaning. It is rather the shibboleth of our historical uniqueness, a living doctrine which bears witness to course of ages, uniting us with our Patriarchs, drawing them into our temporal ontic circle, thus lending to our own existence the tenor of “timelessness.”... It is indeed the acceptance of a great task, the declaration addressed to the remote past that joins the march of generations committed to one idea. In a word, the reading of Shema is a dialogue between the ages, the continual restaging of the historic meeting of Jacob and his sons, pregnant with paradoxical destiny, full of import.
Text #8: The Shema, Norman Lamm (Page 21)

According to this *midrash*, our words, repeated twice daily, are addressed not to the general community, *k’lal Yisrael*, but to our very personal intimate forefather Jacob-Israel. In calling out to him across the chasm of the generations, we assure him and ourselves that the One God he worshiped is ours as well; that we continue his tradition, which he entrusted to his children, that we have not and will not falter as we strive to implement the “Kingdom of Heaven” in our own times and our own places.

1. How do Rabbis Soloveitchik and Lamm understand the comments from Maimonides?
2. How do these comments resonate with you?

Text #9: God in Search of Man, Abraham Joshua Heschel (Page 281)

If God were a theory, the study of theology would be the way to understand Him. But God is alive and in need of love and worship. This is why thinking of God is related to our worship. In an analogy of artistic understanding, we sing to Him before we are able to understand Him. We have to love in order to know. Unless we learn how to sing, unless we know how to love, we will never learn how to understand Him.

1. Summarize the text. What is Rabbi Heschel trying to communicate? Why, do you think?
2. How does the Shema express these ideas?
3. How do Rabbi Heschel’s ideas build on what we have already looked at?

Conclusion: Deuteronomy 6:5-9

You shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your resources. Let these matters that I command you today be upon your heart. Teach them thoroughly to your children and speak of them while you sit in your home, while you walk on the way, when you retire and when you arise. Bind them as a sign upon your arm and let them be *tefillin* between your eyes. And write them on the doorposts of your house and upon your gates.
Our sages compiled a “bedtime themed” liturgy known as the Bedtime Shema. The liturgy is meant to acknowledge our fear at going to sleep and hope that we return to our bodies. When parents say the Shema with children, the moment becomes one of transmission of Jewish commitment and commitment to prayer. In this class, we explore how the Shema can be a meaningful prayer experience for adults and for families.

During the rabbis’ time, it was thought that when we slept, we gave our souls to God, and we were never sure if our souls would be returned to us and we would be alive the next morning. Bedtime was filled with fear. The bedtime liturgy was created to guard our lives and souls, to assure ourselves as we went to sleep. It has become an opportunity for individuals to have time to themselves, for reflection, concentration, and devotion. It has also become a treasured and influential Jewish moment for parents and children: In it, we connect to Jewish tradition and to the Jewish people, we create a sacred moment of family, and we express our fear and affirm that we are safe before we turn to night-time darkness.

Here we explore some of the texts of the Bedtime Shema and also consider the nature of bedtime rituals, thinking about what it means to build Jewish moments and moments of reflection through bedtime rituals for ourselves and with our children.

Text #1: Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz: A Guide to Jewish Prayer

The recitation of Shema at bedtime is one of the five fixed daily orders of prayer; yet, far from being a communal form of prayer, it is a highly personal one, meant for the individual while alone with himself. The origin of reading the Shema at bedtime... is in the Talmud, which states that it was instituted mainly for purposes of safety and defense. In the literal sense, it is supposed to guard a person from all kinds of danger that might come upon one during the night, when asleep and defenseless. But in a deeper sense, it is intended to guard the soul from all kinds of spiritual harm that might occur while one is lying in bed.

1. Summarize the text. What are the different reasons that the Bedtime Shema was developed?
2. Which reasons resonate with you?
3. What is the difference, for you, between saying the Shema with a community and saying the Shema individually? What is it like to say the Shema individually?
4. What is bedtime like for children that you know, or for your children? How do you comfort them? How do you comfort yourself?
Text #2: Babylonian Talmud Berachot 57b

Fire is one sixtieth of purgatory, honey is one sixtieth of manna, Shabbat is one sixtieth of the World to Come, sleep is one sixtieth of death, a dream is one sixtieth of prophesy.

1. Summarize the text. What is it trying to communicate?
2. What is the relationship between each of these things (Shabbat and the World to Come, sleep and death, dream and prophesy)?
3. How does this contextualize our conversation about the Bedtime Shema?

Text#3: Babylonian Talmud Berachot 4b

Even though one has already said Shema in synagogue, it is a mitzvah to say it before bedtime.

1. No reason is given for this practice. What might be the thinking behind saying this additional Shema?
2. What does it mean that the Shema is already said in synagogue? Why is this important?

Text #4: V’Ahavta/ Deuteronomy 6

And you shall love God, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with everything that you have. May you take to heart these things that I command of you today. Teach them to your children. Speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on your way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. Put them as a sign on your arm and as tefillin between your eyes. Write them on the doorposts of your house and gates.

1. Summarize this familiar text. What are the different things it is trying to communicate?
2. Why might we say the Shema before we go to bed?
3. What does “when you lie down” mean? What are all of the things it could mean?
4. To what extent is this text about intergenerational Jewish life? How do we, as Jews, teach our tradition to the next generation?
I forgive anyone who made me angry or upset or who hurt me,
My body, my things, my feelings, or anything thing that is mine
By accident or on purpose
By words, actions, thoughts;
In this world or in another world.
I forgive each one.
May nobody be punished because of me.
May it be your will God—God of my ancestors—that I not hurt anyone anymore.
Whatever hurt that I have done, may You forgive me and not punish me.
God, may these words I say and the feelings in my heart make You happy.

1. What resonates with you from this text?
2. What does this text reveal about the Jewish understanding of bedtime?
3. Why might it be important for adults or children to have an opportunity to forgive and ask forgiveness before they go to sleep?
4. How can we incorporate the themes from this text into our own bedtime rituals?
### Text #6: Hamapil

Blessed are you God, our God, Ruler of the world who makes my eyes heavy and my eyelids sleepy. May it be your will—God of my ancestors that I lie down to sleep in peace and awake in peace. May I not be upset by any bad dreams or thoughts. May my children someday make you happy. May you help me see in the dark, for it is you who illuminates the pupil of the eye. Blessed are you God, who lights up the whole world with your Glory.

1. What does and doesn’t resonate with you about this text?
2. What does this text reveal about the Jewish understanding of bedtime?
3. Why do you think this text comes right after the preceding one about forgiveness?
4. What is the connection between this meditation and the Shema?
5. Why do you think we were commanded that these words be the last ones we say before sleep? Why is that important?

### Text #7: Shulchan Arukh, Rabbi Moshe Isserles Orach Chaim 239:1

One should not eat or drink, or speak after one says the Bedtime Shema, rather he should fall asleep immediately, as it is written: “Ponder it on your bed, and be still…” (Psalms 4:5)...and if he reads the Shema and could not fall asleep immediately, he should read it over and over again until he sinks in sleep, so that the reading of Shema will immediately precede his going to sleep.

1. Why might these rules have been established for saying the Shema at bedtime?
2. What might be an outcome of adopting this as a regular process?
3. Is there anything that might stop this from being a rote practice that ceases to have meaning?
Hebrew Sources

Text #2:

ברכות נב

שמעת את 말씀ך, אלהי סעד. אלהי עלם, אלהי איש, אלהי תורתך, אלהי שםך, אלהי שמה, אלהי חכמה, אלהי חכמה, אלהי חכמה.

On the Bedtime Shema

Text #3:

ברכות ב

אמר רבינו יהודה בןילה: או פיך שקרא אדם קריית שמי בברית הבכורה, מצות לקוראים עלメッות.

Text #7:

ש olanec עוזין יהי ר(Unknown) יאעאأسلوب ספרותי של תהלים, ד כתוב כל רוחה רוחה לובה' בעיון מים בסיכם, שאמור: אמרו בלשון

Including additional Hebrew sources and texts related to Jewish learning and customs.

The Global Day of Jewish Learning November 13, 2011 www.theglobalday.com
The recitation of Shema at bedtime is one of the five fixed daily orders of prayer; yet, far from being a communal form of prayer, it is a highly personal one, meant for the individual while alone with himself. The origin of reading the Shema at bedtime (i.e. immediately before going to sleep, some reciting it while actually lying in bed) is in the Talmud, which states that it was instituted mainly for purposes of safety and defense. In the literal sense, it is supposed to guard a person from all kinds of danger that might come upon one during the night when asleep and defenseless. But in a deeper sense, it is intended to guard the soul from all kinds of spiritual harm that might occur when one is lying in bed.

The night hours are a time of darkness that correspond, in the inner spiritual sense, to a period in which all kinds of evil powers dominate: “You make darkness, and it is night; wherein all the beasts of the forest creep forth” (Psalm 104: 20). The activities of all daytime life forms—human beings, birds, plants, etc.—gradually decrease, the lack of illumination indicates, whether physically or spiritually, concealment and a waning vitality. Together with this change in the world in general, another major change occurs in the state of the human existence—sleep. Sleep is the withdrawal of conscious spirit, and the level of vital energy is lowered not only in terms of general activity but also in the bodily functions of heartbeat and breathing. For this reason, our sages have said that sleep is a “mini death,” a “sixtieth part of death” (Berachot 57b). Wherever light and life vanish, they are replaced by twilight beings and forces of impurity ... Therefore sleep, especially during the night, requires protection.

Another explanation for reading the Shema at bedtime is that one goes to sleep with the words of Torah in mind (some people were even accustomed to repeat certain phrases over and over until they fell asleep). In this way, one not only prevents one's mind from dwelling on trivial or impious thoughts, but engages in sacred matters. Falling asleep in this manner, even one's sleep and dreams are affected by this worthy occupation.

There is yet another aspect to all this. Since during sleep a person is no longer conscious of one's thoughts and deeds, sleep constitutes a temporary cessation of conscious life, between the time one goes to bed and the time one wakens in the morning. Although our sages have mentioned the renewal that comes after sleep, there is also a direct line of continuity in activity and thought between the end of one day and the beginning of the next one. When one prepares oneself for sleep, the conscious continuity of one's life follows that same line of thought and experience. As one sage has caustically expressed it, “Whoever goes to sleep like a dog cannot rise like a lion.” Thus, suitable preparation for sleep—through reading the Shema at bedtime—is not merely a conclusion to the day but also the beginning of a new one.

The most essential components of [the bedtime Shema] reading... are the reading of the biblical portion of Shema and the benediction ha-Mappil. The numerous additions to this are of two main types: requests and protective formulations (various prayers and verses) and confessions and words of remorse. Such confessions before sleep has a double meaning. On the one hand, a person going to sleep is, in some way, like someone who is about to die. It is a little death only, but nevertheless involves a conscious foregoing of one's full vitality and its [trust] to God... while waking up each morning is seen as a recurring grace of resurrection. It is therefore appropriate for a person to make confession before yielding up the soul, as one does at the point of death.
A Conversation: Bedtime Shema
from A Guide to Jewish Prayer

On the other hand, as this Shema reading is the last act done at the end of the day, it is appropriate that it include a summary of the day’s activities. Throughout the day, a person undergoes many things; one might, for example, have been hurt by someone, and might need for one’s own peace of mind and for that of other people, a prayer to pardon those who have sinned against one. There is also room for self-accounting, if one has sinned against others. Such a summing up might reveal that, during the course of the day, one might have committed various sins, either intentionally or by accident. Some may notice only things that are evident and clear-cut, while others might be able to discover also more tenuous matters. Yet at all times and for all people, it is necessary to examine the gap between capability, expectations, and actual realization. The recital of the Shema at bedtime can be seen as an act of cleansing and purification, with a clear mind and a plea for atonement. Only once this has been done, and all accounts have been completed, can one sleep peacefully.

1. What are the reasons that Rabbi Steinsaltz gives for reciting the Bedtime Shema? What were the reasons that it developed and what are the reasons that we might recite it today?

2. What role does a nighttime ritual seem to play, in Rabbi Steinsaltz’s framing of it?

3. Rabbi Steinsaltz discusses the bedtime Shema as helping us to identify “the gap between capability, expectations, and actual realization” in each of our days. What does this remind you of, in Jewish tradition? How does this happen through the bedtime Shema? How else do we do this through ritual?

4. How would this work in your life and in the lives of those you know? Would this be a bedtime ritual that you would recite? What would you want to add?
Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz

For the Jewish people, the Shema is a call, a slogan, a sign of identification and an expression of great emotions. Beyond that, it is a declaration of bond, principles and identity. Shema Yisrael, “Hear O Israel,” has been with us from the very beginning of our history. These words were written on the flag of the camp of the Israelites when they left Egypt, and have accompanied our people for thousands of years – in its homeland and in exile, in times of peace and war, in the gas chambers and along with the cries of triumph. This was our “password”; it is how Jews recognized each other—despite geographical, linguistic and cultural differences.

The words Shema Yisrael are uttered at all times of great emotion. They were our fathers’ last words on their deathbeds; martyrs would chant Shema Yisrael when they ascended the pyre; scared children walking alone at night would say Shema Yisrael to encourage themselves with words that express confidence and promise; women in labor would scream Shema Yisrael in the midst of their labor pains; and whoever was moved by or excited about a great event would also utter Shema Yisrael.

We call upon the entire Jewish people to return to reciting the Shema, we urge every Jew to take upon him or herself to say these words regularly in order to express and strengthen their connection with the Jewish nation, as well as to reveal and shed light upon their internal identity.

Devoting a few moments every morning and night to recite this short passage is invaluable. By saying these words, which every Jew can say at anywhere and in whatever situation he or she may be, one connects oneself with the fabric of thousands of years of fathers and sons, those who have been born and those who are yet to be born, as well as with the brothers and sisters all over the world who also recite these words.

The Shema, then, is a declaration of connection, of faith and of confidence. It is a promise and a call: We are here, we belong, we continue, we have a past and a future. A poetic statement in our daily prayer sums it up by saying: “O Guardian of Israel, protect the remnant of Israel, let not Israel be destroyed—those who proclaim, Shema Yisrael.”

1. What are the reasons that Rabbi Steinsaltz gives for reciting the Shema? Why do we recite the Shema, according to him?
2. What do you think of when you recite the Shema? Which of the above reasons resonate for you?
3. The title of this essay is, “A Call for Shema.” Why is Rabbi Steinsaltz issuing this call? What is a “call”? What do you think of Rabbi Steinsaltz’s call?
4. How would this work in your life and in the lives of those you know? What is stopping us from answering the call? What would lead us to answer the call?
In addition to being a phrase of affirmation and comfort, the Shema is a central part of Jewish liturgy. What role does it play in the liturgy? What is the intention behind our recitation of the Shema in its liturgical context?

In its simplicity, the Shema has functioned throughout Jewish history as a declaration of faith and a source of comfort. As Jews were persecuted and murdered for their beliefs, they followed in suite of the Mishnaic sage Rabbi Akiva, proclaiming the Shema, sometimes with their last breaths.

Even with this practice, so as to fulfill the commandment of reciting its words twice daily, the rabbis dictated that the Shema would be said as a central part of prayer services, surrounded by other prayers relating to love of God, faith, and God’s redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt. At the same time, with this full set of blessings and liturgical writings, the Shema is not technically considered a prayer. Reciting the Shema is its own mitzvah and recitation of the Shema and its blessings is prescribed in conjunction with prayer, specifically the Amidah, or “Silent Devotion.”

The Shema is nevertheless considered a prerequisite to having the temerity to pray and ask God for daily sustenance. Without acknowledging our obedience to God and His kingdom, how dare we venture further into the realm of praise, petition and gratitude?

This collection of sources explores the nature of the full Shema in this context, the juxtaposition of reciting the Shema and its blessings and praying the Amidah. It uses this context to drill down on specific questions about the Shema: If the Shema is not a prayer, how does it function in a prayer setting? Why do so many people think of it as a prayer? What does this mean for our recitation of the Shema?

The legal term for the juxtaposition of the Shema and the Amidah is semichat geulah l’tefilah (juxtaposing Redemption and Prayer). The term redemption is borrowed from ga’al yisrael (Redeemer of Israel) which is the concluding blessing of the Shema and its liturgical sequence, added so that in addition to saying the words of the Shema daily, those praying would also recall daily God’s redemption of the people Israel from Egypt. Familiarity with this term will help participants understand and articulate not only how the Rabbis explain the Shema’s presence in a context of prayer, but also how the participants themselves think about what the Shema does when one says it in a prayer context.
Text #1: Mishnah Berachot 2:2

Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Korcha said: Why does Shema precede the prayer that begins with “and when you heed my commandments”? In order that one should receive the yoke of heaven first, and afterward receive the yoke of the commandments.

1. The Mishnah articulates a two stage process. According to Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Korcha, what is the purpose of both these stages?
2. How does this fit with what you understand is the purpose of these prayers?

Text #2: Babylonian Talmud Berachot 4b

As Rabbi Yochanan said: Who is a person destined for the World to Come? One who juxtaposes [the blessing of] redemption and the evening prayer.

1. Summarize the text. What is redemption here, and what is evening prayer?
2. How does Rabbi Yochanan express the importance of juxtaposing redemption and prayer?
3. What do you think would serve as a good introduction to a prayer for redemption? Would you choose the Shema? Why or why not?

Text #3: Rashi to Berachot 4b

... And we say in the Jerusalem Talmud Berachot: One who does not juxtapose redemption and prayer to what is he similar? To the beloved of the king that came and knocked on the door of the king. The king emerged and found that [the beloved] had departed so [the king] also departed. Rather a person should draw God close to him and charm God with the adulation and praise of [recounting] the departure from Egypt and he will draw close to God, and while God is still close a person should demand his needs.

1. What is the reason Rashi gives for this law (of linking the Shema, redemption and the Amidah)? What is the “knocking on the door of the king?”
2. How does Rashi characterize the Shema? What role does the Shema play?
3. What do you think of Rashi’s understanding of prayer? How does Rashi’s explanation affect your view of prayer?
4. Rashi adds the relevance of the added paragraphs after the Shema and notes the historical context that they add. What do you make of this? What role do the historical words play in the piece or in your recitation of the piece?
Text #4: Midrash Shemot Rabbah 22:3

And why is it necessary to mention the splitting of the Red Sea in the concluding blessing of the Shema? Because it was when He parted the sea for them that they believed in Him, as it says, They believed in God and Moses his servant (Ex. 14:31). And in the merit of the belief that they believed they merited to sing (at the Song of the Sea) and the divine spirit descended on them. As it says after it, Then Moses sang (Ex. 15:1). Therefore a person is required to juxtapose Redemption and Prayer as they [placed] song after the belief and the splitting [of the sea]. And just as they purified their hearts and sang as it says, The people feared God and believed and afterward, Then [Moses] sang, so too a person must purify his heart before he prays. So too Job says, For there is no theft in my hands and my prayer is pure (Job 16:17). R’ Joshua bar Nehemiah the priest said- Is there really a dirty prayer? Rather, anyone whose hands are dirty with stealing will call out to God and He will not answer him. Why? For he is praying in sin. But Job whose work was clear of theft, his prayer was pure. Therefore he says, For there is no theft in my hands, i.e. that there is no wrong doing on my hands or in my work, my prayer is pure.

1. According to this midrash, why is it important to speak about the Exodus before entering into prayer?
2. How do you think the second discussion, about the prayer of a thief, might be connected to the beginning discussion about the Song of the Sea?
3. What does this mean for recitation of the Shema?

Text #5: Rabbeinu Yonah to Berachot 4b

Is it really because he juxtaposes redemption and prayer he deserves so great a reward as to enter the world to come?! And my teacher, the Rabbi, said that the reason he merits such a great reward is because the reason God redeemed us and took us out of Egypt was so that we would be His slaves, as it says, They are My servants that I have taken out of Egypt (Lev. 25:55). And in the blessing of Redemption it mentions this kindness that God has done for us, and the Prayer is the service, as we say, And you shall serve the Lord your God- that is prayer (Bava Batra 92b). And when he mentions the exodus from Egypt and then prays immediately he demonstrates that just as a slave who is acquired by a master has to do the commandments of his master so too he recognizes the good that God has done for him in redeeming him. [He acknowledges] that he is His slave and serves him because He has redeemed him, and does His will and commandments. The result is that because of [this service] he merits the world to come.

1. We often refer to prayer in the synagogue as “services.” How does Rabbeinu Yonah understand this service? How does it change your view of prayer?
2. According to Rabbeinu Yonah, what is it that really grants one entry to the World to Come?
3. Which of the earlier sources do you think is closest to the approach of Rabbeinu Yonah?
4. How does this inform our recitation of the Shema?
Hebrew Sources

Text #1:

משנה ברכתי ב' ב
אִרְיָא יְהוָה בֶן קְרִית הָלָם קְדֵם חַלָּה גְלֵתָה אֶת שְׁמֹהَا אֲנָהּ כַּדָּג שְׁקֵפָה עֲלַי עֶלֶי מלְכוֹת שְׁמֵי חָלוֹת אָוָה כְּקַבֵּל עַלֵּי גֹּזָו...

Text #2:

דרי מسقط ברכת כ ב שער
ואמרין 바로 בירושלמי: מְשַׁמְּרוּ שְׂמֵי חַלָּה גְּלֵתָה לָם חַלָּה גְּלֵתָה לֹא יַהֲדוּ לוֹ שְׁמֵי חַלָּה גְּלֵתָה פַּתַּתָוּ שִּׁלָּחֲכֵנִי הָלָם אֶלָּא יִתְּנָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָוּ אֶלָּא יִתְּנָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָוּ. אֵלֶּה יִתְּנָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָוּ מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָוּ מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָוּ מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָוּ מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָוּ מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָוּ מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָוּ מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָוּ מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָוּ מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָוּ מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָו... מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָו מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָו מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָו מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָו מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָו מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָו מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָו מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָו מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָו מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָו מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָו מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָו מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָו מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁת... מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָו מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָו מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָו מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָו מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָו מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָו מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָו מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁת... מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָו מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָו מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָו מֵהֲבָאָה מַעֲנֵי שֵׁת... מַעֲנֵי שֵׁתָה-פַּתַּתָו מֵהֲבָאָה מַע...
When we contemplate that [there is] no reality that can separate us from God, we come-as much as we can-to the proximity of God.

— Rabbi Steinsaltz

The Lord is our God &
The Lord is One

Exploring Our Ideas About God
The Challenge of Idolatry
Monotheism and Oneness
Ever since Jacob wrestled with God, Jews have explored our relationship with God and the presence of God in our lives. What are different ideas about God in our tradition? Is it possible to define the concept of “God”? How can we understand God when we only have our own, human language to describe God?

In Psalm 139, the psalmist engages in conversation with God, suggesting, “You have scrutinized me and you know; you know my sitting down and my rising up; you understand my thought from afar... You have restricted me and you have laid your hand on me. Knowledge is beyond me; exalted, I am incapable of it.” Central to the Jewish intellectual and spiritual tradition is our opportunity or responsibility to develop a relationship with God—but what does that mean? Psalm 139 explores this question: God knows us, God knows our moves and our thoughts, God limits us when necessary and God takes action against us, and we understand and revere this—still, we cannot know God. Our tradition is filled with ideas similar to this, acknowledging that it is incumbent upon us to love and fear God, and to come to know God through the mitzvot and through study. At the same time, our tradition suggests, there is rarely one understanding of God, rather there are countless images and understandings of God, manifesting in inspiring and complex ideas. These plentiful ideas can be overwhelming, particularly in a larger culture where for many of us, God-talk is not often prevalent and we have only rare opportunities to talk through with others about how we imagine God.

Texts #1: Ideas from Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz

From Simple Words: Thinking about What Really Matters in Life

Perhaps our greatest difficulty in relating to God is our inherent inability to form any coherent understanding of the Almighty. With the millions of words that have been said and written, both for and against, with all the prayers, prayer books, and books on devotion, so much of this subject still remains empty words. The word “God” is indeed used—in public prayers or in unvoiced wishes, in common conversation and in curses—with equal meaninglessness. For most people it means everything—and nothing.

For many people, the image of God is quite clear: a big, white bearded man sitting on a throne very high in the sky. He has—at least figuratively—a stick in one hand, and a bag of candy in the other, bestowing each on His subjects. Many prayers, as well as bitter complaints, ask for more of the candy and less of the stick. You may object and say that such an idea is just childish, kindergarten imagery, but how many people actually continue to develop their religious understanding beyond that age?
Asked, “Who is God?” Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz provides his personal reflections in the interview below:

Q: Characterize God: Is He vengeful, merciful, moody?
A: How can one characterize God? Whatever we say is going to be both right and wrong at the same time. All the good, beautiful and sweet things in this world are actually attributes of God, and every day, nay, every moment, we see Him differently. What is the color of a bubble of water? That depends upon the angle from which I look at it, and when I gaze at it long enough, I shall see in it all the colors and hues: Great, Mighty, Compassionate, Gracious, Awesome, Un-understandable—but forever extremely close to me.

Review what he is saying. What are the different points that Rabbi Steinsaltz is making?

1. What are the different ways that Rabbi Steinsaltz characterizes God? What is fundamental to Rabbi Steinsaltz’s ideas of God?
2. To what extent do you take issue with the questioner’s question? What’s interesting about it, given Rabbi Steinsaltz’s points about God?
3. To what extent do you relate to what he is sharing? What is challenging about it? What is attractive about it?
4. Does his conception surprise you in any way?
5. What are our responsibilities in prayer, according to Rabbi Steinsaltz?

Text #2: Psalm 85

Psalm 85

A לֹא עֹדָשׁ לְכָנִי חָרְבִיתָ: ბְּרָזֵנוּ, יַעֲקֹבָא אַדָּשֶׁנָּא שְׁבָחַ בֵּרוּךְ [שְׁבוּת], וּלְעָצָנוּ, וְלִשְׁמָנָּא עָצָאָד, הוֹי:  גְּבֻלֵּנָא תָּמִיד שֵׁמָא סַמִּים כֵּלָה, ד שְׁפֵּם כֵּלָה שָׁמְחֵהּ וְשִׁבְשָׁב מַחְזֹר אַפָּא:  הַשַּׁעַבְּנָא יָלְאָרָא יִשְׁמָעִי נְפֶשׁ אֱלֻאָא; אַלְּנַעֲרָה תַּמָּא בֵּן מַעֲשֵׂו לָדָא יַעֲקֹב:  גּוֹמֹל לְאֶבֶן שָׁמְחָה לָשֵׁם יְשָׁמֵרוּ כָּל:  הַנְּרֵאוּ לְאֶבֶן יְשָׁמֵרָה לֶאֶבֶן כָּל וְלַעֲשׂוּ יָשָׂר אֵלֹהֹי לָכֶנִי:  יִשָּׁמֵרוּ לְאֶבֶן הָעָלָם לְאֶבֶן כָּל:  יִשָּׁמֵרוּ לְאֶבֶן הָעָלָם לְאֶבֶן כָּל:  יִשָּׁמֵרוּ לְאֶבֶן הָעָלָם לְאֶבֶן כָּל:  יִשָּׁמֵרוּ לְאֶבֶן הָעָלָם לְאֶבֶן כָּל:  יִשָּׁמֵרוּ לְאֶבֶן הָעָלָם לְאֶבֶן כָּל:  יִשָּׁמֵרוּ לְאֶבֶן הָעָלָם לְאֶבֶן כָּל.
To the chief Musician, A Psalm for the sons of Korah.

1 Lord, you have been favorable to your land; you have brought back the captivity of Jacob.

2 You have forgiven the iniquity of your people, you have pardoned all their sin. Selah.

3 You have withdrawn all your wrath; you have turned from the fierceness of your anger.

4 Restore us, O God of our salvation, and cease your anger toward us.

5 Will you be angry with us for ever? Will you draw out your anger to all generations?

6 Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?

7 Show us your loving kindness, O Lord, and grant us your salvation.

8 I will hear what God the Lord will speak; for God will speak peace to God’s people, and to God’s pious ones, but let them not turn back to folly.

9 Surely God’s salvation is near to those who fear God; that glory may dwell in our land.

10 Loving kindness and truth meet; righteousness and peace kiss (confront) each other.

11 Truth shall spring from the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven.

12 Also, the Lord shall give that which is good; and our land shall yield her produce.

13 Righteousness shall go before God; and walk in the way of God’s steps.

14 Define the terms “truth,” “lovingkindness,” “righteousness,” and “peace.” (Note that “chesed” does not exactly translate to lovingkindness. What does chesed mean to you?)

2. What does it mean that “truth and lovingkindness should meet”? What is the relationship between truth and lovingkindness?

3. What is the relationship between righteousness and peace? Are they naturally compatible?

4. If not, how do we make room for both?

Text #3: Genesis Rabbah 8:5

Rabbi Simon said: At the moment the Holy One chose to create the first Adam the ministering angels broke up into factions. Some of them said, “Create him,” while others said, “Don’t do it.” Thus it is written: “Lovingkindness and truth will meet, righteousness and peace will kiss.” (Psalms 85:11)

Lovingkindness said: Create him, for he will do acts of lovingkindness.

Truth said: Don’t create him, for he is drenched in lies.

Righteousness said: Create him, for he will do much Tzedaka.

Peace said: Don’t do it, for he is essentially quarrelsome.

What did the Holy One do? God took Truth and cast it toward the earth. Thus it is written, “And truth will be cast to the earth” (Daniel 8:12).

The ministering angels said: Sovereign of the Universe, why do You shame the leader of Your court? Let truth rise from the earth. Thus it is written: “Truth will arise from the earth” (Psalms 85:12).
Text #4: Babylonian Talmud Berachot 7a

Rabbi Johanan says in the name of Rabbi Jose: How do we know that the Holy One, blessed be God, says prayers? Because it says: Even them will I bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer. (Isaiah 56:7) It is not said, ‘their prayer’, but ‘My prayer’; hence [you learn] that the Holy One, blessed be God, says prayers.

What does God pray?—Rabbi Zutra ben Tobi said in the name of Rab: ‘May it be My will that My mercy may suppress My anger, and that My mercy may prevail over My [other] attributes, so that I may deal with My children in the attribute of mercy and, on their behalf, stop short of the limit of strict justice.’

It was taught: Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha says: I once entered into the innermost part [of the Sanctuary] to offer incense and saw Akathriel Yah [the Divine Crown of God], the Lord of Hosts, seated upon a high and exalted throne. God said to me: Ishmael, My son, bless Me! I replied: May it be Your will that Your mercy may suppress Your anger and Your mercy may prevail over Your other attributes, so that You may deal with Your children according to the attribute of mercy and, on their behalf, stop short of the limit of strict justice! And God nodded to me with God’s head.
Text #5: Exodus Rabbah 5.9

“For who is there of all flesh, that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?” (Deuteronomy 5:23). Come and see how the voice went forth to all of Israel, to each and every one in keeping with his particular capacity—to the elderly in keeping with their capacity, to young men in keeping with their capacity, to the little ones in keeping with their capacity, and to the women in keeping with their capacity. As it is said, “Moshe spoke and God answered him with a voice”—a voice that he would have been able to withstand. R. Yose bar Hanina said: If you are astounded at such an assertion, then draw the relevant inference from the manna, which came down for Israel varying in taste, in keeping with each Israelite’s particular need—to young men it tasted like bread, to the elderly it tasted like wafers made with honey, to sucklings it tasted like milk from their mother’s breast, to the sick it tasted like fine flour mingled with honey, while for the heathen it tasted as bitter as linseed. Now, if the manna, which was all of the same kind, changed into so many kinds to provide for the particular need of each individual, was it not possible for the voice, in which there is such divine strength, to vary according to the capacity of each individual, so that no harm should befall him? Hence Job said, “God thunders marvelously with God’s voice” (Job 37:5).

1. Summarize the text. What is being communicated? What is the logic behind the conclusion?
2. How does this text contrast with the other texts reviewed?
3. What might have generated this midrash, this conception of God? Is it something that you relate to?
4. What does the text suggest for the Jewish understanding of God, for our understanding of God that we invoke when we say the Shema?
Hebrew Sources

Text #3:

The Lord is Our God
Hebrew Sources

Text #4:

The Lord is Our God
Hebrew Sources

Text #5:

The Lord is Our God
Hebrew Sources
Worship of one God is the founding principle of Judaism and the focus of the Shema. Radical for its time, monotheism is today a dominant idea in Western culture, and something that we rarely think about. This class helps us to consider the dangers, complexities, or even the attractions of idol worship, ideas that may be new and unusual for us today.

The rabbis discussed idolatry extensively throughout Jewish intellectual history. In this class, texts introduce us to the nuances of idol worship and how it was understood, primarily by the rabbis. The class also gives perspective on what the underlying psychology behind idol worship might have been, and gives us an opportunity to consider how we might engage in a kind of idol worship today, in a modern form.

Text #1: Exodus 20:1-6

1 God spoke all these words, to say:
2 “I am the Lord, your God, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.
3 You shall not have the gods of others in My presence.
4 You shall not make for yourself a graven image or any likeness which is in the heavens above, which is on the earth below, or which is in the water beneath the earth.
5 You shall neither prostrate yourself before them nor worship them, for I, the Lord, your God, am a zealous God, Who visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons, upon the third and the fourth generation of those who hate Me,
6 and [I] perform loving kindness to thousands [of generations], to those who love Me and to those who keep My commandments.
The Challenge of Idolatry

1. Summarize the text. According to this text, what is considered to be prohibited idol worship?
2. Are there any surprises here? Any interesting twists?
3. How many commandments are there here? How are they different from each other?
4. What is the role of verses 5 and 6? Why are they connected to the prohibition of idol worship?
5. What do these words mean for us, in today’s context?
6. What kind of monotheism does this text establish for us? What does this say about the nature of our worship—what is our worship supposed to be?

Text #2: Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 102b

Rav Ashi used to lecture about the three kings of Israel who do not have portion in the World to Come. … One night, Menashe, one of these kings, appeared to Rav Ashi in a dream, saying, You have called us your colleagues and the colleagues of your father; now, from what part [of the bread] is [the piece for reciting] the ha-motzi blessing to be taken? [Rav Ashi] said to him: I do not know. [Menashe] said to him: You haven’t learned this, and yet you call us your colleagues! He said to him: Teach it to me, and tomorrow I will teach it in your name at the session. He answered: From the part that is baked into a crust. [Rav Ashi] then questioned him: Since you are so wise, why did you worship idols? He replied: Were you there, you would have caught up the skirt of your garment and sped after me because of the idolatrous impulse that ruled. The next day, he observed to the students: We will commence with our teachers [referring to the Three Kings].

1. Summarize this text. What happens in it? What are all of the dynamics?
2. Even Rav Ashi, this tremendous scholar and founder of a yeshiva, would have been unable to resist the allure of idol worship! Why?
3. And Menashe, who was an idol worshiper, knew something that Rav Ashi did not. How do we understand this?
4. Menashe lived in the 600s BCE in Judah, and Rav Ashi a thousand years later in Babylonia. What might have been different about their surroundings? Is it a value for us to resist elements of the dominant culture of our times?
5. What does this text say about judging the heresies of another?
Text #3: Babylonian Talmud Avodah Zarah 17a

And does not one die from renouncing sins other [than idolatry]? Surely it has been taught: It was said of Rabbi Eleazar b. Dordia that he did not leave out any harlot in the world without coming to her. Once, on hearing that there was a certain harlot in one of the towns by the sea who accepted a purse of denarii for her hire, he took a purse of denarii and crossed seven rivers for her sake. As he was with her, she blew... wind and said: As this foul smell will not return to its place, so will Eleazar b. Dordia never be received in repentance.

He thereupon went, sat between two hills and mountains and exclaimed: O, hills and mountains, plead for mercy for me! They replied: How shall we pray for you? We stand in need of it ourselves, for it is said, For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed! So he exclaimed: Heaven and earth, plead for mercy for me! They, too, replied: How shall we pray for you? We stand in need of it ourselves, for it is said, For the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment. He then exclaimed: Sun and moon, plead for mercy for me! But they also replied: How shall we pray for you? We stand in need of it ourselves, for it is said, Then the moon shall be confounded and the sun ashamed. He exclaimed: Stars and constellations, plead for mercy for me! Said they: How shall we pray for you? We stand in need of it ourselves, for it is said, And all the hosts of heaven shall moulder away. Said he: The matter then depends upon me alone! Having placed his head between his knees, he wept aloud until his soul departed.

Then a heavenly voice was heard proclaiming: Rabbi Eleazar b. Dordia is destined for the life of the world to come! Now, here was a case of a sin [other idolatry] and yet he he had to die!—In that case, too, since he was so much addicted to immorality it is as [if he had been guilty of] idolatry. Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi [on hearing of it] wept and said: One may acquire eternal life after many years, while another in only one hour! Rabbi also said: Not only is his repentance accepted, he is even called “Rabbi.”

1. Summarize the text. What is the basic plot? What ideas are being communicated?
2. How would you describe Eleazar Ben Dordia’s behavior? (Remember that he saw not just one harlot and not just a few harlots but every harlot in the land.)
3. Why does Eleazar Ben Dordia’s wake up call come from the harlot? Why does that get his attention?
4. What is the connection between compulsive behavior and idolatry?
5. Why was it too late for Eleazar Ben Dordia to fix his life?
6. Define idolatry taking into account all these texts. How does this text suggest a refining of “idolatry.”
Text #4: Babylonian Talmud Avodah Zara 55a

Raba son of Rabbi Isaac said to Rab Judah: ‘There is an idolatrous shrine in our place, and whenever the world is in need of rain, [the idol] appears to [its priests] in a dream, saying, “Slay a human being to me and I will send rain.” They slay a human being to it and rain does come!’

1. Summarize the text. What is happening here?
2. According to this text, what is the attraction of idol worship? Why might the rabbis be talking about this?
3. Similarly, what are the dangers of idol worship?

Text #5: Rabbi Isaac Arama, Akedat Yitzchak

Under the category of idolatry we must include a form which is particularly virulent today—the devoting of all energies and thoughts to the accumulation of wealth and achievement of worldly success. These are the mighty gods on which they rely, to which they pay allegiance and for which they repudiate the Lord on High and forsake His Torah, leaving it deserted and forlorn in a remote corner. This is the very essence of idolatry. Job proclaimed that he had never been tainted by it, in the text: “If I have made gold my hope, and have said to fine gold: Thou art my confidence; if I rejoiced because my wealth was great and because my hand had gotten much” (Job 31, 24-25).

1. What is interesting about the timing and setting of this text?
2. Why might the writer equate idol worship with an emphasis on wealth and with abandoning the Torah? How are these pieces connected?
Hebrew Sources

Text #2:

The Challenge of Idolatry

Text #3:

עבודה יהוה צドル:

Text #4:

עבודה יהוה נמה:
Monotheism and Oneness

Monotheism is one of the great contributions of the Jewish people. What does it mean to us that God is one?

Shema Yisrael proclaims God’s oneness. As we explore the Shema, it seems important that we explore what we proclaim when we say its words. In this class, we will look at fundamental texts that describe the nature of monotheism and the behavior of idolaters and we consider what these historic Jewish ideas mean for us.


The monistic perception is more than just seeing a single all-embracing law. It assumes there is a fundamental principle for the entire aggregate of existence in all its manifestations, and that everything within this aggregate is generated from that basic law....

The belief in one God is not merely an abstract statement about some kind of reality that exists outside of ourselves. It also implies the supremacy of this single essential entity within all reality: all particularities with their differences and divisions, are unified and subject to a single authority. In this regard, every monistic perception is a kind of comprehensive statement—even if not in religious language—of the very same thing, that is to say, the presupposition of the existence of a unified essence from which the different particularities are constructed and are given significance.

Sometimes the monistic perception is completely unified. That is, it sees everything as emerging from a single point of origin. Sometimes it sees a dichotomous world picture. But even such a dichotomous view is merely a complex form of the unified perception, because according to this perception a single pair of opposites explains all phenomena.

1. Summarize the text. What is Rabbi Steinsaltz trying to communicate?
2. How do his ideas resonate with you? Where do you see these ideas in the world, or in Jewish life and tradition?
3. In the context of this text, how do monotheism and monistic thinking influence us today?
Text #2: Exodus 20:1-6

1. Summarize the text. According to this text, what is considered to be prohibited idol worship?
2. Are there any surprises here? Any interesting twists?
3. What is the role of verses 5 and 6? Why are they connected to the prohibition of idol worship?
4. What do these words mean for us, in today's context?
5. What kind of monotheism does this text establish for us? What does this say about the nature of our worship?
6. How does this relate to Rabbi Steinsaltz’s ideas about monistic thinking?

Text #3: Sifre BaMidbar Parshat Shelach 111

Anyone who acknowledges idolatry disavows the Ten Commandments and everything Moses was commanded, and everything the Prophets were commanded, and everything the Patriarchs were commanded. And anyone who disavows idolatry acknowledges the entire Torah.

1. Summarize the text. What kind of statement is this? Why might it have been expressed?
2. Why do you think the Talmud goes so far as to equate rejection of idolatry with embracing the entirety of Judaism?
3. Is the prohibition of idol worship significant in your own Judaism? If so, how?
Monotheism and Oneness

Text #4: Deuteronomy Rabbah 2

The Holy One, blessed be God, thus addressed Israel. See, my sons! See all that I have created. I have created in pairs, heaven and earth—a pair. Sun and moon—a pair. Adam and Eve—a pair. This world and the world to come—a pair. But My glory is one and unique in the world.

1. Everything is created in pairs—why is this the defining factor in ascertaining God's uniqueness?
2. In this context, why are oneness and God so inextricably linked?

Text 5: Maimonides, The Laws of Idolatry, Chapter 1

1. The sages in the days of Enoch and Enoch himself decided that since God created the stars and heavenly spheres in order to govern the world, they are God’s faithful servants. Thus the stars are worthy of praise, and it corresponds to God’s will.
2. With this idea in mind, they started to build temples for the stars, make sacrifices to them, and laud them. All of it was done with the aim of fulfilling the Creator’s will. This marked the beginning of idolatry.
3. Thus idol worshipers do not claim that a concrete star is a god. Everybody knows that only You are God. Yet people err in that they consider the unwarranted actions to be fulfillment of Your will.
4. Many days have passed and false prophets have surfaced. They started telling that God ordered them to convey to the people: “Serve some the star, make sacrifices to it, build temples to it, and create its image so that people could worship it.” They showed the people a certain form that they themselves invented and said, “This is an image imparted on me in prophesy.”
5. This is how they started creating images in temples and gathering there for worship. They suggested to the people that the image can bring evil or good, and one should fear or serve it. The cult servants convinced them: “Propagate the service and it will bring you luck; do this or that, or don’t do this or that.”

1. Follow the progression of idolatry as Maimonides describes it. Pinpoint the place where idolatry seems to be called tantamount to betrayal and explain why. In other words, when does an error become rebellion?
2. According to Maimonides’ description, what is corrupt about idolatry, other than the fact that it is wrong?
3. Is Maimonides taking responsibility for the people’s idol worship? What are the implications of this?
Hebrew Sources

Text #3:

ספירי פרשת ששת הקא
שכלי המורדו עליי כמר עשריםEZ יהודית למימה שנטמעה משם ומאזנה ולבניאים ומאזנה שנטמעו באוהל
הכメール בער ימודוثل תורתה לכל.

Text #4:

דברים רבה ב
ho כנבר ספירי אריא הקא לישניא ביני כמות רבאטיה י跄תIGNED שบำรุง חיו, שמיים והימים, ושמעו אלהים והימים, והימים.
והימים, וירטלית והימים הא珠宝י והימים החדש והימים אוכל ביהודית אוחד ווהי פיו
ונראה את אלהיון ויאח.

Text #5:

רמב"ם הלכות עבדת יהוה פרק א

הלכות

א

וכחך מקשות על קרבנות נ maintenant בצורת אחד עניין ומכחכיים וدائידת והימים שחלו והימים.
והימים, וירטלית והימים הא禛ייא והימים החדש והימים אוכל ביהודית אוחד ווהי פיו
ונראה את אלהיון ויאח.

אחת אשר_minimum מעדנייב כמיה בשכלי שקר אריא שהשח זא אחר זא אחר זא אחר זא אחר זא אחר זא אחר זא אחר זא אחר זא אחר זא אחר זא אחר זא אחר זא אחר זא אחר זא אחר זא אחר זא אחר זא אחר זא אחר
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והימים, וירטלית והימים הא禛ייא והימים החדש והימים אוכל ביהודית אוחד ווהי פיו
ונראה את אלהיון ויאח.
The command is “Hear, 0 Israel.” is, first of all, to hear. If you don’t hear the Shema Yisrael, where are you? So you must first hear. Now, if you are listening, and answer, “Here I am. I am listening,” then perhaps a message can come through.

— Rabbi Steinsaltz
The words of the Shema themselves command us to hear or listen. What are we hearing or listening to, and what can we learn from Jewish texts about what “Shema” means? What does it mean to hear or listen?

When one is in prayer and recites the Shema, it is very much a simple declaration of Israel's unique relationship with the Creator. The words of the Shema are unique, beginning with a specific call. We say these words regularly, and it is easy to miss the significance of this call: What does it mean to hear? What does it mean to hear the Shema?

In this class and the accompanying class on “witnessing,” we will explore the complexities behind the declaration that is traditionally proclaimed within every morning and evening prayer, learning from the concepts of hearing and witnessing as explored within classical Jewish texts.

Text #1: Shema Yisrael, Deuteronomy 6:4

Hear Israel, the Lord (is) our God, the Lord is one.

דִּבְרֵיהֶם וּדְבָרֵיהֶם
שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֵלֶּה יְהוָה אֶחָד

1. Why are these first words, Shema Yisrael, necessary? Wouldn’t Israel have listened anyway?
2. Take apart the text, if you can. Is the text saying, I am the Lord? Is it saying, I, the Lord? Is this a lesson or a statement? Does it matter?

Text #2: Deuteronomy Rabbah

How did Israel merit to recite the Shema? Rabbi Pinchas bar Chama said: Israel merited to recite Shema from the Giving of the Torah. How so? You find that God only began [the Aseret HaDibrot] with this speech. God said to them “Shema Yisrael: I am the Lord Your God.” Israel all answered and said “Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad” and Moses said “Baruch shem kevod malchuto l’olam va’ed.”
1. What connection does the midrash draw between Shema Yisrael and the Aseret HaDibrot? Why are these two statements connected together?

2. What is the importance of Israel actively accepting the Ten Commandments? What is the importance of issuing response when listening—what is the importance of issuing this kind of strong response, in this case?

3. What does this text say about the nature of listening? How do the Israelites listen—what kind of listening do they practice?

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Text #3: Exodus 19–20

19.16 It came to pass on the third day when it was morning, that there were thunder claps and lightning flashes, and a thick cloud was upon the mountain, and a very powerful blast of a shofar, and the entire nation that was in the camp shuddered.

17 Moses brought the people out toward God from the camp, and they stood at the bottom of the mountain.

18 And the entire Mount Sinai smoked because the Lord had descended upon it in fire, and its smoke ascended like the smoke of the kiln, and the entire mountain quaked violently.

19 The sound of the shofar grew increasingly stronger; Moses would speak and God would answer him with a voice.

20 The Lord descended upon Mount Sinai, to the peak of the mountain, and the Lord summoned Moses to the peak of the mountain, and Moses ascended.

20.1 God spoke all these words, to respond:

2 “I am the Lord, your God, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” ...  

15 And all the people saw the voices and the torches, the sound of the shofar, and the smoking mountain, and the people saw and trembled; so they stood from afar.

16 They said to Moses, “You speak with us, and we will hear, but let God not speak with us lest we die.”
1. Summarize this text. What is interesting to you about it?
2. How would you describe the people’s experience at Mount Sinai? Why did this happen, do you think?
3. What does it mean that the people couldn’t hear God’s words, but could only hear Moses? What do we learn from this about how we hear successfully?
4. What participation do the people have in the giving of the Torah? How do they listen?
5. Does this text change your understanding at all of the midrash (Deuteronomy Rabbah) that we just read?
6. Are there times in our lives where we prepare intensively for an act of listening? What are the similarities?

Text #4: Pesikta deRav Kehana

Rabbi Nechemiah said: “What is [the word] “Anochi”? It is an Egyptian word. To what can this matter be compared? To a flesh and blood king whose son was captured for a long time. His father took revenge, and brought him back and spoke to him in the language of his captors. So too God—Israel was in Egypt for many years and learned the language of Egypt, when God redeemed them and came to give them the Torah and they did not know how to hear (l’shmoa), G-d said, “I will now speak with them in Egyptian.” G-d said “Anochi” to speak with them in their language, hence “Anochi Adonai elokecha.”

1. According to this midrash, why is it significant that the Torah uses an Egyptian word “Anochi” to begin the Aseret HaDibrot?
2. What might this mean about the connection between the Israelites’ past experience of slavery in Egypt and their current experience of Revelation?
3. What does this explain about listening and hearing? About communicating so that someone else can hear?

Text #5: Pesikta deRav Kehana

“Rabbi Levi said: The Holy One appeared to them as though He were a statue with faces on every side. A thousand people might be looking at the statue, but it would appear to be looking at each one of them. So, too, when the Holy One spoke, each and every person in Israel could say, “The Divine word is addressing me.” Note that Scripture does not say, “I am the Lord your God,” [in the plural] but “I am the Lord thy God” (Exod. 20:2), [in the singular].

Rabbi Yose bar R. Hanina said: The Divine Word spoke to each and every person according to his particular capacity (“kocho”; literally, “his strength”). And do not be surprised at this idea. For when manna came down for Israel, each and every person tasted it in keeping with his own capacity—infants in keeping with their capacity, young men in keeping with their capacity, the elderly in keeping with their capacity. Thus, for the infants—in keeping with their capacity—the manna tasted like mothers’ milk. For it is said “its taste was like the taste of rich cream” (Numbers 11:8); young men according to their capacity for it is said “my bread also which I gave you, bread and oil and honey” (Ezekiel 16:19); and old men according to their capacity for it is said “the taste of it was like wafers made with honey” (Exodus 16:31).
Now what was true about the manna—that each and every person tasted it according to his own particular capacity—was equally true about the Divine Word. Each and every person heard it according to his own particular capacity. Thus David said “The voice of the Lord is in strength” (Psalm 29:4)—not “The voice of the Lord is in God’s strength” [as we might expect from standard Hebrew pronoun usage], but the voice of the Lord is in the strength and capacity of each and every person. Therefore the Holy One said: Do not be misled because you hear many voices. Know that I am He who is one and the same: I am the Lord thy God.

1. How does the midrash’s description of the Revelation at Sinai depart from the Biblical description? How are they similar?
2. Why do you think the midrash compares the revelation experience to the taste of the manna?
3. What does the midrash mean when it says that “each and every person heard [the Revelation] according to his own particular capacity?”
4. What does this text teach us about listening? Why was this individual listening important within the context of the revelation?
5. If the purpose of the Shema is to emphasize God’s oneness, how might that concept be undermined by having a multiplicity of voices? How do you reconcile this?
6. In the last line when the Pesikta states “Know ye that I am He who is one and the same: I am the Lord thy God.” Why is this statement necessary? What is the purpose of “I am the Lord your God?”

CONCLUSION
This class has focused on a variety of different ideas related to the definition of “hearing.” To bring together these ideas and apply them to our recitation of the Shema, the facilitator might want to ask those participating any of the following questions:

- How will participants understand the word, Shema/hear, differently in the future?
- After studying these texts, how do participants understand the act of Jews listening? How does it mean to be part of a people that hears and listens?
- What ideas about hearing and listening are participants taking away?
- Do these words create permission for Jews to experience and hear God in their own ways? What might be the limits to this permission?
- Contrarily, what does it mean for participants to engage in saying the Shema as a community? What are we listening for and to, together?
Hebrew Sources

Text #2:

ברית ברך (וילא) פרש אוחזות פרשה ב קודה מק脶 הקלרות שנменно את㎞ שכל נחתו בכר והם ממקוותרו וכיוון עידקל הקלרות שמע כיבר את ממקו בון קודה זכר הبقי בתהת אלא הברך ה א蹊יו תלמוד שמע ישראל número ה אלוחים ענה כל המוסר הוא בתהת אך

אות ומעשה אחר בקרמל רברーションים בכר

Text #4 and 5:

פסוקאות דרב חננא — פסוקא יב

א"ר נלח קלח הדת"ה אציאק שיר והש ילב פני ממקו ילב כל נח מקיב בה היה מקיב בכרון. כ"כ הדת"ה חמקות והש ילב ארוח ממקו היה גבוהה מקיב כ"כ, אלה נלח כי"י אלוחים (שם/שם וכ). א"ר נלחくだ לפל כל נח הגדול מקיב ragazzo מקיב כ"כ.

ואל תחת הממק זכר התגה שיתו תודות שלמעלה כל נח מקיב בכרון, התנוקים לפל כ"כ, והם מבית אחרים לפל כ"כ, התנוקים לפל כ"כ. וככה בשתיון זה היה מקיב בכרון כ"כ הוא צעוק, מה הוא מקיב בשתיון זה מקיב בכרון (מכבר יא: ח). והם מבית אחרים לפל כ"כ, מה הוא מקיב בשתיון זה מקיב בכרון (מכבר יא: ח).

“Shema” can be interpreted as hearing, but also it seems to serve as a call to witness. In saying the Shema, what are we witnessing? What does it mean to be a witness?

Shema clearly translates to “Hear.” Yet as it is placed in the sentence, “Hear Israel, the Lord is our God” it seems to mean more than only “hear.” It asks those around to pay attention, to notice, possibly, to witness. Here, we look at how an understanding of witnessing helps to shed light on what the Shema means and at our responsibilities as witnesses.

**Text #1: Ba‘al HaTurim**

[Where the words of the Shema appear in the text of the Torah,] the Hebrew [letters] Ayin (א) and Dalit (ד) are enlarged to form the word “Ayd” — [witness] and so it says “You are my witnesses [עֵד] says the Lord” (Isaiah 43:10). And so, too, God is a witness to Israel, as it is written “and I will be a swift witness [עֵד] against those who practice sorcery, who commit adultery, who swear falsely, who cheat laborers of their wages, and who subvert the cause of the widow, the orphan, and the stranger, said the Lord of Hosts” (Malachi 3:5).

1. What does Israel testify to through the Shema? What does Israel witness for God?
2. What does God witness for Israel — what does that mean?
3. By defining God’s witnessing in this manner, how does this add another dimension to the Shema?

**Text #2: Babylonian Talmud Chagiga 5a**

When Rabbi Yochanan would come to this verse, he would cry, “And I will bring you to justice, and I will be a swift witness against those who practice sorcery, who commit adultery, who swear falsely, who cheat laborers of their wages, and who subvert the cause of the widow, the orphan, and the stranger, said the Lord of Hosts.” A servant whose master brings him to justice, and bears witness against him, can there be any hope for him? Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakka said: Woe to us, for God has measured with equal weight, the lighter sins with the heavier ones!

1. Summarize the text. What seems to be happening here?
2. Why might Yochanan Ben Zakka have “cried” when we read this verse?
3. Why are the rabbis daunted by this verse?
4. In Jewish law, it is the judge who questions the witnesses, but what happens when witness and judge are one in the same?
5. How does the special relationship between God and Israel make this possible?
6. What do we learn about being a judge from this text? How does a fair judge do his or her work?
Text #3: Pesikta de Rav Kahana 12:6

“And you are My witnesses, says the Lord, and I am God.” (Isaiah 43:12) Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai taught: “If you are my witnesses,” I am the Lord. And if you are not my witnesses, I am not, as it were, the Lord.

1. According to this midrash, what impact does our witnessing have on God? How does this influence our understanding of what God is?
2. What could have motivated Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai to explain the verse in this way?
3. What does it mean for the concept of witnessing, that God can also witness?

Text #4: Ritva, Babylonian Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 29a

All Jews are responsible for one another. They are like one body and like a guarantor who repays the debt of a friend.

1. What is the nature of responsibility here?
2. How does this relate to what we say in the Shema, or to how we say the Shema? How does it relate to witnessing?

Text #5: Babylonian Talmud Yoma 69b

Rabbi Joshua b. Levi said: Why were they called men of the Great Assembly? Because they restored the crown of the divine attributes to its ancient completeness.

[For] Moses had come and said: The great God, the mighty, and the awesome.

Then Jeremiah came and said: Aliens are destroying His Temple. Where are, then, His awesome deeds? Hence he omitted [the attribute] the “awesome.”

Daniel came and said: Aliens are enslaving his sons. Where are His mighty deeds? Hence he omitted the word “mighty.”

But they [The Members of the Great Assembly] came and said: On the contrary! Therein lie His mighty deeds that He suppresses His wrath, that He extends long-suffering to the wicked. Therein lie His awesome powers: For but for the fear of Him, how could one [single] nation persist among the [many] nations!

But how could [the earlier] Rabbis abolish something established by Moses? Rabbi Eleazar said: Since they knew that the Holy One, blessed be He, insists on truth, they would not ascribe false [things] to God.
What Are We Witnessing?

1. Summarize the text. What are the different things happening here?
2. What perspectives on witnessing are presented in this text?
3. The first words are those of Moses. But didn’t he see horrible deeds? How can he reconcile the words he uses and what he has seen?
4. Whose reaction do you identify with more: Jeremiah and Daniel or the Men of the Great Assembly?
5. How does this text help us understand the Shema?
6. Have we had similar situations of witnessing, when we were torn between different perspectives?
7. Think about the Shema. Is there anything in the first verse of the Shema that could ever be contradicted in reality? Could God’s oneness ever be considered a false thing?
What Are We Witnessing?

Hebrew Sources

Text #1:

בכל התורות פורש ואחתן

d'א ל' י' משלוה ויה עון ושם עד נא' (עשויה מג) ושם הקבד'ה והיה עד LIGHTMARL כרכטב (מלכים ג ה)
vיחית על מותר:

Text #2:

тяжנה ה':

רגי יוהמ כי מתי לוחא קרא ברך + מולאני: ג' וקרבודה לילך למשתפ ואוחית על מותר במשכיבים וברמאמים
ובנשעטיו שבקר יושב שיש שברת מברכת זדנה,Resolve: יש лиו? זה מה רבי יוהמ בן

תא'י: איי ל' שעקל עלינו חוכמיה כלת חכמה.

Text #3:

מסקנת אד PLAY חחנה' בו:

וותם עד נא' י' בהו' אל. תני ר' שמעי' בן י' והם עד נא' י', ואין אלו והם עד נא'ภ' פなし

אף, יי.

Text #4:

רościי' על ראש והנה' כ'?

ותני אבה רבי' ד' ורא' ד' כו'. פני' כל ברכות המצות אין שיצא מוציא שאיצא' פ gjcoות גות' על כל אדה

הרי כל ישראל הוא הלה כותך נほか אחד ועברה הפורע בה בחירה

Text #5:

וייימ סה'ב:

אמר רב י' יושב בן י' הי' כל מביא שמן או נאכ' חכמיה - שבחיחי' על הנושה. א chave משש
אמר + זביכי' ז'ทอง החל הבור החנה', אתח דמח' ואחר: זכריך מקדישי'overrides, איה זורחי' אלא אם
אמר. אחת דשת', אמר: זכריך משנתיבים בו, איה יונ nisi' אלא אמור. אתח א失控' אתח בורה
יהיו נscenes כרתו שכרת. והנה' אפי' לדרשו. אלאإن' זורחיי' - שאלמלא' מותאי על חזר

ברוח קי איה אמא' האה' לכלל ההלקית. בן האומיץ; זכריך י' ייס פכי' עתיי' תקנת חזר השמא!:

אמר רב אליעז: מתת שודיות בכיי' הברה. זו שמתתי' איה, לפקד לא כיבוי. בד.
The people of Israel is essentially a people that has not only a hold on its religion, but a very deep spiritual need, a very basic one, for faith.

— Rabbi Steinsaltz
Is the land of Israel central to our Jewish identities? What does it mean if we live there; what does it mean if we live elsewhere? How has the mitzvah of aliyah been understood throughout Jewish intellectual tradition?

When one is in prayer and recites the Shema, it is a simple declaration of Israel’s unique relationship with the Creator. But Israel, *yisrael*, has a dual meaning, referring to the Jewish people and to the land of Israel. Each of these has a special relationship with God and with each other.

This class delves into the relationship between God and the land, the people and the land, the nature of community, and how Jews build community in and outside of Israel. The relationship between the Diaspora and the land of Israel has been a complex one for thousands of years, as evidenced in these texts. This resource gives us an opportunity to share our own understandings of this relationship and even, if we wish, to delve into our decision to live *b’galut*, in the Diaspora, or *b’aretz*, in our land.

Text #1: Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, “What Will Become of the Jewish People?”

Now, I want to speak about Jews in the Diaspora. There are basically only two choices. Either we can give up, close shop, and say “we are defeated.” Or, we can create a new way, a new hope. If we want to survive, we cannot do it by simply surviving. There are more Jews, of one description or another, living in the United States than anywhere else. They did, all in all, quite well for themselves. But what they did not do was to create a communal future to look forward to. As individuals, some are very successful, perhaps as successful as Jews were in any other place ever in history. As a community, as a people, they are second raters, third-raters or less. One cannot go on living with the knowledge that you have to be a third-rater forever. It cannot be done. You cannot have a people striving and struggling, fighting and working only for that.

So, if people want to go on—if there is a feeling that there is something in it—if the memory of the half-obiterated document still possesses some compelling power, then Jewish life in this country must be rebuilt. People cannot go on living in the past, even if the past was nice - and it wasn’t completely so. You see, the *shtetl*, wherever it was, cannot be recreated. There is no need and no use for it.

But—let me just say something full of *chutzpah*—there is a need, a use and even a possibility of making this place something like *Galut Bavel*, the ancient Jewish exile in Babylonia. One can create a second center, comparable, sometimes better than the main center in Israel. To do that, one has to do much more than survive. However, if you cannot do it well—if you cannot rebuild here something that will be worthwhile spiritually or intellectually—then it is not worth doing it at all.
1. Summarize the text. What do you think Rabbi Steinsaltz is trying to communicate?
2. How do we bring elements of the Diaspora into Israel, or elements of our holy land, eretz hakodesh, into the Diaspora?
3. Are we prepared to recreate Jewish life at its best? Are we doing that now—what would it mean to do that?

Text #2: Deuteronomy 11:8-14

So you are to keep all the commandments that I command you today, in order that you may have the strength to enter and to take possession of the land that you are crossing into to possess,

in order that you may prolong your days on the soil that the Lord swore to your fathers to give them and to their seed, a land flowing with milk and honey.

For the land that you are entering to possess: It is not like the land of Egypt, from which you went out, where you sow your seed and water it with your foot like a garden of greens;

but the land that you are crossing into to possess is a land of hills and cleft valleys; from the rain of the heavens it drinks water;

a land whose welfare the Lord your God seeks. Regularly are the eyes of the Lord your God upon it, from the beginning of the year until the after-part of the year.

Now it shall be if you hearken to my commandments that I command you today, to love the Lord your God and to serve God with all your heart and with all your being,

I will give forth the rain of your land in its due-time, shooting-rain and later-rain, you shall gather in your grain, your new-wine and your shining-oil...
Text #3: Midrash Sifre Ekev Parshah 37

“...and give you a desirable land, the heritage of the deer, of the hosts of nations.” (Jeremiah 3:19)

[What is …] “a desirable land”?: A land that is made of palaces. It is made of palaces of kings and rulers because any king or government who did not purchase a home in Israel would say, “I have achieved nothing.”

Rabbi Yehuda said, Do we mean to say that all of the thirty one rulers in the past had wedged themselves into the land of Israel? Instead, just like in Rome nowadays, every leader and government who does not have a palace in Rome says “I have achieved nothing” [if I do not have this]. So, too any ruler or government who has not purchased a palace in Israel says, “I have achieved nothing...”.

[What is …] “the heritage of the deer”?: Just as a deer is lighter on its feet then any other domesticated or wild animal, so too, the fruits of Israel come easier than the fruits of other lands.

Another interpretation: Just as when a deer is stripped of its skin it cannot contain its flesh, so, too the land of Israel cannot contain the abundance of her fruit--when Israel is fulfilling the Torah.

Just as a deer is easiest to eat among all of the animals, so too, the fruits of the land of Israel are easier to eat than those of other lands.

Would they be light or would they be fatty, the Torah says, “a land flowing with milk and honey.” Fat like milk and sweet like honey... The land of Israel because it is the highest of all lands, it is also the most praiseworthy of all lands, as it is written: “Let us ascend and inherit her...” (Numbers 13:30). “And they ascended and they surveyed the land” (Numbers 13:30). “And they ascended to the Negev...” (Genesis 45:25). “And they ascended from Egypt” (Genesis 45:25).
1. Summarize the text. What is it trying to communicate?
2. What kind of land is promised here? How does it build on the Deuteronomy text?
3. What is Israel, in these rabbis’ or writers’ eyes?
4. What are the advantages of understanding Israel in this way? What are the disadvantages?
5. Why, do you think, might the rabbis use these physical or animal images to demonstrate the richness of Israel? What is the relationship between the physical and the sacred nature of Israel?
6. How does this understanding of the land of Israel inform the people’s relationship with God?
7. How is the rabbis’ relationship similar to our present-day relationship with Israel? Is it?

Text #4: Babylonian Talmud Ketubot 110b

The Rabbis taught: He says, “Let us make aliya” and she says, “Let’s not.” We force her to make aliya. And if she refuses, he may divorce her without paying her ketubah. She says, “Let us make aliya.” He says, “Let’s not.” We force him to make aliya, and if he resists, he should divorce her and pay the value of the ketubah. The rabbis taught: One should always live in the land of Israel, even in a village where mostly gentiles live. No one should live outside the land, even in a city where mostly Jews live. For anyone who lives in the Land of Israel is like a person who has a God and anyone who lives outside the land is like a person who does not have a God, as it is written “To give you the land of Canaan so that I can be your God” (Leviticus 25: 37).

You mean to say that anyone who doesn’t live in Israel is without God! Rather you must mean that anyone who lives outside the land is like an idolater. Just as the verse says with David, “For God has expelled me today from annexing the inheritance of the Lord, saying to me, ‘Go, and serve other gods.’” Who would ever say to David to go and worship other gods? It must mean, “Anyone who does not live in the Land is tantamount to being an idolater!” (I Samuel 26:19)

1. Summarize the text. What is it trying to communicate? (What is the relationship between the man and the woman?)
2. What claims are made about the Land of Israel which one might find surprising?
3. List all things for which settling the Land of Israel takes priority.
4. The text discusses living in Jewish communities outside of the land and gentile communities inside the land. Which do the rabbis find preferable? Why, do you think?
5. Think about when and where this text, as a text from the Babylonian Talmud, was written. What does the text imply mean for its writers and for Jews everywhere at the time? Why might the rabbis have been thinking about Israel in this way? How does its context influence your understanding of the text?
Text #5: The Commentary of Tosaphot: Ketubot 110B

He says, “Let’s make aliyah.” Nowadays we do not observe this commandment because the roads are dangerous. Rabbeinu Chaim says, “There is no commandment to live in the Land of Israel today because there are many commandments connected to the land which, when transgressed, have harsh punishments and we are not capable of observing them carefully.”

1. Summarize the text. What is it trying to communicate?
2. What reasons are given for why the mitzvah of aliyah is not being observed? Would any of these apply today?
3. How is “land” understood here? How is this similar to or different from the texts we’ve read?
4. During this time, the great commentator Nachmanides moved to Israel, and suggested that settlement in Israel even during difficult times was imperative, a mitzvah on behalf of the community, so that a Jewish presence in the land could always be maintained. What do you make of this?

Text #6: Babylonian Talmud Ketubot 110B–111A

Rabbi Zera was avoiding Rabbi Yehuda when he wished to enter the land of Israel. For Rabbi Yehuda said, “Anyone who goes from Babylon to Israel transgresses a positive commandment, as it is written, “You will be brought to Babylon, and there you will be until the day of My visit to them, says the Lord” (Jeremiah 27:22).

Rabbi Zera interpreted this verse as referring to the Holy Vessels [that the Babylonians plundered from the Temple.] Rabbi Yehuda actually used another verse, “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the hinds of the field, that you stir not up, nor awake my love, until it please” (Song of Songs 2:7).

Rabbi Zera learned from this verse that the people should not go to Israel en masse. [but one may go as an individual.] Rabbi Yehuda learned that individuals may not ascend to Israel from a different verse. “I adjure you O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the hinds of the field, that you stir not up, nor awake my love, until it please” (Song of Songs 3:5). Rabbi Zera used this verse to learn what Rabbi Yossi Bar Rebbe Hanina learned:

There were three oaths that the Holy One exacted from Israel: One, that the people would not go to Israel [without Divine intervention] en masse. Another, that Israel was made to promise that they would not rebel against the nations of the world and that He made the gentile nations promise not to enslave Israel too harshly... Rabbi Levy said there were six oaths given. The three that have already been stated, and three others. One, they should never delay the end of days and they should not reveal the secret to the nations of the world. Why does the verse say “with the hosts and the rams of the field”? Rabbi Elazar said, The Holy One said to Israel, if you fulfill the conditions of the oath, all will be well. If not, I will let your flesh go leaderless into the world like the multitudes and the rams of the field.... Rabbi Yehuda said, Anyone who lives in Babylon is like one who lives in Israel, as it is written: “Ho! Escape, O Zion, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon.” (Zecharia 2:11) Abayye says: We have a tradition that Babylon will not be subject to the sufferings that precede the coming of the Messiah...
1. Summarize the text. What is it trying to communicate?

2. What does the text say about Babylon?

3. What does the text say, implicitly and explicitly, about aliya?

4. How does this text contrast with the texts we have already read?

5. Rashi understands the first oath as being about war, essentially stating that Israel would not take the land by force. What do you think of this reading? What does it imply for the mitzvah of aliya?

6. How do you relate to this text? Does it make sense to you?

Text #7: Babylonian Talmud Ketubot 111A

Rab Judah stated in the name of Samuel: As it is forbidden to leave the Land of Israel for Babylon so it is forbidden to leave Babylon for other countries. Both Rabbah and R. Joseph said: Even from Pumbeditha [a renowned center for Torah learning] to Be Kubi [a village just outside of Pumbeditha].

A man once moved from Pumbeditha to [settle in] Be Kubi and R. Joseph placed him under the ban.

A man once left Pumbeditha to [take up his abode at] Astunia, [also a village near Pumbeditha] and he died. Said Abaye: ‘If this young scholar wanted it, he could still have been alive’.

Rab Judah said: Whoever lives in Babylon is accounted as though he lived in the Land of Israel; for it is said in Scripture, Ho, Zion, escape, you who lives with the daughter of Babylon (Zechariah 2:11).

Abaye stated: We have a tradition that Babel will not witness the sufferings [that will precede the coming] of the Messiah. ..

1. Summarize the text. What are the ideas being communicated?

2. How can this text be reconciled with the idea that Israel is the spiritual center of the Jewish people?

3. What kind of center is Babylonia, do you think, according to this text? What qualities give Babylonia this status?

4. Is there a modern-day Babylonia? If so, why or how is Israel unique?
ספר מפרשת עקבי

רבי יהודה האומר, כי אחר palabras שלוהי כשר ישות אל אחר כاختلاف
ברוחיהם בכל ממלכת살יה שלמה נשתתנו כל בורמיםオープンו לא עשיתם כליה
פלטיריהם בוותרו בחרם ישראל;set נשתתנו כליה.

נוהל צביה, עם עבזת כל בורמלכון באומנו כל ממלכת ישראלçıחר ישות כליה לכל פיורית
ארזתיה, דבור אחרון ביבי זה כסנה(Symbol) אנו יזקוכות אתدورיה או גורו ישראלי יא מזאת
יפורית בישעה שיפורת עיצה על החצלת, מה עבזתי זה לכל ליאכל כליות שיזקוכות
ישראל כלכל ומארזת, או כלל ולא קיים שעינו תלתום לちなみに(ברכים א) או גורז חלב
ודיב, שעינו מכל בקStartPosition בודו או יא מזאת (鲗ם: יא) איש şiir ידידי רהר לכרמה
כבר היה לידידי ב왁ן בקStartPosition, מה שיזקוכות איב ואיב מאוחר וכבר שיזקוכות לכל איב
מה שיזקוכות זה איב בפיורה מקרים כי ישראל יזקוכות מכל האיברים דלום לברך איב
שומנה איב ומיא ישראל, ליבר שיזקוכות מけばיר משקוב מומחה, איב ישראלי יפושת לכל
משניה מכל שומנה (ברכים ג) עיב ליבר משקוב בஸא, (ברכים ג/ברכים ב) עיב הלודר את
האיבר, (ברכים ג/ברכים ב) עיב רביע (בריכתים מכבו) יזקוכות מברכב.
The People & Land of Israel

Text #4:

The Global Day of Jewish Learning
November 13, 2011
www.theglobalday.com

Text #5:

The People & Land of Israel

The Global Day of Jewish Learning
November 13, 2011
www.theglobalday.com
כホーム קיאא:

’ר יזא הוה קומשמטיס מינייה דרב יוהיה, דבעא למיסק לאירן ישארל, דאמר בר יוהיה: כל העול сделал תpanion ישראל עזרבבעשת, שאאמר: יריחמה? בבלל יזא טשבת יזא דע דיו פקדא אות נוא

’ר, תpanion ישראל הזה באלי שער חניב. תpanion יוהיה? חניב קריא אהיה: ישיר השירים ב’ השביעית אוחכנר

בוטח ישראל יבראתי ואביייה השדיה ב.’ תpanion יזא? הזה שאלה יעל ישראל בחמה. תpanion יוהיה?

השובעך אהרייך חניב. תpanion יזא? הזה מבעיله ילו לוכלריי יזא ברביה תחניא, דאמר: ב’ שביעית הולל

תרח? אתא, שאל יעלו ישראל בחמה; ואתא, ש趟םיב הקדוש ברוך הוא את ישראל שאל ירבדו

ביאנמות העולום; ואתא, ש趟םיב הקדוש ברוך הוא את העבידי בכלם שאל ישתעבדו בחן ישראלי

יותו מקיאא. תpanion יוהיה? ישיר השירים ב’ אמא תעייה ואמא תעדורי חכיב. תpanion יזא? מبيعي הלו לוכלרייב

לד, דאמר: שוש עברות הלו למלת? תורה - הני אדמור, Ainט - שאל גולא תקע, ושתא ורדקה את

הטק, ושתא גולא תקע לוכלרייב כלבשו. ישיר השירים ב’ ברבאת ואביייה השדיה - אמרי רב איילור,

אמר להתק"ה ליישארל: אם אמר מקימיך ואביייה השדיה, גם לא - אם מתיי ואר בשכרים

כןربي אטיול השדיה... אמרי רב יוהיה: כל חורבב - כל רבי בראיני ישראל, שאאמר: זכריה

ב’ כי ציון המלט יושב בת-שכל. אמר אביך,نكמיך: כל לא חוא חכל משיח...
How does the Shema connect us as a people, and what is God’s relationship with God’s people? What does it mean to be one people?

When the Jewish people says the Shema, our voices join together from around the world. We proclaim God’s oneness and our relationship with God, and also as a result, the relationship that we have with each other through our relationship with God.

In this class, we explore the Jewish people’s unique bond as a people and how God and the Jewish people have interacted. This is an enormous topic with many engaging threads of discussion and study; we focus here on God’s love for the Jewish people and how we fulfill part of our role by building an intimate community. The class offers provoking questions about what holds the Jewish people together and what role we, personally, play in creating Jewish unity.

Text #1: Pirkei Avot 3:14

Rabbi Akiva would say: Beloved is the human who was created in the image. Abundant love was made known to him because he was created in the image, as it is written: “In the image of God the human was made.” (Genesis 9:6)

Beloved is Israel who were called the children of the Omnipresent. Abundant love was made known to them as children of the Omnipresent, as it is written: “You are the children of the Lord your God.” (Deuteronomy 14:1)

Beloved is Israel for a precious vessel was given to them. Abundant love was made known to them by giving them this precious vessel from which the world was created, as it is written: “For a good lesson I have given you, my Torah, do not abandon it” (Proverbs 4:2).

1. Summarize the text. What is it trying to communicate?
2. What point is Rabbi Akiva making in comparing humanity to Israel?
3. Why do you think two reasons are given for Israel being beloved?
   Analyze the difference between the two reasons. How do they relate to each other?
4. The claim is made in the third paragraph that the world was created from the Torah. Why does this fact make it more significant that Israel was given the Torah?
5. Is there a connection between Israel being given the Torah and being called “children of the Omnipresent”? What might it be?
6. What does this say about how rabbis of Talmud understood the relationship between God and God’s people?
Text #2: Avot de Rabbi Natan II Chapter 44

“Beloved is Israel who was created in the image.” Even if they were not created and they were not told that they were beloved. Abundant love was bestowed upon them that they were called “children of the Omnipresent,” as it is written, “You are children of the Lord your God.” (Deuteronomy 14:1)

Beloved is Israel for they were given a vessel from which the world was created. Even if they were not created and they were not told, they would still be beloved. Abundant love was known to them when they were given the vessel from which the world was created. This was the Torah, as it is written: “I have put My words in your mouth and sheltered you with My hand.” (Isaiah 51:16)

Israel was called [God's children] as it is written: “You are children to the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 14:1), and the ministering angels were called God’s children, as it is written: “Let the children of God come” (Job 1:6). And it was not known which of them was considered most dear. When however, God said, “Israel is My first born son” (Exodus 4:22) [this meant] You [Israel] are dearer to me than the angels.

1. In many ways this version is a rewrite of the original Pirkei Avot. Imagine reasons for this change, and make a case for the version that you prefer.
2. This passage does, though, have a significant difference even though the material is quite similar. What does this version deny that the Mishnah in Pirkei Avot affirms?
3. In western democracies the notion of being chosen is often under fire. Both the Mishnah in Pirkei Avot and Avot of Rabbi Natan deal with this idea. Does either source reflect your understanding of what it means to be Jewish? If so, which one and why?

Text #3 Babylonian Talmud Hagiga 3a

As it is written: Israel are like scattered sheep harried by lions. First the King of Assyria devoured them and then Nebuchadnezer of Babylon crunched their bones (Jeremiah 50:17). Nebuchadnezer, the king of Babylon likened Israel to a lamb, just as a lamb when smitten on one limb, feels the pain in all its limbs, so is Israel: When one of them is killed, everyone feels it and everyone suffers...

He further expounded: You have affirmed to God on today...And God has affirmed to you (Deuteronomy 26:17–18). The Holy One said to Israel: You presented me as one to the world [i.e. you have affirmed God], and [for that] I will present you as one to the world [i.e. I will affirm you].

You presented me as one, as it is written: Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one!

I will present you as one to the world as it is written: Who is like Your nation Israel, a unique nation in the land.
1. Summarize the text. What is being communicated here?

2. In the first paragraph, Nebuchadnezer observes that the Jewish people is tremendously unified, that when one Jew feels pain, all feel pain. To what extent does this have resonance today?

3. What is the deal that is made? What is exchanged for what?

4. Can you explain how the unity of Israel is reflective of the unity of God? What do we learn about Israel or God by making this parallel? Why does one need the other?

5. Where and why is there such a thing as Jewish unity? How does the theme of Israel feeling the pain of any of its members fit into this understanding?

Text #4: Leviticus Rabbah 27:4

“And God seeks the persecuted” (Ecclesiastes 3:15): Rav Huna said in the name of Rav Yosef, God will always seek out the persecuted. When the righteous hunt the righteous, “God seeks the persecuted” [When] the wicked hunt the wicked, “God seeks the persecuted”, and even more so when the wicked hunt the righteous, “God seeks the persecuted,” until one can finally say even when the righteous hunt the wicked, “God seeks the persecuted”.

Rav Yosi Bar Rav Yudan, in the name Rav Yosi bar Nehorai, says, God will always demand the blood of the hunter in favor of the persecuted. Abel was persecuted by Cain, “God seeks the persecuted”—“The Lord paid heed to Abel’s offering”(Genesis 4:4). Noah was persecuted by his generation, and “God seeks the persecuted”—“You and your household come into the ark” (Genesis 7:1). And it is written: “For this to me is like the waters of Noah, as I swore that the waters of Noah would nevermore flood the earth” (Isaiah 54:9). Abraham was persecuted by Nimrod, “God seeks the persecuted”—“You are the Lord God who chose Abraham and extracted him from Ur Kasdim” (Nehemiah 9:7). Isaac was persecuted by Ishmael, “God seeks the persecuted”—“For it is through Isaac that your offspring will continue” (Genesis 21:12). Jacob was persecuted by Esau, “God seeks the persecuted”—“For God chose Jacob as Israel his chosen one” (Psalms 135:4). Moses was persecuted by Pharoah, “God seeks the persecuted”—“Had not Moses, God’s chosen one, confronted him in the breach…” (Psalms 106:23). David was persecuted by Saul, “God seeks the persecuted”—“And he chose David, his servant” (Psalms 78:70).

And Israel has been persecuted by the other nations. “God seeks the persecuted” - “And in you the Lord chose [you] to be a nation for the Lord” (Deuteronomy 14:2). And even the sacrifices in the Temple follow this principle. The ox is persecuted by the lion, the lamb is persecuted by the wolf, the goat is persecuted by the leopard. This means the Holy One says not to sacrifice from the predators, but from the persecuted. “When an ox, a goat, or a sheep is born...” (Leviticus 22:27).

1. What does it mean that God seeks the persecuted? How would you interpret the Biblical text on which the rabbis are commenting?

2. How do the rabbis seem to understand the original text? Why do they bring so many proof-texts?

3. How do these texts come together? Meaning, how can we understand the loving that God has for God’s people, described in the previous texts, with this persecution? How are both true—how can the persecuted be beloved and the beloved be persecuted? Are the beloved also persecuted?
Text #4: From an Interview with Rabbi Steinsaltz on Elul*

... What does the individual do within the community? Who is that person? What does he want? What does he do? What can he do? These questions come to structure the community on a different kind of a basis. A community made up of functions is just like a mathematical equation: a set of abstractions. And how can it be made real? When it is made to stand on the real pillars of the community—namely, the individuals.

A Jewish way of putting it is to say that each of the individuals within the community should be a mentsch. The month of Elul is the time for making sure that we have not missed the first person singular. We need to know not only how many organizers and how many greater and smaller personalities there are in our community: we should wish to know how many mentschen there are there. That is a different way of counting.

The shofar is a very primitive, inarticulate instrument: it is not musical at all. The kind of cry that it emits is the voice of “me,” whoever “me” is, shouting: I am here, I still exist. I may not be of any value, but this primal, coarse voice comes from within me. This sound is the voice that will be recognized after all the words are forgotten. The blowing of the shofar comes to remind people of that most basic, fundamental question: Who are you? What are you going to do? What are you going to do with yourself?

This kind of a cry does not create a community, nor does it create Klal Yisrael. However, it reshapes the community and puts it on a very different basis. Only when a community is made up of a minyan not of twenty legs, but of ten hearts, does it have a good chance of being built in the right way.

1. What is the relationship between individuals and the community in this context?
2. How does Rabbi Steinsaltz understand community?
3. How is the Shema similar to the shofar, in this context? When we say the Shema, how might we be thinking about community and the people Israel?
4. How does this idea about community add to or change your understanding of the texts that we have already read?

*Elul is the month preceeding Rosh Hashana.
Hebrew Sources

Text #1:

בפרק אבות פerek מ"ג משנתו הת waktu עם אבות שנהב בצלאל חיה ייתר נודע וенькרא בצלאלchers (בראשית)
לא בצלס אלוהים השות אבות חיות תרות נודע התורה נודע להם שנקרא להם
ולם נקראים דבירין "ד בנים אמהเหล" אלוהים חיות תרות שגות חיות לרמות להם
ולתקות התוחם על הממד שכר עולם נ אחר מי של כל להAdobe על תוחם ולתקות התוחם או תוחם:

Text #2:

אבות דרבי נחמ נשת פרכמד
בبارك יישאר שובניך בצלאל. אם לא יבר או לא יאמר על חיתיך.libc תוחך ייתר נודע ונקרא בצלאל
ולמה נקראה בצלאלเหลב שבר ונוצרו (רה"מ) [ה책ות]. איון לא נבגרי (לא) [לאר] נאמר להבורי חתים.
והנה היות נודע להם ששתה על כל שבר ונוצרו עולם ותחיה שנאמר אworthy דבר פיק滋养 וית הוא.
כשיך יתענן "ל:א:ן

יוסף צדק עד בדימ [סרגיאו] כי כי ישראל שובניך ד"ה "ד ה المحليות השוטר נקראה בצלאל (ותו)
[סרגיאו] ויוכליל אל אימים של די "ד יואים אתי וידיו איינו חיות (ז"ה) מות. חותמה אמור לפי עדיף מה אאור
וזאתו שנהバック מאמיר [>window] (ד"ה) "ד ה"הアイיל הא מכלビー החתים של ממלכי השחר:
ישראל נקראה בצלאל שנדון בשמ תחית ה"ה אلاحقי דבירה "ד א ממלכי השוטר נקראה בצלאל שנדון ויבא
במי האלוהים אורב. אחד הוא הנדיעו א社會 ממה. חותמה אמור בעכורי ישראל (עמור ד:כ"
[ישרא] אשת חיתים עפל יית ממלכי השחר.

Text #3:

הכל רוח צפונה ג:א
שנירב נ כ"ז fisheries ישראלי ואירוט וגו, נבכר ודיבר בך נברט הקדיש, שמה הוא ש.csrfו יוקה מקדש.
מאברה המשיח צד אביג' פרויש, כנישארו, אל נזר反正 מחוקי נשישים מעטסירין
עומר דרור: "בדים כ"ז אתי אתים חותים אנא מעניינו חותים אחרים להקים בחדת תוקי: אולם
עתוני ישיבוה את็บת עולמל, אנא מעניינים אתבים תורבת חותים עולמל - אתים השיתויחו יתביב אתחבר עולמל
dרכמור דביר ה"ה ישראלה. אנא עניין אתים חותים אתיבה עולמל שבורה: ידני הים
אין "י"כ אני עניין ישראלה להאתי בורינן: גזע.
God and the People of Israel

Text #4:

יִקְרָא רְבָּה כ”ד: ד
הַהֲנָלִים יֵכֶּשׁ אֵת נֵרָה (כְּלוּלָה, כ”). וְהוֹנָא לִבְשָׂה רְ, וַיַּשְׁפֵּק אֶפֶּם, הַהֲנָלִים יֵכֶּשׁ אֵת נֵרָה. אַחֲרֵיהֶם מֵאֲזַנַּת רוּחַ צְדֵיק, הֲנָלִים יֵכֶּשׁ אֵת נֵרָה. רֵשֵׁע רוּחַ רֵשֵׁע, הֲנָלִים יֶכֶּשׁ אֵת נֵרָה. זַלְלֶנּוּ רוּחַ רוּחַ, הֲנָלִים יֵכֶּשׁ אֵת נֵרָה. דַּע שֶׁאֵם הַחוּר אֵם הַחוּר, עִזְּק רוּחַ רוּחַ, הֲנָלִים יֶכֶּשׁ אֵת נֵרָה. רַם יִשְׁמָר מְבָטָר, מְבָטָר אָוֹן הַעֲלוֹת הַקוֹלָה. הֲוֵה דִּומַל של דִּרְסֶפֶּם מִיִּגְדוּ. הָלֵל נֵרָה מִפְּנֵי

זַלְלֵנּוּ רוּחַ רוּחַ, הֲנָלִים יֵכֶּשׁ אֵת נֵרָה, יֵשׁוּﬠַ י”ל אָל הָבוֹל הַאוֹל מָנַח (בְּבָאֹרָשֵי ד”). נַגְּרָד מִפְּנֵי דּוֹד.

כְּלוּלָה יֵכֶּשׁ אֵת נֵרָה, וְאָמַר מְיָוָה יַלְיָה (בְּבָאֹרָשֵי ד”, א). אִמְרוּ מִי יֵתִּוָה לְאָל אֶשְׁר

יִשְׁאַל לְמַלְמַלְמָה (תְּלָלַיְם כ”ל, ד”). מַשָּׂה נֵרָה מְפִּרְעָה, הֲנָלִים יֵכֶּשׁ אֵת נֵרָה, לָלִי מְשַׁמָּה בְּחֵי עָמָד. בְּפָרֵךְ לָכֵּנָה (שָׁמ”ל/תְּלָלַיְם/כ”ל). דִּזָּה נֵרָה מְפִּרְעָה, הֲנָלִים יֵכֶּשׁ אֵת נֵרָה, בְּדוֹר הֶבֶדְיָה (שָׁמ”ל/תְּלָלַיְם/ע”ת, א”). שִׁיאֲרֵם נֵרוֹפֶּמוּ מְפִּרְעָה, הֲנָלִים יֵכֶּשׁ אֵת נֵרָה, נַגְּרָד י”ל לְהוֹי לְלָא (דָּבְרֵי כ”). אָבּוּ בְּקִחוֹרְנֵה, כְּלָצֵה נֵרָה מְפִּרְעָה, כְּלָצֵה נֵרָה מְפִּרְעָה, כְּלָצֵה נֵרָה מְפִּרְעָה, לָלִי מְשַׁמָּה בְּוָאָרָה (שָׁמ”ל/תְּלָלַיְם/כ”ל). הַכָּב”ה אֲלֵי תַּקְרוּ בְּלַעֲמָנוּ מְדִירֵם אַלָּא מְדִירֵם. שׁוֹר אֶל בֵּשָׂ הַאֵזֶה זַלַּיְגָּא מְדִירֵם. שָׁמֵר אֲלֵי בֵּשָׂ בֵּשָׂ כְּלָא כְּלָא...
Teaching it to our children means also making them partners in what is so very important.

— Rabbi Steinsaltz
Program Goals & Activities

The primary goal of this program is to teach one way we say “thank you” to God is to make the world a better place (tikkun olam) by caring, sharing, and helping others. Specific values and mitzvot include:

- **Ma’akhil Re’evim/Tzedakah** .............. Feeding the hungry/ Giving to those in need
- **Tikkun Olam** ................................... Making the world a better place
- **Tzedakah** ........................................ Acting and sharing justly
- **Ahavat HaShem** .............................. Loving God
- **Gemilut Chasadim** ............................ Acts of kindness

During the program, families will:

- Create a birthday cake gift package to donate to a local food pantry.
- Actively listen to the story and share their favorite parts.
- Explore the Holy Ark (Aaron HaKodesh) if the story is read in a synagogue sanctuary.
- Enjoy a snack together, saying “Thank You” for the food before eating.
- Create a tzedakah box to help families continue the mitzvah of tzedakah.
ADVANCED PREPARATIONS

Suggested locations:

1. **Large room with separate reading and work spaces.** You can use the power of dramatic storytelling to bring the “awe” of the sanctuary into the reading space.
   - If possible, arrange for the loan of a Torah. Get “up close and personal” by showing families the outside and inside of the scroll.

2. **Space in a congregation** that has a captivating sanctuary and a room (ideally with a sink in the room or nearby) for some “messy work.”
   - The *Bima* or space in front of *bima* should be large enough for all to be seated for story and conversation.
   - Work room needs tables for families to spread out (2 or 3 families/table for the first project)

Connect with synagogues:

- Speak with the congregational staff prior to program to understand any rules about who can/cannot open the *Aron HaKodesh*—the Holy Ark where the Torah is kept (or, as Benny says, “where God’s special book is”).
- Ask if the children &/or adults will need to wear a *kippah*.
- If you are bringing in snack, check to be sure you are complying with their *kashrut* policies.

Connect with local food bank:

- Find out what donations would be helpful: birthday packages, packed lunches, etc.

Ask families to bring:

- Donations for food bank: Possibly cake mix and frosting and whatever else they’d like to add (e.g. candles) to create a special “birthday cake” pack for families who visit a food pantry before a family member’s birthday.

Plan to welcome families:

1. Station a greeter at the building entrance to direct families.
2. Set up a welcome table for sign in & making nametags.
3. Station a greeter at the doorway of the meeting space to help families find a seat at an art table, ensure that others at the table welcome them, and give activity directions.

**INTRO ACTIVITY:** Birthday Care Packages

**MATERIALS NEEDED:**

- Little slivers of tissue or construction paper for “sprinkles”
- Crayons to spread out among the tables
- 1 brown paper bag sheet/child
- Glue-sticks
ADVANCED PREPARATIONS:

- Gather paper bags from a local grocery store (most will be glad to donate).
- Cut off bottom of bags and cut the bags open down one side so you will have big sheets of brown paper for each family to use.
- Bring a few extra sets of birthday cake mix for those who forgot.

DIRECTIONS:

1. Invite families to decorate the brown paper by coloring a giant birthday cake, possibly “sprinkling the cake” with tissue paper sprinkles and using the glue-stick to attach them.
2. Parents (and older children) can write a birthday message such as “Enjoy your birthday and your cake, from PJ Library families” or “From Emily & her mom.” Encourage families not to use last names for a somewhat anonymous gift.
3. Once done with their decorations, families can either wrap their bundle and leave it on the table, or wrap their bundle after the reading.
4. When most are done, ask everyone to go and wash their hands and then come sit by you.

Hints for Sharing the Book

Transition:

- Welcome everyone and invite them to introduce themselves to the group.
- Ask the children about what they just made. See if they can tell you what they made and why. As you rephrase their comments, be sure they or you talk about wanting to help people; such as making sure that other people get to celebrate their birthdays with cake. “Sometimes doing nice things to help others is a way to say ‘thank you’ for having all the nice things we have.”
- Explain that the story you will soon read is about a little boy who also says “thank you” by doing something nice for someone else.

Introducing the Book:

- If you are using space in a synagogue, let everyone know that you will be going to a special, very big room to share a story. Grownups and children can come to this room. Some people come here to learn, others might come to think quietly, some come to sing and others come to pray. This is one place where people pray, which means they talk to God. It is a place called the sanctuary. Invite them to repeat the word.
- If you are not meeting in a synagogue, explain that some of this story takes place in a bagel shop, some in a school, and some in the sanctuary of a synagogue.
- Talking about God: If children ask about what or who God is and you are comfortable answering them, you might share that some people think that God is like a parent who helps to take care of all the growing things in the world—people, plants, and animals; others think that God is who created everything in nature; some think God is like a little quiet voice we can hear inside that helps us make good choices – we can’t see God, but we can see a bit of God inside each one of us when we do the right things and treat people, animals, plants and everything in the world with care.
Talking about Prayer: If they ask about what “prayer” is, you might share it is when people talk to God. You don’t need to be in a sanctuary to talk to God. You can be in your room, outdoors, or anywhere. People might be saying thank you to God for all the good things in their life. Some might be asking God to help give them the energy to deal with the hard things in life. Others might be asking God to help them make good choices.

Ask if anyone has ever been to the room in a synagogue where people pray. If so, ask them to tell you something they remember about it. You can prompt with questions about what it looked like, what the people were wearing, etc.

Ask if anyone knows how we should behave in such a special place. Make sure they get to things such as speaking in quiet voices and sitting still—it isn’t a place to run.

If appropriate, walk to the sanctuary. Stop in the middle of the room so that everyone can just “hear” the quiet. Then head to where you will read the story, ideally on the bima.

Encouraging Participation:

Use movement to engage the listeners. Invite them to use silent mimes to help sweep the floor (sitting down), dust the shelves, put the baked goods on the shelf, and pull open the doors of the ark.

At the end of the story ask “What did you like best about the story?” encouraging both children and parents to answer. If they mention something that relates to one of the values, it would be a nice follow-up to mention the value (i.e., “That’s right, it is certainly important to share what we have with other people who are hungry”).

FOLLOW UP ACTIVITY #1: Open the Ark

If you have permission or one of synagogue professionals is there to do it, (and you have planned enough time into your program) ask all to stand and invite the children to come up to help you open the ark. If possible, take out and undress a Torah scroll so that all can see one up close. It is wonderful if someone knowledgeable about the Torah is there, as there will be many questions! Some rabbis will allow the children (and adults) to touch the back of the scroll parchment. Be sure to check before inviting anyone to do so.

FOLLOW UP ACTIVITY #2: Say thank you for a snack

Offer a snack...ideally include bagels.

Ask the children who they might want to thank for the bagel snack.

Use either the words Benny used in the story (“Thank You for making the best bagels in town”), or the traditional Motzi* bracha (blessing). All can repeat after you, word by word:

*Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech HaOlam, HaMotzi lechem minHaAretz*
Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, Who brings forth bread from the earth
FOLLOW UP ACTIVITY #3: Wrap Birthday Packages

- Explain that now we can say “thank you” for having all the nice things we have by finishing to wrap our birthday packages to give to the local food bank.
- Have families reclaim their decorated wrapping paper and wrap up their package.

FOLLOW UP ACTIVITY #4: Make a Tzedakah Box

MATERIALS NEEDED:
- One empty plastic topped can/family—cocoa tins, frosting containers, coffee cans, international coffee tins, etc.
- Small paint brushes—one per child (inexpensive ones from the dollar store)
- Small plastic cups to hold glue/water mix
  (1 part white glue to 2 parts water works well as a home-made “mod podge”)
- Scraps of colored tissue paper OR collect a variety of family oriented magazines
- Waxed paper or wax coated paper plates for families to work on
- Wet wipes or sink space and towels for hand clean up
- Adult and children Scissors (if using magazines)
- Sticker / paper label with the word tzedakah in Hebrew &/or English (optional)

ADVANCED PREPARATIONS:
- Cut a slit in the plastic top of each container.
- Prepare small cups of glue/water mix—two or three per table along with paint brushes for the cups.
- Pre-wrap just the metal cans with plain paper.
- Stack magazines on work tables (at least 1 per family) or prepare baskets of tissue paper scraps for each work table.
- Place waxed paper pieces or coated paper plates on tables for families to use as a work surface.
Introductory Remarks:

Share with families that in addition to giving food to those that might be hungry, we also say thank you to God when we save and share our money with food pantries and other places that help make the world a better place. These places might help people find jobs, care for animals, or take care of the earth. We call that tzedakah—doing what is right. Today we are going to make a special bank—a tzedakah jar—so that you can save tzedakah at home!

DIRECTIONS:

1. Invite each family to pick a jar and to find a space at a work table.
2. IF YOU ARE USING TISSUE PAPER—show families how to pick colored scraps, one at a time, and while holding them on the can, cover it completely with the glue/water mix. They can then add colors, with each scrap overlapping the one before it, covering the entire can.
3. IF YOU ARE USING MAGAZINES—explain that families should look for pictures of things that families need and could buy with the tzedakah you save and give. They can cut those pictures out and using the same method noted above, cover the jar with the pictures.

FOLLOW UP ACTIVITY #5: Enjoy a Closing Song

Thank You God by Doug Cotler

* * *

Baruch Ata Adonai, Thank You God
Baruch Ata Adonai, Thank You God

Thank You for my mommy;
Thank You for my dad;
Thank You for their hugs; they always make me glad

Baruch Ata Adonai, Thank You God
Baruch Ata Adonai, Thank You God

Thank You for……… (invite children and parents to fill in with their thoughts)

(You can find the song on Doug Cotler’s CD It’s So Amazing and on Shira Klein’s ShirLaLa Shabbat CD.)
NURTURING THE FAMILY

Thank everyone for coming and for saying Thank You with you. Briefly give a wrap up message to parents how they can continue to guide their children in adopting the value of saying Thank You by encouraging them to “do the right thing” and taking care of others in the world.

Following the program, send families an email thanking them for coming, and providing helpful links to nurture the value of “saying thank you,” support talking with their children about God, and providing connections to local organizations that feed the hungry.

Resources from Kveller (a Jewish Twist on Parenting)
- Gratitude Advice, Wendy Mogel
- Using Bagels from Beny to Talk About God, Amy Meltzer
- How to Talk About God, Rabbi Sarah Reines

Resources from My Jewish Learning
- How to Talk to Your Kids About God, Rabbi David Wolpe
- Raising a Mensch, Sharon Estroff

Brachot / Blessing Information
- Basic Brachot, Akhlah: The Jewish Children’s Learning Network
Boker Tov! Good Morning!

BY: Rabbi Joe Black

Program Goals & Activities

The primary goal of the program is to introduce families to the concept of beginning and ending each day with gratitude.

During the program families will:

- Create a fun, interactive boker tov/lilah tov sign to serve as a daily reminder to begin and end each day with gratitude.
- Learn the Hebrew expressions “boker tov” and “lilah tov.”
- Discover additional developmentally appropriate activities to promote the daily expression of gratitude.

Additional activities include singing a variety of boker tov and lilah tov songs and making fresh squeezed orange juice (a tasty boker tov treat).

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY: Creating Boker Tov/Lila Tov Signs

Introductory remarks: Today we’re going to read a book about some of the activities that one little boy likes to do every morning when he first wakes up. Every morning, the boy in our book likes to jump out of bed, take off his “jammies,” get dressed, eat breakfast, and dash off to school. This little boy also likes to say thank you. Every morning when he wakes up, he looks around and says thank you for all of the wonderful things which he sees. He says thank you for the sunshine, thank you for the yummy breakfast food, thank you for the earth, and even thank you for the hamster which he discovers in his classroom when he arrives at school. Right now we’re going to make a boker tov/lila tov sign—a good
morning and good night sign—which will remind us to start and end each day by saying thank you, just as the boy in our book does. When we sit down to read our book, I’ll show you exactly how our signs work, but for right now I’d like you to work on making and preparing some of the pieces for your sign.

**MATERIALS NEEDED**
- Plastic plates
- Pipe cleaners
- Watercolor sets: Either tubes, bottles, or trays containing solid pallets of watercolor
- Small paint brushes
- Muffin trays for holding painting supplies and water (by using muffin trays, you will avoid the frequent overturning of bowls and cups of water which often accompany watercolor painting)
- Boker tov and lila tov cards (see end of program for a copy of these cards)
- Pony Beads
- Velcro
- Foam or poster board, cut in the shape of the moon and sun

**ADVANCE PREPARATIONS**
1. Prepare the interactive sign from two plastic plates.
   - Cut one plate in half.
   - Place the half plate on top of the whole plate.
   - Staple around the edges of the half plate, thereby creating a pocket.
   - This pocket will hold the individual pieces or attachments to the sign
   - Attach one piece of Velcro (teeth side up) to the top of the half plate.
   - Attach one piece of Velcro (teeth side up) to the top section of the full (whole) plate.
   - Attach matching pieces of Velcro (fuzzy side up) to the backs of the sun, moon, and boker tov and lila tov cards.
   - Place all pieces of sign (i.e. the sun, moon, and boker tov and lila tov cards) inside plate pocket.
   - Using a hole punch, punch a hole into the top of the full size plate.
   - Insert a pipe cleaner through the hole. Twist one end of the pipe cleaner to secure it to the plate.
2. Set up two work areas.
   This project works best with two separate work stations. One station will be for watercolor painting, while the second station will be for the stringing of beads.
Boker Tov! Good Morning!

**Watercolor Station**

**MATERIALS NEEDED:**
- Watercolors (liquid, tubes or watercolor pallets)
- Paint brushes
- Muffin trays/tins
- Pencil, pens for writing names
- Water
- Prepared plastic plates
- Newspaper or plastic bags or tablecloths for covering table
- Sheets of white paper (for those children who wish to continue painting even after they have completed their boker tov and lila tov cards)

**A Note on Preparing Watercolors:**
If using tube or liquid watercolors, fill the muffin compartments half full with water and squeeze in one or two drops of watercolor paint. Additionally, fill one or two muffin compartments with water but do not add color. These water-only compartments will be used for the rinsing of paint brushes. If using watercolor pallets, fill muffin compartments with water only. Pre-moisten watercolor pallets so that children can paint without delay.

**Bead Stringing Station**

**MATERIALS NEEDED:**
- Bowls containing pony beads
- Prepared plates

**Watercolor Station**

**DIRECTIONS:**
1. Distribute one sign/plate to each participant.
2. Participants remove boker tov and lila tov cards from the plate pocket.
3. Using watercolors, children decorate each card (blot with paper towels if cards become too drippy).
4. Be sure to jot children’s names on the back of their card.
5. Once the children have completed painting their boker tov and lila tov cards (and extra paper), ask them to bring their plate to the bead stringing table.

**Bead Stringing Station**

1. Children string beads onto the open end of the pipe cleaner.
2. After children have attached as many beads as they desire, parents tie or twist the open end of the pipe cleaner to the section of pipe cleaner which is already attached to the plate. This forms a loop or a handle which will enable the sign to be hung on a door-knob within easy reach of a child.
Hints for Sharing the Book:

Introducing the Book

Today we’re going to read the book Boker Tov by Rabbi Joe Black, which shows what one little boy does when he first wakes up in the morning. Do you know how to say the word morning in Hebrew? Boker, can you say that word with me?

What do you do when you wake up in the morning?

- As children offer suggestions, ask the group to pantomime each action.

What do you say when you wake up in the morning? In our book, the boy likes to say “boker tov.”

Let’s watch and listen and see what this boy does and says when he first wake up in the morning.

If possible, sing rather than read the book aloud

Encouraging Participation

- Ask children to describe what the dog is doing on several of the book’s pages.
- On page 11, ask the children to guess what the new surprise in the classroom is (the hamster).
- Ask children to join you in imitating some of the actions depicted on each page: pretend to get dressed, wave hello/boker tov to the letter carrier, dance in the classroom, etc.

Closing Remarks

Wow, sometimes there’s a lot to do in the morning. Every morning, the boy in our book gets dressed, eats breakfast, and says thank you. Let’s see what he says thank you for (review pp. 8 – 10; he says thank you for “the food he eats, for the earth beneath his feet and for the morning sunshine bright.”).

Earlier today, you made a sign which you can take home and hang in your bedroom. This sign can help you remember to say thank you every morning, just as the boy in our book does. Every morning when you wake up, you can jump out of bed, run to your sign, reach your hand in the pocket, and pull out the sun and the card that says “boker tov. Good morning! Today I am happy because....”

Demonstrate how to attach these items to the sign.
Once you’ve arranged your sign, try to think of one thing which you feel happy about. I bet that every day, you’ll think of something different to be happy about. One morning you might feel happy because the birds are singing. Another day you may be happy that the sun is shining, or you may be excited that you are going to have a play date with a friend, or that you are going to visit grandma.

At night, you can rearrange your sign again, just before you go to sleep. What shines in the sky at bedtime? That’s right—the moon. So at bedtime, you can take down the sun and put up the moon. You’ll also need to put up the lila tov card. The lila tov card asks you to think about one nice thing which happened during the day and say thank you for that person, place, or thing. So for example, one night you might say, “Thank you for the friends whom I played with today,” or you might say, “Thank you for the zoo that I visited today,” or “Thank you for the sun which kept me warm all day long”. What other types of thank-yous might you say at the end of the day? I hope that you’ll keep track of some of your morning and night time thank-yous because I really want to hear about them the next time I see you.

**FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY #1:** Singing songs & performing finger-plays about waking up and going to sleep.

This Little Girl All Ready for Bed

This little girl all ready for bed,
down on the pillow she lays her head
(*Lay one finger down in the palm of the other extended hand*)

Wraps herself up in the covers so tight
(*Wrap fingers of the extended hand tightly around the sleeping finger*)

This is the way she sleeps all night

Morning comes, she opens her eyes
Back with a toss the covers fly.
(*Open the hand which was clasping the finger; Allow the opened hand to fly through the air*)

Up she jumps, she’s up and awake
(*Bounce finger up and down on the palm of the extended hand*)

Ready to play and have a good day
**I Wake up in the Boker**

“I wake up in the boker and I open my eynayim (eyes)
I jump from my mitah (bed) and clap my yadayim (hands)-

**If You’re Happy in the Boker** (To the tune of “If you’re happy and you know it”)

If you’re happy in the boker, shout Boker Tov (2x)
If you’re happy in the boker and you really want to show it,
If you’re happy in the boker shout, Boker Tov

*Other possible verses:* If you’re happy in the boker…
eat your breakfast, brush your teeth, and comb your hair…

*Last verse:* If you’re sleepy in the lila, close your eyes (2x)
If you’re sleepy in the lila, and you really want to show it,
If you’re sleepy in the lila, close your eyes and go to sleep.

**FOLLOW UP ACTIVITY #2:** Squeezing fresh orange juice and preparing a boker tov treat.

**Introductory Remarks**

We’ve spoken a great deal today about waking up in the morning, in the boker. I have a question for you—What do you like to eat in the morning, in the boker, when you first wake up? Is there a special name for the meal which we eat in the morning? (Breakfast) What do you like to drink at breakfast? Right now we’re going to make a special morning breakfast treat. We’re going to make our own fresh-squeezed orange juice. Has anyone here ever made orange juice before? What will we need in order to make orange juice? What do you think we should say before we drink our juice? Should we say thank you to the oranges for giving us such good juice?
MATERIALS NEEDED:
- Oranges (sliced in half)
- Hand juicers (many, but at least 2 or 3)
- Paper bowls
- Paper cups
- A large pitcher for collecting the juice
- Carton of store-bought orange juice
- Cheerios

DIRECTIONS:
1. Pass out a handful of cheerios to each child (The cheerios will serve as a distraction, as the children await their turn with the juicers).
2. Distribute a small bowl and ½ orange to each child.
3. Ask children to wait for a turn with the juicer. Upon receiving a juicer, each child will twist his/her orange on top of the juicer, extracting as much juice as possible from the orange (those who can’t wait for the juicer can try hand-squeezing their orange into their bowl).
4. After each child has used the juicer, he/she should pour the collected juice into the large pitcher.
5. When all of the oranges have been squeezed, pour a little of the fresh-squeezed orange juice into each child’s cup.
6. Optional: Recite a blessing before drinking the juice, or simply offer a shout of “thank you.”
7. After serving the fresh-squeezed juice, offer children additional helpings of store-bought juice.

NURTURING THE FAMILY

Following the program try to e-mail each family, thanking them for coming and providing them with the words to some of the songs that you sang at the program. Parents may also enjoy reading an article by Dr. Wendy Mogel on ways of nurturing the value of gratitude within their children. The article is posted on the Jewish parenting site kveller.com. Dr. Mogel is the author of Blessing of A Skinned Knee: “Gratitude: Encouraging your Child’s Natural Appreciation for the Little Things”

Boker Tov!
Good Morning!!
Today, I am happy because...

Lila Tov
Good Night!
Tonight, I say “Thank You” for...
THEME: *Making Bedtime Moments Jewish Moments*  
- Infants to 4 year olds  
- 45 minutes–1 hour

**Book Overview**

Both *Goodnight Shema* and *The Bedtime Shema* feature gentle verse and soft, serene illustrations which follow a young child as he/she prepares for bed. While *Goodnight Shema* focuses on the actions that one small boy takes before going to bed (i.e. reading a book, hugging a bear, reciting a prayer), *The Bedtime Shema* contains child-friendly verses, adapted from various psalms and prayers, which a parent and child recite as a young girl prepares for bed. Each book concludes with the timeless words of the Shema prayer.

**Program Goals & Activities**

During the course of this program, families will explore several different ways of adding Jewish content their nightly bedtime routines. In addition to examining the words and meaning of the Shema, a traditional bedtime prayer, families will:

- Discover ways to incorporate the Shema and/or expressions of gratitude into bedtime rituals
- Learn several different tunes for the Shema prayer
- Create a beautiful framed bedtime sign which will encourage families to use bedtime as a time for expressing gratitude for all which has occurred over the course of the day

Additionally, children will create a delicious bedtime snack, and will “practice” putting their stuffed animals and dolls to sleep, while joyfully reciting the Shema.

**ADVANCED PREPARATIONS**

- Choose a “comfy” space, one with soft floor that is conducive to cuddling
- Encourage children to bring a well-loved stuffed animal or doll
- Bring extra dolls and stuffed animals for those who forget to bring their own
- For larger groups, consider enlarging or projecting book illustrations
- Choose an introductory and follow-up activity that best suits your community

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This book-based Program curriculum was developed by The PJ Library.
INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY #1: Creating a Starry Night Mural

Mural will be used to help set the scene for the storytelling session.

MATERIALS NEEDED:
- Large sheet of black paper—cut from a roll of bulletin board paper, or created by stapling several pieces of black paper or craft foam or poster board together.
- Gold and silver mini stars—self-stick or the kind which are applied by licking

ADVANCED PREPARATIONS:
- Tape the black paper to the floor or to several small, low tables, lined up in a row.
- Place small handfuls of stars in plastic containers or bowls so that each child will have his/her own supply of stars to work with.

Introductory Remarks:
In a few minutes we are going to read a book about bedtime and going to sleep:

*When do you and your dolls and stuffed animals usually go to sleep?*
*Do you go to sleep when it’s dark outside or when it’s light outside?*

That’s right; we usually go to sleep when it’s dark outside. So to help set the mood for our story, we’re going to make our own night sky.

Can you help us add stars and moons to our sky?

DIRECTIONS:
1. Show children how to attach stars to the black paper.
2. When children have finished attaching their small supply of stars, encourage them to move on to Introductory Activity #2 – decorating a frame.

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY #2: Decorating a Frame

For the “Bedtime Picture” which will be created in the second half of the program

MATERIALS NEEDED:
- Frames cut from craft foam or construction paper (8.5 x 11 in.)
- Stickers (include star and moon stickers)
- Paper cut outs of stars and moons
Cut-outs of the Hebrew letters—Shin, Mem, and Ain
(for those families who would like to display Hebrew Letters on their frames)
Handout with the word Shema, written in Hebrew
Glue sticks or white/school glue, bowls, and q-tips
Optional: sequins, jewels, foam shapes etc.

**Introductory Remarks:**

*Later, we are going to make a special bedtime sign which can be taken home and hung in your bedroom. We hope that these beautiful signs will help you feel even more relaxed and comfortable at bedtime. Before you paint your bedtime sign, we want you to first decorate the frame which will surround your sign.*

**DIRECTIONS:**

1. Encourage children to spread glue all around the edges of their frame
2. Ask children to select the shapes, sequins, etc. which they would like to use on their frame
3. Ask children to place their chosen materials on top of the glue.
4. Have several copies of the word Shema available, so that those who wish, will be able to see how to arrange the letters on their frame.

**Hints for Sharing the Book**

**PROPS:**

- Completed night sky
- Stuffed animal for the group leader
- Parents to hold up night sky

**Introducing the Book:**

Invite all to come and join you, bringing their cuddle toys, leaving their art pieces at the table. Assure them that their work will be safe:

- As everyone settles in, welcome all; encourage little ones to snuggle with their parents.
- Have families briefly introduce themselves and their special cuddle toy.
- Pass out extra stuffed animals to those children who did not bring one from home.
- Comment on how busy everyone was today working on their projects

*Oh, I’m seeing lots of dolls and stuffed animals who are yawning—(demonstrate a few yawns) and looking very sleepy. I think that soon it’s going to be time for us to put our toys to bed.”*

- Ask parents to help you hold the completed starry night mural over the children’s head.
Look at what time it is? It's dark outside and the stars are out. That means it’s time for the dolls and stuffed animals to go to sleep. How should we help them get ready for bed? What do you do before bedtime?

Ask for suggestions and encourage the entire group to pantomime gestures for whatever actions are suggested—brushing teeth, taking a bath, etc.

In a few minutes, we’re going to read a book that shows a child getting ready for bed. The child in our book does something very special before she (The Bedtime Shema) /he (Goodnight Shema) goes to sleep – He/she says a prayer. There are many different kinds of prayers that children and grown-ups can say at bedtime. Sometimes, people like to think of all of the special things that happened to them during the day and say thank you for those special things. Other people, before going to bed, like to think about something that they hope might happen tomorrow—For example someone might say—Tomorrow, I hope I have fun riding my bike. The child in our book says a special Hebrew prayer before he/she goes to sleep. The prayer is called Shema and its words are written and spoken in Hebrew. Can I teach you the words to this Prayer?

Ask the children to repeat the Shema words after you.

The words of the Shema tell us that there is only one God. Does anyone know who or what God is? Many people have many different ideas and thoughts about God. I like to think of God as someone whom I can’t see and whom I can’t hear and whom I can’t feel, but who is all around. Even though I can’t see God, I think that God is very important. Many people believe that God helped to make the world, and helped to make everything that we see around us—The trees, the grass, the birds, and people.

Ask: What else do you think that God helped to make?

Sometimes before, going to bed, people like to talk to God and say “thank you God for all of the special things that you gave me today.” Saying Shema is a way of talking to God and saying thank you. Let’s read our book and discover what the child in our book likes to do and say before he/she goes to bed.

Follow Up Questions:

What were some of the things that the child in this book did before going to bed?
Whom did the child take to bed with him/her?
Do you take someone special to bed with you?
What did the child say before going to bed?

ADAPTATIONS FOR GROUP SIZE AND AGE

Older Children: With Bedtime Shema—you may pause on the 1st page and encourage parents and children to quietly think about any “I’m sorry” moments that they may have had either today or during the past several days. Ask parents and children to quietly whisper these moments to one another.

Younger Children: If children get restless during the story reading, encourage them to hug and kiss their stuffed animals.
FOLLOW UP ACTIVITY #1: Putting Stuffed Animals and Dolls to Bed

MATERIALS NEEDED:
- Pieces of felt, 8.5 x 11—in a variety of colors
- Night sky mural (which was made during the introductory activities)

Introductory Remarks:
- Invite parents to help you stretch the night sky mural over the children’s head

“Ohh..., I see that it’s getting dark out again. Look at how tired these dolls and stuffed animals are—They’re eyes keep closing. I think that it’s time for us to put our special friends to bed. (Pass out pieces of felt) Here are some blankets for our friends. Before we cover them up, let’s help them wash their faces, brush their teeth, and read a book. Let’s give them a hug and a kiss. Now, let’s cover them with their blankets.

- Pantomime each of the activities above.

There’s one more thing that we need to do before putting them to bed. Do you know what it is? We need to help them say Shema. Can you sing the words with me? Let’s see if we can teach this prayer to our cuddly friends.

- Sing Shema to animals, Pretend to let the stuffed animals sleep for a few seconds. Take down the night sky. Announce:

“Morning time. Boker Tov. Everybody up.”

- Encourage children to throw back the covers and wake their dolls/stuffed animals.

Hmm...I wonder what our friends will do today. Maybe they’ll dance or go on the swings or help cook

- Invite children to pantomime each of these actions.
- Ask parents to help (again) with putting up the black sky. Announce.

“It’s time for our friends to go to sleep again! What do they need to do? What’s the last thing that they should do?”

FOLLOW UP ACTIVITY #2: Make a special bedtime snack

MATERIALS NEEDED:
- Animal crackers, Teddy Bear Crackers, or Gingerbread cookies.
- Jelly or cream cheese
- Brown whole wheat bread, each slice cut in half
- White bread or potato bread-cut in half and then cut into a 1/3 and 2/3 piece (to be used as pillows and blankets for the cookie children or animals.
ADVANCED PREPARATIONS (OPTIONAL):

- Arrange small snack plates for each child—each plate should contain:
  - a heaping spoonful of jelly or cream cheese
  - Plastic spoons or knives
  - Both white and brown bread (cut into its proper size)
  - One gingerbread man or other animal shaped crackers.
  - Raisins (optional)

Introductory Remarks:

Wow, you guys are experts on putting your special cuddly friends to bed. To celebrate your excellent skills at putting animals to sleep, we’d like you to make a special snack which involves making a comfy bed for a tasty little gingerbread boy or girl (or teddy bear) cracker.

DIRECTIONS:

1. Demonstrate how to make an edible bed. Using a spoon, spread jelly or cream cheese onto a piece of brown wheat bread.

2. Place the smaller white piece of bread on top of the jelly/cream cheese. (This white piece of bread will represent the cookie’s pillow.)

3. Lie the gingerbread boy/girl down on top of the jelly or cream cheese with its head resting on top of the white pillow.

4. Cover the gingerbread boy/girl with the remaining piece of white bread. (This piece of bread will function as the cookie’s blanket.)

5. Optional: Use a raisin (torn into small pieces) to form facial features for the gingerbread boy/girl or for the teddy bear cracker.

FOLLOW UP ACTIVITY #3: Make A Bedtime Sign

MATeRIALS:

- Liquid water color or food coloring mixed with water
  (The paints need to be substantially watered down, so picture and words on the page peak through the paint.
- Bowls—for storing various colors of diluted water colors.
- Paint brushes
- Shema cards (templates are available at the end of this program)
  ideally printed on card stock
- Scotch or masking tape
ADVANCE PREPARATION:

Create pages with the Shema on them (in Hebrew and English) Prepare several different types of Shema cards—some with Hebrew and some without; some which mention giving thanks to God; and some which avoid mentioning God.

Introductory Remarks:

We are now going to paint a special bedtime sign which we hope you’ll take home and hang in your room. Every night before you go to sleep, we hope that you’ll take a look at your bedroom Shema sign, and remember to say a prayer and/or a few words of thanks before you go to sleep. Parents, please note that while all of our Shema signs contain the same picture, they each feature slightly different wording. Please take time to find the wording which best meets your family’s beliefs and needs.

DIRECTIONS:

1. Encourage children to use several different colors on their sign.
2. Demonstrate how to paint one color next to another, without overlapping colors
3. Families with more than one child might want to create one sign for each child.
4. If time permits (and the paints have sufficiently dried), encourage families to attach their completed picture to their corresponding frame. Use tape to attach the sign to the frame. (If picture has not fully dried, ask families to attach the picture to the frame at home.)

FOLLOW UP ACTIVITY #4: Enjoy a Closing Song

As a closing activity, invite families to once again cuddle. You can again ask if anyone remembered a moment in their day that was “special” that they didn’t share earlier. Invite families to settle back and sing along with or listen quietly to several Jewish bedtime songs and finger plays. Some possibilities include:

- **Kobi’s Lullaby** by Rick Recht
  Watch Rick performing Kobi’s Lullaby and listen and download lyrics from Rick’s website
- **Y’varech’cha** and **Bedtime Shema** by Sheldon Low
- **The Angel’s Blessing** by Debbie Friedman
- Several different renditions of the Shema can be found at [http://www.totshabbat.com](http://www.totshabbat.com) (Recommended: Kenneth Cohen, and Judy Caplan Ginsburgh’s Amazing Songs for Amazing Jewish Kids.)

Conclude the program with hugs all around! Be sure everyone has their projects to take home.
FOLLOW UP ACTIVITY #5: **Shema Pillow to Take Home**

Older preschoolers and primary age children can hand make Shema pillow cases, or as Toledo and Southern Arizona communities did, print and give out travel size Shema pillows to program participants, at a cost of $6–7 / piece. Pillows and pillowcases were ordered from PillowXpress.com and printed locally.

NURTURING THE FAMILY

Following the program, try to e-mail each family, thanking them for coming and providing them with the words to some of the songs that you sang at the program. Parents may also enjoy reading up on Jewish bedtime ritual:

- **Goodnight, Sleep Tight: Bedtime Rituals**
  Interfaith Family.com
- **Creative Bedtime Rituals: Ending the Day with a Jewish Connection**
  Jewish Federations of North America
- **Jewish Bedtime Rituals**
  Kveller.com
Before I close my eyes at night and sleep, 
before I drift into my dreams, 
I give thanks for the blessings in my life 
for the people who care for me…

(from *Kobi’s Lullaby* by Rick Recht.)

Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu
Adonoi Echad. Listen Israel. 
God is our God. God is one.

Shema Yisrael Adonai 
Eloheinu Adonai Echad.

Thank you, for this 
special day 
that is now ending…
A Mezuzah on the Door

BY: Amy Meltzer

**THEME:** Creating a Jewish Home  
4–7 year olds  
45–60 minutes

**Book Overview**

This book tells the story of a young boy’s move to a new home. His transition is eased by the ritual of hanging up a mezuzah and the celebration of a chanukat habayit, a traditional Jewish housewarming/home dedication party.

**Program Goals & Activities**

The primary goal of this program is to introduce families and involve children in the making and mitzvah of hanging a mezuzah.

**During the program families will:**

- Discuss the significance and purpose of a mezuzah.
- Look at mezuzot (plural of mezuzah), both the case and the klaf (the scroll inside).
- Create a mezuzah case.
- Learn about the connection between the Shema prayer and the mezuzah.
- Learn about a traditional klaf including the Shema prayer, and make a “creative klaf.”
- Practice hanging a mezuzah.

**INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY #1:**

What makes you feel comfortable and safe in your home?

**MATERIALS NEEDED:**

- White copy paper
- Markers and/or crayons.
- Tape to hang pictures

**ADVANCED PREPARATIONS:**

- Large piece of chart or butcher block paper with outline of a large house.
DIRECTIONS:
1. Ask families to draw a picture of what helps them feel safe or comfortable in their home.
2. When families are done, ask them to affix their picture to the inside of the large house.
3. Invite families who are finished to participate in the Jewish scavenger hunt. (Introductory Activity #2)

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY #2: Jewish Scavenger Hunt

MATERIALS NEEDED
- Clipboards with paper and writing implement (optional)

DIRECTIONS
1. If you are meeting in a Jewish space, such as a JCC, synagogue or Jewish school, have families walk around the building and find things that identify the space as Jewish. They can write or draw or just remember their answers, or use cameras/cell phones to take pictures.
2. Consider how you will gather families together based on your meeting space.
   - Will they all be close enough to hear your voice?
   - Do you need to limit how far from your program area they can venture?
   - Will you have a signal, such as music or an intercom announcement, to indicate that it's time to return?
Hints For Sharing The Book:

MATERIALS NEEDED:
- At least one mezuzah case
- Example of a klaf/parchment
- Copy of A Mezuzah on the Door
- Consider borrowing a variety of mezuzah cases made from different materials from a local synagogue gift shop or Judaica store.
- Consider enlarging a klaf to poster size for all to see.

Transition:
Point to the house drawings. I see that many of you had a chance to draw something that makes you feel safe in your home. Who can tell me something they put in their picture? (Take a few comments.)

Introducing the Book:
Today we are going to read a book called A Mezuzah on the Door. It’s about a boy who moves to a brand new home. One of the things that helps him feel safe in his new home is a mezuzah. Who has ever heard the word mezuzah before?

Let’s see if we know what a mezuzah is. I’m going to ask you a question, and I want you to raise your hand when you think I’ve given the right answer. You’ll have three choices.

Who thinks THIS is a mezuzah? (Hold up a mezuzah CASE.)

Who thinks THIS is a mezuzah? (Hold up a mezuzah scroll/klaf.)

And who thinks THIS is a mezuzah? (Walk over to a door post and point to the one of the side frames. Don’t point to an actual mezuzah case if one is hanging on the door.)

Guess What? You’re ALL right! The world mezuzah means three things—the case that holds a piece of parchment with prayers/Hebrew words/the Shema written on it, the parchment that goes inside, AND the door post, the part of the door that stays still and doesn’t move when you open and close a door.

We take a mezuzah like this (show the parchment), and put it inside a mezuzah like this (show the case) and we hang it on a mezuzah like this (point to the door frame). When we read the book, we’ll hear more about what’s inside a mezuzah and why it makes Noah feel so much more comfortable in his new house.
A Mezuzah on the Door

Encouraging Participation:

- Encourage children to sneeze along with Mr. Gollis (ah-CHOO!)
- Pause the story when Noah says “You can see the tiny Hebrew letters on the paper inside.” Hold up the klaf/parchment. Ask children if they know what the klaf is really made of. Take a few answers. “We’ll find out in the story. Listen carefully.” Continue story.
- When Maya begins to play her violin at the party, pause after “an enthusiastic rendition of…..” Encourage children to finish the sentence by asking “What song do you think she played?” “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star!”

TRANSITION ACTIVITY: SHIN

Today we are going to have a chance to make our own mezuzah cases.

- If you have several examples of different types of mezuzot, hold them up or pass them around.

Every mezuzah case is different—you’ll get to choose the materials and colors that you like best, just like Noah picked out his very own mezuzah.

We are also going to have a chance to make something to go inside our case. It won’t be a kosher klaf, because that is made with very special materials, by someone who studies a long time to learn how to write the letters in a special way. But, we can try to write or color some of the words from the prayer that goes inside.

Does anyone remember from the story what prayer is written inside the mezuzah? That’s right, the SHEMA. Before we create our klaf and make our mezuzah, let’s make the sounds and shapes of the Shema.

What sound do you hear at the beginning of the word shema? (Exaggerate the SHHH sound when you say the word.)

That’s right, SHHHH. In Hebrew, the letter SHIN makes that sound. It’s the first letter of the word Shema.

Here’s what SHIN looks like:
(Show poster with large outline of shin drawn in black. This can be a coloring-in activity for families who finish early.)

Let’s see if we can make that shape with our fingers. Who would like to try to make it with their whole body? Can you make one with your family or a friend?

Many mezuzot have the Hebrew letter Shin on the case. If you would like to put a shin on your case, you can try to draw one, or you can come up and get one of these SHIN stickers to add to your case when you are all done.

Stickers can be purchased from Benny’s Educational Toys

(Note: The Shin on a mezuzah does not traditionally stand for the Shin of Shema, but for Shaddai, one of God’s names.)
FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY #1: Mezuzah Case Craft—Jewelry Box Mezuzah Case

MATERIALS NEEDED:
- White or gold cardboard bracelet boxes ~8”x2” (can be purchased from jewelry store, Michaels or various online retailers)
- Collage materials: feathers, foam shapes, buttons, sequins, stickers, etc
- Bowls, foil pie plates, or other rimmed container to hold collage materials
- Foam mounting tape, cut into 6” strips and affixed to the bottom of the jewelry box, on the side that would attach to the wall
- Elmer’s glue in small disposable cups or bowls (one glue container for every 3–4 participants)
- Inexpensive paint brushes (one brush per child)
- Paper plates
- Sharpees for labeling mezuzot

ADVANCE PREPARATION:
- Place glue, brushes, collage materials in bowls at all tables, or at one central table.
- Place a jewelry box TOP (not the bottoms) at each work space.

Introductory Remarks:
While gathered together, explain that children should look at all the different collage materials and select some materials they think they would like to use on their mezuzah case. (You can suggest a limit of items for their first trip, such as “choose 10 things, you can always go back for more!”) Tell them that once they have chosen their items, then they can sit down at a spot with a jewelry box.

Model the process of choosing a few items and then demonstrate using a brush to put glue on the BOX (not the decoration) and placing a decoration on the box top (not the sides).

DIRECTIONS:
1. Distribute paper plates and invite children to choose collage materials.
2. Children can use same paper plate as a work surface, or give them a second paper plate if necessary. (Working on a paper plate makes both clean up and taking home of the not-yet-dry-project much easier.)
3. While families are working, explain to parents that when their families are finished they should come get a box bottom for their mezuzah and write their child’s name on it. The tops can be placed on mezuzah bottoms immediately, or parents can wait until the top is dry.
4. Invite families to visit the “creative klaf” station when finished.
A Mezuzah on the Door

Match Box Mezuzah Case

MATERIALS NEEDED:
- White matchboxes (emptied)—these can be purchased from Amazon and many party stores
- Masking tape
- Craft sticks (aka tongue depressor), plain or colored
- Tissue paper (more than one color) cut into 10-15 one-inch squares
- Bowls, foil pie plates, or other rimmed container for tissue paper
- White glue diluted slightly with water in small bowls or cups
- Inexpensive paintbrushes for glue
- Optional decorations: adhesive gems, beads, ribbon, etc
- Foam mounting tape cut to length of craft stick (to mount to doorframe)
- Paper plates as work surface

ADVANCE PREPARATIONS:
- Use masking tape to attach the craft stick to the back of the matchbox lengthwise. Don’t tape the box shut—the inside part of the matchbox should still be able to slide freely.

DIRECTIONS:
1. Place glue on each work table. Distribute tissue paper and decorative materials at all tables.
2. Place a matchbox/craft stick at each work space on a paper plate. (Working on a paper plate makes both clean up and taking home of the not-yet-dry-project much easier.)
3. While gathered together, explain that children will decorate the box with layers of tissue paper. Model brushing a thin layer of glue on matchbox and pressing individual layers of the tissue squares on box (except for the open ends). Remind children that they can do as many layers of tissue paper as they like. They can add other decorations when they are finished.
4. Send participants to the tables to get started. Circulate with a sharpie or place one on each table so parents can label the paper plate with their child’s name.
   - If participants accidentally glue the matchbox shut, instruct parents run a sharp knife through the seams when dry.
5. When participants are finished, distribute mounting tape strips to affix to the backs of their mezuzot.
6. Invite families to visit the “creative klaf” station when finished.

Additional Mezuzah Case Ideas
- Paint wooden mezuzah cases
- Glue Stick Mezuzah
- Lego Mezuzah
FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY #2: Creative “Klaf”

MATERIALS NEEDED:
- Writing and drawing materials
- Parchment-like paper cut slightly shorter than length of box used for mezuzah case and 2–3 times the width. Some paper should have the word shema written in bold outline, so children can color it, and some should be blank, for children who want to write the shema or make their own prayer.

DIRECTIONS:
1. Invite families to choose one or both kinds of paper, and create a prayer for the inside of their mezuzah case.
   - What is something you are thankful for?
   - What is something special or important that you hope for?
   - How do you want people to feel in your home?
2. Child can draw or parent can write his/her thoughts.
FOLLOW UP ACTIVITY #3: Attaching the Mezuzah

MATERIALS NEEDED:
- Sample mezuzah
- Doorway or picture of door drawn on large piece of paper

DIRECTIONS:
1. Gather group together.
2. Demonstrate where on a door you place a mezuzah—on the right side, top pointed inward.
3. Teach blessing for hanging the mezuzah:
   When we hang a mezuzah we say a blessing, or a bracha. It goes like this:

   Repeat after me: (recite one or two words at a time)
   Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech Haolam Asher
   Kidshanu B’mitzvotav V’tzivanu Likboa Mezuzah.

   Practice hanging a mezuzah: Who would like to try to put their mezuzah up on the door?
   Invite families to hold their mezuzah up on the door or door picture. If you don’t have several doors in the room, consider drawing more than one picture of a door, so everyone can have a turn without waiting too long.

FOLLOW UP ACTIVITY #4: Sing “I See a Mezuzah”

I See a Mezuzah (Judy Caplan Ginsburgh)

When I come to the door of a Jewish home I see a mezuzah (3x)
I know I’m in a Jewish place when I see a mezuzah

When I come to the door of a synagogue, I see a mezuzah (3x)
I know I’m in a Jewish place when I see a mezuzah (2x)

Found on: Judy Caplan Ginsburgh’s cd: My Jewish World: Kids Songs for Everyday Jewish Living
Listen: http://new.music.yahoo.com/judy-caplan-ginsburgh/tracks/i-see-a-mezuzah--217566240
Preview or purchase: http://www.amazon.com/I-See-A-Mezuzah/dp/B0028HB35O
Suggest that families do their own “Jewish Scavenger Hunt” in their home. Besides their new mezuzah, what else shows that their home is Jewish?

Take home package for families:

- Mezuzah FAQ’s
- Small copy of traditional klaf
- Blessing sheet for affixing the mezuzah

Contact a local Judaica shop to see if they would like to offer a discounted coupon for participants to distribute at the event.

Following the program try to e-mail each family, thanking them for coming. Include information about local sources of mezuzot or parchment if they are interested. Include links in case they are interested in learning about the mezuzah, such as these videos about how to hang a mezuzah. If you have permission, attach a few photos from the event.

- Serious mezuzah hanging video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=youT85Czmio
- Funny mezuzah hanging video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zy4-gcKwOXU
- Mezuzah info from My Jewish Learning: http://www.myjewishlearning.com/life/Life_Stages/Building_a_Jewish_Home/Home_and_Community/Mezuzah.shtml
MEZUZAH FAQ’s
Gathered from a variety of traditional and non-traditional sources.

Where did the idea for the mezuzah originally come from?

- The mezuzah is based on the Torah-based mitzvah of binding a sign on the doorposts of your house. Why might the Torah describe this idea?
- There is evidence that in ancient Semitic cultures there were often signs of different kinds placed by people on doorposts.
- Many people date the mezuzah back to the time when we were slaves in Egypt. It is known that the Egyptians used to place a sacred document at the entrance to their houses.
- When God brought the tenth and final plague, the death of firstborn Egyptian males, the Israelites were instructed to dab lamb’s blood on their doorposts as a sign for the Angel of Death to “pass over” their homes.
- Originally an abbreviated version of the Shema was carved into the doorpost. Later the present 22 lines were written on a piece of parchment and fastened to the doorpost. Then it was placed in a hollow reed and attached to the doorpost. Finally it was placed in containers similar to what we use today.

What does the presence of the mezuzah remind us?

- The mezuzah reminds us to follow God’s commandments.
- The mezuzah reminding us of God’s commandments and helps us to stay away from doing wrong.
- The mezuzah serves as a constant reminder of what we already have but often need to remember—God’s omnipresence and the potential for our home to be a holy place.
- Maimonides claimed that the mezuzah reminded us, each time we left our home and ventured into the world, that worldly affairs were unimportant. Others see the mezuzah as a reminder that we must behave ethically, following the commandment, as much outside the home as inside.
- These days the mezuzah additionally serves to identify a house as a Jewish household, and reminds us of our own Jewish identity in our homes and when we go out into the community.

What is the true “heart” of the mezuzah—the klaf or the cover?

- The mezuzah consists of a decorative cover or case containing a klaf, a parchment with the Shema and Deuteronomy 6:4–9 and 11:13–21 lettered on it.
- The parchment, or klaf, is the real mezuzah and the case is meant to hold the mezuzah and make it possible to attach it to the doorpost.
Why is the letter “Shin” written on the outside of the Mezuzah cover?

- “Shin” stands for the word “Shaddai” (pronounced “Shad-eye”) which is one of God’s names and generally translated as “Almighty God.”
- The most common explanation is that it is an acronym for “shomer daltot Yisrael” (Guardian of the doors of Israel).
- During the Middle Ages, some people viewed the mezuzah as a protective amulet and even added to it mystical names of God; however the sages inveighed against this belief and eventually it faded away.

What makes a mezuzah kosher?

- An authentic “kosher” mezuzah must be made from the skin of a clean (kosher) animal as described in Leviticus 11. It must be hand-written with no mistakes by an authorized sofer (scribe), and it must have twenty-two lines.
- Just like a Torah, none of the letters can be rubbed off or torn, so scrolls need to be checked every so often to make sure they have not been damaged by the weather or elements.

On which doorposts in our house do we put a mezuzah and on which doorposts do we not put a mezuzah. Why?

- A mezuzah is affixed to every door in the house except a room used for personal purposes (e.g. bathroom).

Why do we affix the mezuzah on the top-third of the right hand side of the doorpost?

- Why the right-hand side? The Talmud learns this from the word “your house” (beit’echa), which can be rendered “as you enter” (bi’atcha).
- In Jewish tradition, the right side, which is understood as the side of strength, has always had a preference to the left—with the exception of tefillin (which is generally worn on the left hand) and the Chanukah menorah (which is always lit on the side of the doorway leading to the house). In this position the word Shaddai is most visible.
- The mezuzah is always on the right-hand side as we enter, right being the side of hesed—love—to remind us that everything we do in the home should emanate from loving thoughts. When the family is joined by bonds of love, the home is one of blessing and peace.
- Why at the top third of the doorway? To remind people to reach upward to God, the mezuzah is mounted at approximately eye level. People have to look up to see the mezuzah, and have to reach up to touch it.
Why is the mezuzah placed at a slant on the doorpost?

- Why is the mezuzah affixed at a slant? Opinions vary, but some say the custom began as a compromise. According to Lutske, the 12th-century scholar Rashi argued about this issue with his grandson, Rabbenu Tam. Rashi believed the mezuzah should hang vertically, while Rabbenu Tam insisted on horizontal placement. The argument was based on the Torah text “You shall speak of them when you rise up (thus, it should be vertical) and when you lie down (thus it should be horizontal.)” With a bit of negotiation, the mezuzah was posted obliquely and angled inward, a placement that is now customary.
- The Mezuzah is placed at a slant to remind us how important it is to do everything possible to make peace in the home.

Why do we kiss the mezuzah when we enter the house?

- It is Jewish tradition to kiss holy objects as a gesture of reverence.
- Many Jews follow the custom (of Talmudic origin) to kiss the mezuzah upon entering the house by first kissing one’s fingertips and then transferring the kiss to the mezuzah. Some recite the prayer “May God guard my going out and my coming in now and forever” as they kiss the mezuzah.
- Kissing the Mezuzah gives you a moment to reflect on the spiritual purpose of your home life and offers you an opportunity to re-orient yourself to Godliness when you enter the sanctity of your home and when you leave it to re-enter a world that is far from Godliness.

Does the mezuzah have magical powers to protect our homes?

- There has been some disagreement over the significance of the mezuzah. Some people think of it as an amulet which helps protect their house.
- At one point Kabbalistic symbols and inscriptions were added to the inscription in the mezuzah to enhance its protective function. The “Shaddai” on the back of the parchment is a remnant of this and was an abbreviation for “Guardian of the doors of Israel.”
- A different view, more prevalent today, is that the mezuzah protects us not against external harm but against sinning. (Again, this is the traditional interpretation of the Torah text.) Eliezer ben Jacob said “Whosoever has the tefillin on his head, the tefillin on his arm, the tzitzit on his garment, and the mezuzah on his doorpost is fortified against sinning.”
About the Mezuzah

Mezuzah means "doorpost," and the word is often used to describe the decorative case placed on the doorpost of a Jewish home. However, the term correctly refers to the klaf, the small parchment scroll that is placed inside the case. The klaf, which must be handwritten in Hebrew by a scribe, contains two passages from the Biblical book of Deuteronomy (Chapter 6, verses 4-9 and Chapter 11, verses 13-21). They affirm the belief in One God who commands us to follow the commandments and to affix a mezuzah to the doorpost as a reminder.

The mezuzah should be placed in the top third of the right side of a door, tilted to face inward. Most Jewish families place a mezuzah on the front door of their homes; others put them on the doors of every room excluding the bathrooms.

The following prayer is recited when placing a mezuzah on a door:

כְּפֹרֵץ אָפֶּה יֲנָשֵׁם מִלְכָּה נִלְכָּה
כְּשֶׁכָּלָה יְנַשֵּׁם בֵּיתוֹ יִקְבוֹזֵן

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam
Asher kid'shmu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu likboh mezuzah.

Blessed are You, Adonai
Who has commanded us to affix the mezuzah.
Global Day of Jewish Learning
Additional Resources

NOV•13•11
1 WORLD. 1 PEOPLE. 1 DAY.
www.theglobalday.com
A Project of the Aleph Society
If the Bible is the cornerstone of Judaism, then the Talmud is the central pillar, soaring up from the foundations and supporting the entire spiritual and intellectual edifice. In many ways, the Talmud is the most important book in Jewish culture, the backbone of creativity and of national life. No other work has had a comparable influence on the theory and practice of Jewish life, shaping spiritual content and serving as a guide to conduct. The Jewish people have always been keenly aware that their continued survival and development depend on study of the Talmud, and those hostile to Judaism have also been cognizant of this fact. The book was reviled, slandered, and consigned to the flames countless times in the Middle Ages and has been subjected to similar indignities in the recent past as well. At times, talmudic study has been prohibited because it was abundantly clear that a Jewish society that ceased to study this work had no real hope of survival.

The formal definition of the Talmud is the summary of oral law that evolved after centuries of scholarly effort by sages who lived in Palestine and Babylonia until the beginning of the Middle Ages. It has two main components: the Mishnah, a book of *halakhah* (law) written in Hebrew; and the commentary on the Mishnah, known as the Talmud (or Gemarah), in the limited sense of the word, a summary of discussion and elucidations of the Mishnah written in Aramaic-Hebrew jargon.

This explanation, however, though formally correct, is misleading and imprecise. The Talmud is the repository of thousands of years of Jewish wisdom, and the oral law, which is as ancient and significant as the written law (the Torah), finds expression therein. It is a conglomeration of law, legend, and philosophy, a blend of unique logic and shrewd pragmatism, of history and science, anecdotes and humor. It is a collection of paradoxes: its framework is orderly and logical, every word and term subjected to meticulous editing, completed centuries after the actual work of composition came to an end; yet it is still based on free association, on a harnessing together of diverse ideas reminiscent of the modern stream-of-consciousness novel. Although its main objective is to interpret and comment on a book of law, it is, simultaneously, a work of art that goes beyond legislation and its practical application. And although the Talmud is, to this day, the primary source of Jewish law, it cannot be cited as an authority for purposes of ruling.

The Talmud treats abstract and totally unrealistic problems in the same manner in which it refers to the most prosaic facts of everyday life, yet succeeds in avoiding abstract terminology. Though based on the principles of tradition and the transmission of authority from generation to generation, it is unparalleled in its eagerness to question and reexamine convention and accepted views and to root out underlying causes. The talmudic method of discussion and demonstration tries to approximate mathematical precision, but without having recourse to mathematical or logical symbols.

The Talmud is best understood through analysis of the basic objectives of its authors and compilers. What were they aiming at, those thousands of sages who spent their lives in debate and discussion in hundreds of large and small centers of learning? The key is to be found in the name of the work: Talmud (that is, study, learning). The Talmud is the embodiment of the great concept of *mitzvat talmud Torah*—the positive religious duty of studying Torah, of acquiring learning and wisdom, study which is its own end and reward. A certain talmudic sage who has left us nothing but his name and this one dictum had this to say on the subject: “Turn it and turn it again, for everything is contained in the Torah. Regard it and grow old in it, and never abandon it, for there is no greater virtue.”

Study of Torah undoubtedly serves numerous practical purposes but these are not the crucial objectives. Study is not geared to the degree of importance or the practical potential of the problems discussed. Its main aim is learning itself. Likewise, knowledge of Torah is not an aid to observance of law but an end in itself. This does not mean that the Talmud is not concerned with the values contained in the material studied. On the contrary, it is stated emphatically that he who studies Torah and does not observe what he studies would better never have been born. A true scholar serves as a living example by his way of life and conduct. But this part of the general outlook of the Talmud; for the student poring over the text, study has no other end but knowledge. Every subject pertaining to Torah, or to life as related to Torah, is worthy of consideration and analysis, and an attempt is always made to delve into the heart of the matter. In the course of study, the question of whether these analyses are of practical use is never raised. We often
encounter in the Talmud protracted and vehement debates on various problems that try to examine the structure of the method and to elucidate the conclusions deriving from it. The scholars invested all this effort despite the fact that they knew the source itself had been rejected and was of no legislative significance. This approach also explains why we find debates on problems that were relevant in the distant past and were unlikely ever to arise again.

It sometimes occurs, of course, that problems or debates once thought impractical or irrelevant gain practical significance in some later age. This is a familiar phenomenon in the sphere of pure science. But this development is of little consequence to the Talmudic student, as, from the outset, his sole objective has been to solve theoretical problems and to seek the truth.

The Talmud is ostensibly constructed along the lines of a legal tract, and many people commit the error of thinking that it is legal in essence. It treats the subjects with which it deals—basic halakhah, biblical verses, or traditions handed down by sages—as natural phenomena, components of objective reality. When a man has dealings with nature, he cannot claim that the subject does not appeal to him or is unworthy of perusal. There are, of course, varying degrees of importance to issues, but all are alike in that they are—they exist and note must be paid to them. When the talmudic sage examined an ancient tradition, he perceived it, above all, as a reality in itself, and whether binding on him or not, it was part of his world and could not be dismissed. When the scholars discuss a rejected idea or source, their attitude resembles that of the scientist contemplating an organism that has become extinct because of its inability to adapt itself to changing conditions. This organism has, in a manner of speaking, “failed” and died out, but his fact does not detract from its interest for the scientist as a subject of study.

One of the greatest historical controversies was that between the methods of the “houses” (schools) of Shammai and Hillel, which lasted for more than a century. It was eventually resolved in the famous dictum: “Both are the words of the living God, and the decision is in accordance with the House of Hillel.” The fact that one method is preferred does not mean that the other is based on a misconception. It, too, is an expression of creativity and of “the words of the living God” When one of the sages ventured to say a certain theory was not to his liking, he was scolded by his colleagues, who informed him that it was wrong to say of Torah, “This is good and this is not.” Such a view is analogous to the case of the scientist who is not permitted to say that a certain creature seems to him “unappealing.” This does not mean to imply that evaluations (even of appeal) should never be made; they should, however, be based on a consciousness of the fact that no man has the right to judge or to determine that a certain object lacks beauty form the purely objective point of view.

This analogy between the natural world and Torah is ancient and was developed at length by the sages. One of its earliest expressions is the theory that just as an architect builds a house according to a blue-print, so the Holy One, Blessed be He, scanned his Torah in creating the world. According to this viewpoint, it follows that there must be a certain correlation between the world and Torah, the latter forming part of the essence of the natural world and not merely constituting external speculation on it. This way of thinking also engendered the view that no subject is too strange, remote, or bizarre to be studied.

The Talmud reflects so wide a range of interest because it is not a homogeneous work composed by a single author. When several people collaborate on a book, they have in mind a certain specific aim which lends the work character and direction. But the Talmud is the end result of the editing of the thoughts and sayings of many scholars over a long period, none whom envisages a final written work at the time. Their remarks were inspired by life, growing out of the problems submitted to them and the exchange of views between the various sages and their disciples. This is why we cannot discern a clear trend of a specific objective in the Talmud. Each debate is, to a large extent, independent of others and unique, and each subject is the focus of interest at the time it is being discussed. At the same time, the Talmud has an unmistakable and striking character of its own, which does not bear the imprint of an individual,
or of the editors, but is collective, reflecting the quality of the Jewish people over a given period. Not only where the thousands of anonymous views are concerned, but also in cases where the identity of the author or proponent is known, the differences between individuals are blurred and the general spirit prevails. However violently two sages may differ, their shared traits and likemindedness must eventually become evident to the reader, who then discerns the overall unity that over comes all differences.

Since the Talmud is concerned with subjects, ideas, and problems, there evolved over the centuries the custom of quoting various views in the present tense: “Abbaye says, Rabba says.” This stylistic habit reflects the belief that the work is not merely a record of the opinions of the scholars of past ages, and it should not be judged by historical criteria. The Talmudic sages themselves distinguished between personalities and periods (clarification of such questions is, in fact, an integral part of study), but the distinctions are only cited when strictly relevant and are not employed for evaluation and discussion. For those scholars time is not an ever-flowing stream in which the present always obliterates the past; it is understood organically as a living and developing essence, present and future being founded on the living past. Within this wide-ranging process, certain elements take on more stable form, while others, pertaining to the present, are flexible and much more changeable; the process as such, however, is bases on faith in the vitality of each element, ancient as it may be, and the importance of its role in the never-ending, self renewing work of creation.

This process of renewal is closely connected to the centrality of the query in the talmudic debate. To a certain extent, the entire Talmud is framed by questions and answers, and even when not explicitly formulated, questions constitute the background to every statement and interpretation. One of the most ancient methods of studying the Talmud attempted to reconstruct the question on the basis of the statement that serves as a response. It is no coincidence that the Talmud contains so many words denoting questions, ranging from queries aimed at satisfying curiosity to questions that attempt to undermine the validity of the debated issue. The Talmud also differentiates between a fundamental query and a less basic inquiry, a question of principle and marginal query. Voicing doubts is not only legitimate in the Talmud, it is essential to study. To a certain degree, the rule is that any type of query is permissible and even desirable; the more the merrier. No inquiry is regarded as unfair or incorrect as long as it pertains to the issue and can cast light on some aspect of it. This is true not only of the Talmud itself but also of the way in which it is studied and perused. After absorbing the basic material, the student is expected to pose questions to himself and to others and to voice doubts and reservations. From this point of view, the Talmud is perhaps the only sacred book in all of world culture that permits and even encourages the student to question it.

This characteristic leads us to another aspect of the composition and study of the Talmud. It is impossible to arrive at external knowledge of this work. Any description of its subject matter or study methods must, inevitably, be superficial because of the Talmud’s unique nature. True knowledge can only be attained through spiritual communion, and the student must participate intellectually and emotionally in the talmudic debate, himself becoming, to a certain degree, a creator.
There is one prayer which the vast majority of Jews—regardless of their personal knowledge or involvement with Judaism—know. Whether by instinct, a sub-conscious intuition, or through Jewish education of one form or another, most Jews can recite the first six words of Judaism’s central prayer, shema. It marks the starting point of Jewish education for everyone from small children to adults who are completely unacquainted with their religion and their G-d. But why is the shema so central to being a Jew? Why did our brothers and sisters recite it as they were marched to death, and why did they recite it upon returning to the Western Wall? Why is it that these few words and the three brief paragraphs that complete the prayer are recited twice a day, every day? The shema deserves this place of honor in our practice and in our legacy because it is the basis of our individual and collective relationship with G-d.

The first verse of “shema,” “Hear (shema) O Israel, the L-rd our G-d the L-rd is one,” contains the main principles of Jewish faith. To utter it with concentration and intention is to “accept the yoke of Heaven.”

When this verse is inscribed in Torah scrolls, two of the letters are written larger than the rest: the “י” (ayin) of “שמא—hear” and the “ד” (dalet) of “אחד—one”). Allegorical interpretations of the Torah point out that when these two letters are combined in the order of their appearance, they make up the word “’.ד” (’ed—witness), as in Israelites’ testimony to G-d’s kingship (as it says in Isaiah 43:10: “You are my witnesses, says the L-rd”). When read in the opposite direction, they make up the word “הכ” (da’—know). We learn about the centrality of knowledge to one’s spiritual experience from the verse “Know the G-d of your father, and serve Him with a perfect heart”.

The first line of shema, which (in Hebrew) contains only six words, is divided into three parts, each of which indicates one of the necessary components of a Jew’s relationship to G-d.

In this case, “hearing” is much more than a passive aural exercise; we must actively listen to—and for—G-d’s message. Moreover, we must also try our best to understand and accept it. These words assume an additional meaning when shema is being recited, for then they serve as a public declaration: “Let the entire people of Israel hear the things which I, who utter them, proclaim and make known to all.” And for a person who recites shema when he is alone, it is as if he were calling upon himself, saying: “Hear and listen, you who are a member of the people of Israel.”

The next two words—“הא — the L-rd our G-d”—are the essence of the “acceptance of the yoke of the kingship of Heaven.” With them, we declare that the L-rd is our G-d, that we accept Him and are willing to take His rule upon us.

The word “One” also contains the idea that the One G-d is all-inclusive. The Rishonim (Ancient commentators) say that when uttering these words during the recitation of shema, one should concentrate on G-d’s unity in the seven heavens and on earth. (This is connected with the gematriya, or numerical value, of the letters of the word “אחד (echad), one: “ף”=1, which stands for G-d’s oneness; “ח”=8, which stands for the seven heavens and earth; and “ד”=4, which stands for the four corners of the earth.) Therefore the Halacha (Jewish law) says that one should prolong the uttering of the word “echad,” “One,” so that he can think of all the meanings of G-d’s unity.

1 Chronicles 1 28:9
2 Deut. 4:35
In the name of the Holy ARI, it is said that when reciting this verse, one should identify with its message completely. In other words, one should think and feel that he is willing to give his very life and suffer any pain or tragedy rather than swerve from this declaration that “The L-rd our G-d, the L-rd is One.”

It is an ancient custom to say, “"Barukh shem kevod malkhuto le’olam va’ed"—May the Name of the glory of His kingship be blessed for ever and ever” after uttering the first verse of shema. But because this sentence is not written in the Torah, it is said in a whisper and not aloud like the rest of the recitation (see Tractate Pesahim 56a).

A simple explanation for this addendum is that after the grand recitation of shema Israel, we add words of praise and thanks for being permitted, and able, to say them. Viewed from a different angle, this sentence is the inner completion of shema Israel. The first verse of shema speaks of G-d’s unity in a way that negates the world’s existence, for “there is none else beside Him.” In order to fill the void created by this negation, we add "Barukh shem kevod malkhuto le’olam va’ed": His glory occupies all of reality, in place and time. The very idiom “—‘השם وبנוהו’—‘the name of the glory of His kingship’”—expresses a feeling of awe, for it is not G-d Himself who is mentioned here but rather His inspiration which fills the world, and even the mere “name of the glory of His kingship” is blessed for ever and ever. It is as if we leave behind the perception of the sublime Unity to define G-d’s kingship within the world. Paradoxically, this declaration of the all-encompassing glory of G-d’s dominion acknowledges the significance of a human presence on Earth. For what is a ruler without any subjects? Yet we whisper these words because we are not convinced that we deserve the honor of bearing “the glory of His kingship.” Only on Yom Kippur, when the Jews are like the ministering angels, do we say this sentence aloud.

At this point, we continue reciting the Torah portion of shema contained in three paragraphs. This portion concludes the declaration of our relationship with God outlined in “Hear Israel” with active expressions of faith: we should adhere to G-d in emotion—“You shall love”, in words—"[you] shall talk of [these things]", and in deed—“you shall bind them... you shall write them.”

The inner feeling is one of perfect attachment and devotion: “You shall love the L-rd your G-d with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” “With all your heart” means not as a partial emotion, with reservation and hesitation, but with the entire heart. Our Sages said that this recognition should be present in the whole of man’s emotional makeup, even in the inclinations which are not good.

“With all your soul” is interpreted to mean “even if He takes your soul”—namely, a love of G-d which reaches the degree of actual self-sacrifice for His holiness. “And with all your might” means that this love should be great and strong, even greater and stronger than it was in the former statement—even in things which man perceives as more difficult than death. Therefore our Sages state that this may mean “with all of your money”; man should be prepared not only for a one-time sacrifice, but for a life of sacrifice, even if it is a life of continuous poverty and suffering. For this is the essence of “(me’od, might): beyond all measure, beyond all boundaries.

“And these words, which I command you today, shall be upon your heart”: These things are not a matter of one-time acceptance and consent, but should exist in one’s consciousness (“upon your heart”) always. “And you shall teach and repeat them to your children” is the obligation to transmit this awareness to the next generation; the first step towards education is repetition. By making these thias clear as possible, and by repeating them until they are internalized, you will be able to teach them most effectively.

“And you shall talk of them”—each and every one should engage in Torah in general, and in this portion in particular, so that it will be in his mouth in the form of explicit statements at all times: “when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way”—when one is at his own home, he cannot rely on his inner awareness alone; he is obliged to engage
in the words of Torah and to say them. And when he leaves his private domain, it is incumbent upon him to speak up and make these things known, wherever he is. “And when you lie down, and when you rise up”—the simple meaning is that one should say these verses at all times, be it when one goes to sleep or when one rises, and most certainly when one is awake and active. However, this verse is also the basis for the halachic injunction about the set times for reciting shema. Shema should be recited at the times which are stated explicitly in this verse: at night, when it is time for lying down, and in the morning, when it is time to get up.

The verse “And you shall bind them for a sign upon your arm, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes” is a practical expression of attachment, in the action of putting on tefillin, which contain parchments on which this and a few other Torah portions are inscribed. The tefillin are tied onto the arm as a symbol of attachment and acceptance of yoke, and on the head as a crown of glory.

Another practical expression of the attachment to G-d is defined in the next statement: “You shall write them upon the doorposts of your house and on your gates”—namely, by writing these Torah portions on mezuzah parchments and placing them on the doorposts of the houses and the city gates.

Yet just as these verses teach us about the literal implementation of G-d’s commandments, (tefillin, mezuzah), they are also meant to teach us a more general lesson: that the words of Torah must be bonded and intertwined with man, in all aspects of one’s life, and in every way that makes the words of Torah known to others.

**General Notes**

The recitation of shema is defined in Jewish tradition as a Torah commandment. The details of how to fulfill this commandment can be found in Maimonides’ *Mishne Torah*, “Laws of Reciting Shema,” and in *Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim* 58-55. When recited fully, it includes the following verses: Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Ibid., 11:13-21, and Numbers 15:37-41, and there are blessings which are to be recited both before and after it. *Shema* should be recited in a clean place, fully clothed, and with a covered head. By beginning or continuing to learn and recite *shema* one can enjoy the most beautiful of relationships—a loving relationship with G-d.

Maimonides’ *Sefer Hamitzvot*, Positive Commandmen #10
In the reality of our lives in the Land of Israel (and not only there), we are gradually being torn to pieces. Controversies (about everything: foreign affairs and internal affairs, economy, religion, society —) are, in and of themselves, a problem. The gaps are enormous, and there is very little consensus about anything. Worse than that are the hatred and the license to hate; for not only are there differences in ideas and practices; there is also a considerable measure of mutual hatred, a hatred that people are not only unashamed of but also openly demonstrate. And what is worse even than that is the estrangement: people from different sectors, especially the religious and the non-religious, no longer have a common language; they are not only uninterested in encountering each other, but also unable to do so.

The only remedy and solution for causeless hatred is causeless love, and the only remedy for alienation is major, highly focused effort to create rapprochement. When so many people are not interested in meeting with or talking to each other, we must go out of our way to open the doors and pave ways to creating contact despite everything. We are commanded not only to “seek peace,” but also to “pursue it” (Psalms 34:15) – just as when something that we badly need is not within reach, we must chase for it in order to attain it.

We must therefore go out to the streets and create contacts with people—every kind of people: from those who are sublime human beings to those who are just plain people, about whom the best thing one can is that they too are God’s creatures. Such contact cannot be made through idle talk or “dialogues” (intelligent or stupid); rather, it should be created through attempts to impart contents, and to do it in ways that the listener can at least absorb, and perhaps even understand and identify with.

Although one can never know what impact such things may have, realistically speaking one should not expect such encounters to bring about miracles. But still one should work, try, make efforts to create some point of connection. Even partial and temporary connection is something about which our Sages (Song of Songs Rabbah 5, 3) say: “Open for me an opening as narrow as the point of a needle, and I will open for you an opening through which chariots and wagons can pass.”

The Shema is one of the few things in which there still is a point of encounter between very different kinds of people within the Jewish nation. There are still positive memories and fractions of memories of, as well as an attitude of respect, for Shema Yisrael, “Hear O Israel.”

When meeting with people and suggesting to them to say the Shema, or at least to carry the text with them, we grant Jews the possibility to connect not only with us, but also—which is so much more important—with their own essence.

This must be done graciously and in good measure; but every such encounter, by its very existence, is both a path and a message.

Surely, something like this does not come easy to everyone; sometimes one has to gird oneself with “holy chutzpah” in order to overcome natural shyness. One should also be prepared for negative reactions (such as taking stock with other people’s transgressions, or incitement, and the like); but if one prepares oneself ahead of time, one may encounter other things as well. Thus, “he that follows after righteousness and mercy,” even if at first he may be taken to be a hopeless nuisance, is guaranteed that eventually he will “find life, prosperity and honor” (Proverbs 21:21).

In a certain sense, this is an elections campaign—but not for this or that party or leader: rather, it is a campaign for the real choice—namely, to “choose life” (Deuteronomy 30: 19).
Many of us will honestly say, “I would like to believe in God. If only I could see something, anything, that proves that God exists, I would gladly accept and believe.” Unfortunately, what most people can see of God would be irrelevant or nonsensical, and what is relevant and sensible cannot be seen.

There is a Yiddish folk song that deals with that very problem in a way that is both frivolous and profound:

The skeptic asks the believer, “What is God? What is God?”

Says the believer to the skeptic, “you donkey, you donkey you, There is no thought that can grasp Him, There is no place that is not filled with Him.”

Ages we create, the more emotions we can have. Just imagine a love letter written by a mathematician, describing his beloved’s eyes as ellipsoids. It may be mathematically accurate, but it will not arouse much emotion—neither in the giver nor in the receiver. We need the images; they are part of our emotional heritage, but they are limited, by definition. Poetry is wonderful, but we should not expect God to conform to our images.

Yet we do. For many people, the image of God is quite clear: a big, white-bearded man sitting on a throne very high in the sky. He has—at least figuratively—a stick in one hand, and a bag of candy in the other, bestowing each on His subjects. Many prayers, as well as bitter complaints, ask for more of the candy and less of the stick. You may object and say that such an idea is just childish, kindergarten imagery, but how many people actually continue to develop their religious understanding beyond that age?

As enticing as this grandfather image of God is, it contains within itself its own destruction. The budding atheist or agnostic eleven-or twelve year old is one who cannot—with full justification—continue believing in this definition of God. Unfortunately, most adolescents throw away the whole idea of God along with this picture. Because they do not have the ability, or desire, to transform this childish description, they remain atheists or agnostics for the rest of their lives. Years ago, when the first Soviet cosmonauts returned from space, Khrushchev asked them, “Did you see anybody up there? When they told him they did not see anymore, Khrushchev gleefully pronounced that to be the final proof that God does not exist.

More sophisticated people, who do not expect to see the Almighty walking around in a long white robe, ask for miracles as proof of God’s existence. If God does not appear in person, at least He should appear in a miracle. If God wants to prove His existence without showing His face, perhaps He could do something obvious and spectacular. Philosophically, however—as pointed out many years ago by Maimonides—a miracle does not really prove anything. A miracle merely proves that something extraordinary happened, and no more. A miracle that goes against what we call the laws of nature is simple what it is: something astonishing. It does not have an intrinsic message. Turning a glass of wine into a flower is remarkable, astonishing, ad spectacular, but it does not prove that two times two equals five and a half, nor that God exists. One thing has nothing to do with the other. The sea being split or pillar of fire has nothing to do with anything beyond what they are.

This observation about the invalidity of miracles as proof of God’s existence was used at the time when science was far more rigid. In our time, it is much less effective. What is the difference between a nineteenth-century scientist and a twentieth-century scientist? If a devil appeared to a nineteenth-century scientist, he would say, “You do not exist.” The twentieth-century scientist would look at him and say, “You are a phenomenon.” The scientist just writes down that he saw a phenomenon of smaller or bigger magnitude. However, even this change in the way science views things makes no difference as far as faith is concerned. Even if people today accept a concept like “miracle” and do not ignore it,
or fight against it, this does not necessarily change their worldview. Namely, they may see a miracle, note it, and then go on with their lives, without it having any effect on other spheres of their lives. In other words, although science has changed, it has not altered its basic attitude toward miracles.

Since early times, many people have deplored the fact that we no longer see miracles, while others just wonder why we do not have miracles. Perhaps miracles do still happen, but we do not observe them. When we do notice them, they are not convincing. To see a miracle as some thing significant, we must first believe in its significance. If we do not believe that an event can have meaning, then we will not see anything miraculous. The power of a miracle as a proof is not inherent in the miracle itself; it is contingent upon our readiness to accept the phenomenon as a miracle. If we do not want to see it as a miracle, we will not; it will be a coincidence, an unexplained phenomenon or just something that happened—but there it will stop. If I do believe that events are significant, that they have some meaning beyond the mere fact of their existence, then I do not need extraordinary, supernatural phenomena in order to see miracles. If I am ready for miracles, I can walk down the street and see sunshine, and that is enough of a miracle. If I am not ready for miracles, seeing thirty dancing angels will not do anything to me. I will take a picture, send it to the newspaper, and that will be the end of that.

Incidentally, that is true about almost everything, in every realm of knowledge. First, we have to believe that a fact or a chain of events is significant; only then can we interpret the events. If we do not search for meaning, then things just happen; why shouldn’t they? My late uncle was sitting in a train, reading a popular book on science. After some time, the person sitting across from him said, “You look like an intelligent person; why do you read such foolish books? Look at the title!” The title was Why Does Fire Burn? My uncle asked, “What’s wrong with it?” The stranger replied, What kind of question is that? If you do not light a fire, it will not burn; if you light it, why shouldn’t it burn?” If a particular question does not make any sense, then we will not care. One cannot go any further than that point, in any field, whether in science, politics, theology, or anything else. The attempt to connect ideas or events into a significant order is contingent upon the notion that such an order exists.

To illustrate this point, let us consider the very idea of the written word. Someone who can read will try to decipher a line of writing in another language, even when it is full of strange characters. For someone who is not familiar with the notion of writing, and has never seen writing before, the words will be smudges on a page, and nothing more. Unless you are ready, beforehand, to accept that a particular question has significance, you will not ask it.

In that sense, the miracles, whether they appear supernatural, natural, or simply ordinary, are full of meaning if I am ready to “read the book.” Unless I believe that there is a message, I will never try to find out what is in the message. If someone were to ask, “What is the message of this chair?” I would say that there is no meaning in it. I would not even try to find out why it has this form. If I did believe that it carries some message, then it would be a very different question. It is not a fact that would change my mind; it is my mind that would interpret the facts. My notions about what to search for will determine which questions I will ask.

Other people, of a more intellectual bent, search for God through philosophical proofs. There are numerous proofs in many books of pure philosophy or theology. However, no proof for the existence or nonexistence of God is convincing, if one does not want to be convinced. It is impossible to turn a person who does not want to believe into a believer. Nothing that person sees anywhere, in any way, will convince him to believe unless he is prepared to accept it as proof. If he is not prepared, rightly or wrongly, no proof will have any power or meaning. Even if you bring proof to such a person, the response will be, “So what? What significance does that have?”

That readiness to accept new arguments and proofs depends on a person’s former convictions is a notion not confined to the realm of belief; it exists also in other walks of life. A lawyer describes in his memoirs how he experienced such a situation. He was an apprentice in the district attorney’s office, and was given the job of prosecuting a certain case.
In the middle of the process, he finished his training, and entered into private practice as a junior lawyer. The first case he was given was to defend the same person he had just been prosecuting. “Then,” he said, “I began to understand the subjectivity involved. The evidence was the same, but suddenly I was compelled to take the other side, and that changed my mental process.”

This is not just a problem for lawyers; everywhere, one can find out that no one is a deaf as the person who does not want to listen. With all that, it should be remembered that proof, or belief, has very little to do with reality. If I describe a giraffe to a person with a skeptical turn of mind, he might say that it is an unreasonable concept; giraffes do not seem like reasonable creatures at all. It is unlikely, so he does not believe in it. Does the giraffe care whether we believe in it or not? Whether we believe or not certainly does not affect the giraffe. The planet Mars, the Andromeda galaxy, and the giraffe will all exist whether we believe in them or not. They probably do not even care much whether we do or do not believe in them. In the same way, God’s existence is not dependent on our belief or disbelief, nor on proofs, on way or the other.

Of course, it is very difficult to accept a notion that is not grounded in our own experience. Because of the tendency to project known facts onto the unknown, we become entangled in our limited knowledge. There is a parable in Arabic literature that applies here (although originally used for a very different purpose). An old philosopher was stranded on an island with a young disciple. He raised the boy and taught him everything he knew. When the boy grew up, he asked the philosopher, “How did we come into the world?” the old man described the process to him. The young man, in spite of his well-trained politeness, said, “What you tell me is such a tall tale that is cannot be believed. I know from my own experience and experimentation that if I did not breathe for two minutes, I would die. Now you are telling me that I existed for nine months without breathing! That is clearly a logical impossibility, and it is clear proof that the whole tale is an invention.”

The point is that even if a theory is unlikely, that says nothing at all about reality. Whether or not we believe it and can explain it, whether we think it is reasonable or entirely irrational, babies are born. If something exists, it exists, whether we believe in it or not, whether we can prove its existence or not. If it is, it is. No matter how reasonable or unlikely I think they are, my opinion does not have any impact on the real facts. We can try to explain them one way or another, but our explanations have nothing to do with reality.

However, even though our belief—or lack of it—may not matter to God, it matters a great deal to us. Belief changes our attitudes, our ways of coping with reality, and how we behave, and that is why there is such urgency to the question.

Religion is a formal relationship between humans and God. Some people may adhere to it out of deep conviction; other may accept it as a convenience, as and accepted norm in society, or just through inertia. Belief is more in—formal, and probably far more common. On the other hand, for most people—barring a few exceptional individuals—belief is also less constant. When our lives are more or less Normal, we do not have the time or inclination to think about God. When we are happy and content, we may occasionally say, “Thank God,” but it is usually a mere phrase that means very little. In times of disaster or other disruption, a very powerful and compelling need for meaning appears; it is not always belief, but it is at least a desire for belief. Sometimes people find themselves in a position in which they have to have a God, whether he exists or not. Someone who was caught in an earthquake once described it, “The greatest need I had then was to have something to believe in—a God or an idol—but something that I could adhere to, because the world was collapsing.”

When the world collapses physically, financially, or personally, we have a great need for something that will not be destroyed along with the general destruction. That “something,” although not always a comfort, and not always an answer, nevertheless meets the need for permanence and reliability. Therefore, in times of personal or general disaster,
there is a surge in belief. From a philosophical point of view, however, disaster is not an argument for belief. Even on a theological level, it is not a very good reason, however understandable on the human level.

The crisis-inspired belief is a particular experience; usually, when the crisis passes, the belief passes also. Sometimes, people are embarrassed by their sudden belief, but even if not, it is usually a transient mode, not a permanent change.

Hard times and good times do not prove anything about God, but they show that the quest surges and diminishes according to our situation. What happens to people in hard times shows that there is an inner source of belief that is revealed when one needs or wants it. In such times, people who had forgotten their childhood prayers for many years suddenly remember them. Even those who have never prayed, and surely did not intend to try to formulate some way of appealing to the Almighty. The remarkable side of this phenomenon is not in the need, but in the fact that inside the “nonbeliever” there is enough belief to hang his hopes on. In the same way, when a person in distress cries out, “Mommy!” it does not prove that he has a mother, or that his mother will help him. It does prove that there is, in that person, a deep attachment—and trust.

This inner belief can be dismissed through any number of rational explanations. It can be called primitive, reflecting ancient fears and hopes, yet rationalization does not make the emotion disappear. Like many other primordial emotions, it has the same quality of being a natural, integral part of what we are. Hunger, fear, sexual attraction, and desire for companionship all share this same quality. Even if one is able to ignore them temporarily, they cannot be eradicated. More than that, such basic desires and emotions, which exist prior to and regardless of any specific cultural influences, are a part of the very definition of humanity itself. These are connected to a very essential part of our mind, and are the basis for any cognitive process in us. These basic parts of ourselves can be somewhat modulated and regulated, bound by rationalistic links and limitations, but they cannot be ignored.

Belief in God can be naïve and childish, or sophisticated and elaborate. The images we have of God may be nonsensical, or well constructed philosophically. Yet the essence of this belief, when stripped of verbiage and frills, is simply: existence makes some sense. Sometimes, one may think—probably mistakenly—that one knows exactly what that sense is, while others may just ponder it. In any case, there is a firm belief—which others may just ponder it. In any case, there is a firm belief—which precedes any kind of thought, rational and irrational—that there is some sense in things. What we experience, through our senses or inwardly, are only disjointed pieces. The fact that we somehow connect these particles of information stems from our a priori faith that there is a connection—because it precedes reason.

Accepting this assumption is the first, most fundamental “leap of faith”; not an experience, but a belief. Of course, people would not call this “religious belief, “nor see it as a point of faith. Nevertheless, when analyzed properly, it becomes—for those people who are afraid of the word—frightfully close to believing in God. This belief is like our belief in the existence of the world: it is the foundation of our relation to everything; indeed, on some levels, it is perhaps even more fundamental. This deep, native belief can be found when we “undo” our childhood training and eliminate everything we were taught about belief as children. Then we must answer the question “What is God?” not on a philosophical level that claims objective definitions, but as an attempt at least to understand “What is God for me?” To do this, we have to get rid of our preconceived and learned structures and images, which blur our real belief. We must delve very deeply into ourselves, into our most primal thinking, indeed—to begin at the beginning.

The very first beginning of our thinking occurs long before we are born. Fetuses do think, as they have a rather developed brain in the last months of pregnancy. There is even scientific evidence that babies dream in utero—they have electrical brain patterns compatible with dreaming. What does a fetus dream about? That may, perhaps, never be answered completely; we surely forget our prenatal dreams, whatever they are. What does a fetus think about? It
may have the first stirrings of consciousness of self, because as much as it still a part of its mother’s body, it has a brain and a mind of its own. However, the only thing a fetus could possibly think about is theology. Using this term in this context seems, at best, facetious. Obviously, a fetus does not formulate its thought in words, because the mind of a fetus is a pre-mind, not a conscious mind that uses words. Words become significant only in adulthood (and sometimes not even then). However, theology does not always mean heavy terminology written in ponderous manner (and never read). Basically, it is knowledge of God—or any system of thinking about the Divine.

To a fetus, who has almost no outside experience, there may be just two points of thought. One may, perhaps, be “me” and the other, “all.” The only thing that exists is the wholeness. If we put it into words, it would be something like “I am engulfed within the wholeness of existence; in me and beyond me is this wholeness. This is the food and the shelter, the matrix of everything, infinity.” At a much later stage, we may say that it was the mother’s womb, but for the fetus, it is the universe, the every thing in which it exists. We begin life with the experience of undifferentiated wholeness. When the baby is born, it is faced with a myriad of disconnected details, each of which demands to be observed, and somehow integrated into the mind.* In a way, the baby seems to forget what it had know before. Later, as we mature, our ability to piece together meaning in life based on that prenatal experience.

*That is the stage in which every baby shifts from pure theology into epistemology—namely, defining perception, noting the difference between true and false, finding out the basic meaning of existing things. The same idea is described in the Talmud (Tractate Niddah 30b), in a far more poetical way. There it is written that the fetus is having the happiest time of life, in which it sees the whole world and studies Torah. When the baby is born, an angel slaps it, and makes it forget everything.

The belief that things somehow fit together into a whole that makes sense is the most primitive, most basic belief, and paradoxically, it is also possibly the most sophisticated and abstract belief. It is so very basic that it precedes doctrine. Although it is not a definition of God, the notion that somehow the world makes sense, that there is a background upon which everything exists, is so simple and so taken for granted, that we do not even realize that it is the root of all belief. This very basic thought-emotion is sometimes felt by adults in special circumstances. Freud used the expression “the oceanic emotion” to describe this feeling that people sometimes experience when facing the ocean: the vastness, the power, the attraction.

As far as we know, this is also the faith of most primitive tribes: a monistic or monotheistic notion of the Whole. Polytheism is neither fundamental nor basic, but rather a more advanced attempt to differentiate, to cut this basic notion of a unified wholeness into discrete parts that are more concrete, and that can easily be defined and indentified. This development is also destructive, as it breaks our basic intuitive understanding into pieces. To make sense, polytheism has to develop mythologies and explanations for each separate entity. It takes many generations to return to a unified view.

Ultimately, high theology and high philosophy can only answer the question “What is God?” with the answer of a newborn baby, “God is the wholeness of everything.” The mystical writings say things about God that every child
knows. In the words of the Zohar, “God, you are the completeness of everything.” The understanding of God as “the completeness of everything” is quite simple, and it is not an anthropomorphic picture of God. It is not an image that people can visualize. This understanding is so close and integral that it is almost invisible.

On the other hand, it is a very abstract notion, and difficult to express in words. Children are usually too young to articulate their belief, and by the time they develop consciousness and language, they can see the world only as disjointed pieces. Perhaps earlier, the child understands the oneness, and if no one spoils that belief, he will have it, wherever and however he lives. The secret of belief is not to expect to see miracles, or to have grand mystical experiences, but rather, to preserve the innate notion we are born with.

Instead of adding, we have to edit out so many extra, useless words and ideas. If we can come to the core, and carefully develop the very fundamental points of our minds, we may discover that God has always existed within us.
For additional reading on the Shema:

**A Guide to Jewish Prayer**
By Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz
Published by [Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group](http://www.penguin.com)

**The Shema: Spirituality and Law in Judaism**
By Norman Lamm
Published by [Jewish Publication Society](http://www.jps.org)

**My People's Prayer Book, Vol. 1: The Sh'ma and Its Blessings**
Edited by Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman
Published by [Jewish Lights Publishing](http://www.jewishlights.com)

**To Pray As a Jew: A Guide to the Prayer Book and the Synagogue Service**
By Hayim Donin
Published by [Basic Books](http://www.basicbooks.com)
Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz has authored more than sixty books and hundreds of articles. Below are the English language books that he has authored over the past forty years—many of them still available today. In addition, Rabbi Steinsaltz’s translation and commentary on the Talmud has been published in Hebrew, English, French, Russian and Spanish. For a complete listing of books and articles please visit www.steinsaltz.org.

Books on Talmud

**Hebrew Text**

*Steinsaltz Talmud Bavli, Hebrew Edition* (Koren Publishers Jerusalem)
45 Volumes

*The Koren Talmud Bavli with Commentary by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, Hebrew Edition* (Koren Publishers Jerusalem)
38 Volumes

**English Text**

*Talmudic Images: An Introduction to the Sages*¹ (Koren Publishers Jerusalem)

*The Essential Talmud*² (Koren Publishers Jerusalem)


Other Books of Interest in English

*A Dear Son to Me: A Collection of Speeches and Articles*³ (Koren Publishers Jerusalem)

*A Guide to Jewish Prayer*⁴ (Schocken)

*Biblical Images: Men and Women of the Book* (Koren Publishers Jerusalem)⁵

*In the Beginning: Discourses on Chasidic Thought* (Jason Aronson; soon to be republished by Koren Publishers Jerusalem)

*Learning From the Tanya: Volume Two in the Definitive Commentary on the Moral and Mystical Teachings of a Classic Work of Kabbalah* (Jossey-Bass)

*On Being Free* (Jason Aronson; soon to be republished by Koren Publishers Jerusalem)

*Opening the Tanya: Discovering the Moral and Mystical Teachings of a Classic Work of Kabbalah* (Jossey-Bass)

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¹ Also published in Hebrew, German and Russian
² Also published in French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Swedish
³ Also published in Hebrew
⁴ Also published in Hebrew
⁵ Also published in Hebrew, German, Japanese, French and Russian
Simple Words: Thinking About What Really Matters in Life⁶ (Simon & Schuster)


The Candle of God: Discourses on Chasidic Thought (Koren Publishers Jerusalem)

The Illuminated Five Scrolls with Commentary by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz (Koren Publishers Jerusalem)

The Lamp of God (Jason Aronson; soon to be republished by Koren Publishers Jerusalem)⁸

The Long Shorter Way: Discourses on Chasidic Thought (Jason Aronson; soon to be republished by Koren Publishers Jerusalem)


The Passover Haggadah⁹ (Carta, Jerusalem)

The Seven Lights: On the Major Jewish Festivals (Jason Aronson; soon to be republished by Koren Publishers Jerusalem)

The Strife of the Spirit: A Collection of Essays (Jason Aronson; soon to be republished by Koren Publishers Jerusalem)

The Sustaining Utterance: Discourses on Chasidic Thought¹⁰ (Jason Aronson; soon to be republished by Koren Publishers Jerusalem)

The Tales of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav¹¹ (Koren Publishers Jerusalem)

The Thirteen Petalled Rose¹² (Koren Publishers Jerusalem)

The Woman of Valor¹³ (Jason Aronson; soon to be republished by Koren Publishers Jerusalem)

Understanding the Tanya: Volume Three in the Definitive Commentary on a Classic Work of Kabbalah by the World's Foremost Authority (Jossey-Bass)

We Jews: Who Are We and What Should We Do? (Jossey-Bass)
Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz is internationally regarded as one of the leading scholars and rabbis of this century, and of the last. As described in Newsweek, “Jewish lore is filled with tales of formidable rabbis. Probably none living today can compare in genius and influence to Adin Steinsaltz, whose extraordinary gifts as scholar, teacher, scientist, writer, mystic and social critic have attracted disciples from all factions of Israeli society.”

Born in 1937 to a secular family, Rabbi Steinsaltz has authored more than 60 books and hundreds of articles on Jewish mysticism, religious thought, sociology, biography, and philosophy. The best known of these is his recently completed interpretation of the Talmud, the seminal work of Jewish culture.

Rabbi Steinsaltz travels frequently to the Former Soviet Union. He founded the Institute for Jewish Studies in the CIS, comprising Melamedia College, Lamed, the national Jewish teacher’s organization, Chaverim, a leadership movement, and an extensive publishing program. In 1985, he established the Mekor Chaim network of schools in Israel, attracting students from a wide spectrum of Israeli society.

Rabbi Steinsaltz has served as resident scholar at Yale University, the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton, Columbia University and The Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, D.C. He received the Israel Prize, his country’s highest honor, and in 1995 was also awarded the Legion d’Honneur, the French Order of Arts and Letters. In 2002, Rabbi Steinsaltz received the Zalman Shazar Memorial Prize for his pioneering work in the Talmud.