



TOWARDS MEANINGFUL

TEFILLA

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Shema

During Operation Protective Edge, a female suicide bomber in Gaza attempted to detonate her explosive belt and kill a group of Israeli soldiers. The soldiers realized they were about to die and one of them cried out “Shema Yisrael”. The suicide bomber flinched for a moment, giving the soldiers just enough time to stop her. After some questioning, it came out that this woman was actually the daughter of an Israeli Jew who had married an Arab. Despite her complete distance from Judaism, somehow the words “Shema Yisrael” were still ingrained deep inside her soul.

We have all heard many stories similar to this one - stories of young children who grew up in Christian monasteries during the holocaust and had no idea they were Jewish but upon hearing the words Shema Yisrael recited by those who came to rescue them, jumped up and began screaming out.

Shema is the first tefilla we learn as children (my own one-year old can practically recite the entire thing by heart) and it's the last thing we say before we die. We recite it three times a day and it is the most well-known verse in the

entire Torah. What is so special about the Shema? What is the deep significance of this Tefilla?

Today, we will focus on just the first line - שמע ישראל ה' אלוהינו ה' אחד

As we mentioned previously, Shema is preceded by two Birchot Kriyat Shema, יוצר אהבה רבה and אור. We prepare ourselves for this momentous moment of מלכות עול, accepting upon ourselves Hashem's Kingship. In fact, the whole Pesukei dZimra is leading up to this moment.

In six simple words, we encapsulate our entire belief system, the whole reasoning and meaning behind how we live our lives. Let us look at those words together –

The Shulchan Aruch (61) writes that we must say this Tefila with רתת, חזק, ויראה – with fear, trembling, and sweat! The words we

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are about to say are intense, we can't just mumble through them. We need to cover our eyes so that we can have complete concentration, and not be distracted by anything going on around us.

שמע ישראל - Listen, fellow Jews - We call out to the entire Jewish people, it's not enough to just accept Hashem's rule over us as individuals, we need to do so together as a people.

ה' - Hashem is the master over everything. He is הוה, הוה, ויהיה - He is beyond time, He simultaneously exists in the past, present, and future. He embodies the middah of רחמים, of mercy.

אלוקינו - Not only does He embody the middah of רחמים, He concurrently exemplifies the middah of דין, of strict judgement, as well. Additionally, we specifically point to the fact that He is not just אלוהים, He is אלוהינו, **our** G-d. He watches over every single one of us, in a very personal, detailed way.

ה' אחד - Hashem is the One and Only. One should enunciate the letter ד long enough to focus on the magnitude of this statement. He rules over the entire world from one end to the other, the good and the bad, the world of nature, the world of politics, war and economy, medicine and current events....*everything*.

Continued next week... ■

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