

KRIAT SHEMA INTRODUCTION #1

by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

*Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD is One. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words that I am commanding you today shall be in your heart. *Veshinantam* (Teach them diligently) to your children *VeDibarta Bam* (and talk about them) when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. (Devarim [Deuteronomy] 6:4-7);*

To introduce the Mitzva of Keri'at Sh'ma, there are several introductory issues which demand clarification:

[There are 613 Mitzvot in the Torah - and many additional details and laws which are considered to have the authority of Torah. There are also 7 Mitzvot and many more laws, enactments, ordinances, decrees and customs which are Rabbinic in nature, source and authority.

Keria't Sh'ma includes the recitation of three paragraphs from the Torah: "Sh'ma" - (Devarim 6:4-9); "VeHaya Im Shamo" (Devarim 11:13-21) and "Parashat Tzitzit" (Bamidbar [Numbers] 15:37-41).]

- (a) Is Keria't Sh'ma a *Mitzva d'Orayta* (Mitzva from the Torah)?
- (b) If Keria't Sh'ma is d'Orayta, how much of it is mandated by the Torah?
- (c) If Keria't Sh'ma is d'Rabanan (mandated by the Rabbis) - what was their motivation in doing so?
- (d) Is Keria't Sh'ma an independent Mitva - or is it also part of one or several other Mitzvot?

"And these words which I command you today...speak of them...when you lie down and when you rise." To which "words" are we referring? Are they the words of Torah in general, or specific words?

- (1) Tosafot (Menahot 43b s.v. V'Eizo) states that Keria't Sh'ma is D'Rabanan.

This opinion seems to be based on Shmuel's statement (Berakhot 21a) that if one was unsure if he said Keria't Sh'ma, he doesn't have to repeat it, since Keria't Sh'ma is D'Rabanan (and the rule is "Safeq d'rabanan lequla" - doubt about a Rabbinic Law leans to the lenient side). R. Yosef challenges this ruling - "...when you lie down and when you rise" - to which Abaye responds: "That verse is referring to words of Torah (in general)."

In other words (according to Abaye's understanding of Shmuel's rule), the Torah commands us to

read words of Torah when we lie down and when we rise up - and the Rabbis mandated that those words be the three paragraphs of Keria't Sh'ma. (Talmidei Rabbenu Yona, 12b in RIF pages, s.v. Amar R. Yehuda).

RAAVAN (#155) provides a slightly different explanation: "In order to fulfill 'This book of the Torah shall not depart out of your mouth' (Yehoshua [Joshua] 1:8)".

There is some support for this opinion from two other sugyot in the Talmud:

(a) Menahot 99b: "R. Yohanan said in the name of R. Shim'on b. Yohai: Even if a person only reads Keria't Sh'ma in the morning and the evening, he has fulfilled 'This book of the Torah shall not depart out of your mouth'.

(b) Nedarim 8a: "(If a person takes a vow to learn, even though he is already foresworn to do so from Sinai, it is still valid, because) if he wants to, he can exempt himself by reciting Keria't Sh'ma in the morning and evening."

Both of these Gemarot indicate that Keria't Sh'ma fulfills the most basic level of daily learning.

(2) RAAVIAH (#46), R'AH (Berakhot Ch. 2), Sefer haHinuch (#420) and RITBA (Berakhot 13b s.v. Tanu Rabanan (#2)) rule that Keria't Sh'ma is D'Orayta - but only the first verse ("Sh'ma Yisrael...Echad"). This ruling is based, to a large extent, on two Gemarot in the second chapter of Berakhot (13b):

"The Rabbis taught: 'Sh'ma Yisrael...Echad' - this is the Keria't Sh'ma of R. Yehuda haNasi"

"...If he said 'Sh'ma Yisrael...Echad' and was overcome by sleep, he has fulfilled his obligation."

Both of these selections seem to indicate that the only "absolutely necessary" section of Keria't Sh'ma which must be recited is the first verse.

Those who rule that more of Keria't Sh'ma is "absolutely required" explain the second Gemara as follows: If he said the first verse with a clear head and proper intent, even if he said the rest "dozing off", that is sufficient. (see Talmidei Rabbenu Yonah, 7b in RIF pages, s.v. Amar, MT Keria't Sh'ma 2:12).

As far as the first Gemara is concerned, some explain that since R. Yehuda haNasi was involved in the Mitzva of public Talmud Torah, he didn't want to interrupt for Keria't Sh'ma - so he only said the first verse, which may involve a broader fulfillment than just Keria't Sh'ma (see the next paragraph) - and may be serious enough to warrant interruption of public study. This response is a bit difficult, since we don't generally apply the rule of "Involvement with one Mitzvah exempts one from another Mitzva" to Talmud Torah; however, we might posit that public study is different (Tosafot haRosh, 13b s.v. Besha'a). On the other hand, it may be that he was only able to say that one verse without interrupting his teaching (while he was saying the verse, the Meturgeman (spokesman) was relaying his teaching to the students). This would follow the Gemara in the third chapter of Berakhot which rules that if an attendant at a funeral is able to say any part of Keria't Sh'ma - even one verse - before his turn to comfort the mourners comes - he should do so. (Berakhot 19a).

Why would the first verse be the only Torahic obligation? There are both textual and conceptual arguments here. The verse states that "THESE words which I command you today..." and that could be referring to the first verse, which is the basic declaration of God's unity/singularity.

In Sa'adiah's formulation of the Mitzvot (where he considers Keria't Sh'ma as 2 Mitzvot - one in the evening and one in the morning - but we'll leave that for our discussion at Keria't Sh'ma 1:1), he says: *Erev vaVoqer Yach'duhu* - "In the evening and morning declare His unity"; Rambam, in Sefer HaMitzvot (Mitzvat Aseh #2), understands the verse of "Sh'ma Yisra'el" to be the source for the Mitzva of believing/declaring God's unity. Therefore, in addition to whatever inherent obligation is fulfilled through Keria't Sh'ma, by reciting the first verse, we are also fulfilling the Mitzva of *Yichud Hashem* - declaring God's unity.

The Yere'im (#252) introduces yet another component to Keria't Sh'ma: "Fear God and worship and accept his rule and yoke morning and evening..." Here, we are presented with what the Mishna (Berakhot 2:2) refers to as *Qabbalat 'Ol Malkhut Shamayim* - the acceptance of the yoke of God's rule. Saying the Sh'ma is not only a cognitive declaration - a theological statement - it is also a form of worship, of accepting God's rule over us.

(3) R. Yehuda haChasid and ROSH (Berakhot 13a s.v. Ad Kan) seem to suggest that the first two verses are in a class by themselves - and may be suggesting that these two verses, which include God's unity and our obligation to love Him, are the only obligation D'Orayta.

(4) YERE'IM (#252) maintains that the entire first paragraph is D'Orayta (although he adds that if someone only said the first verse, we cannot claim that this person has transgressed against the Torah. His reasoning may be connected with the following argument:)

RASHI (Berakhot 2a s.v. Ad) seems to support this opinion. In commenting on the prevalent custom of reciting the evening prayer - including Keria't Sh'ma - before dark, Rashi reminds us that we must re-recite it after dark - but that the recitation of the first paragraph, which we say at bedtime, is sufficient.

There are two possible reasons why the entire first paragraph constitutes the obligation. Either the entire text is significant within the realm of Keria't Sh'ma (because the verse states: "...these words..." - which may refer not just to the above-mentioned words, but the entire context of the paragraph) - or, once we are obligated to read part of a section of Torah, we may be obligated to read that entire section as it is formatted in the Torah. This is born out in Berakhot (12b), where the Gemara is discussing the reasons for inclusion of the third paragraph of Keria't Sh'ma. The chief reason seems to be the inclusion of a commemoration of the Exodus. The Gemara then asks why we don't read the section of Bil'am's blessing (Bamidbar 23) which also mentions the Exodus. The response is that it is too long and is an unreasonable burden on the community. The Gemara then asks - why not just read the verse which refers to the Exodus? The response is telling: "Any paragraph which was not broken up by Moshe - we do not break up". In other words, remembering the Exodus in the context

of Keri'at Sh'ma must be done by reading an entire 'Parasha' (paragraph) from the Torah which includes the Exodus. We might posit the same to explain the approach of RASHI and the YERE'IM.

(5) Rabbenu Yona (Talmidei Rabbenu Yona on Berakhot 2a in RIF pages, s.v. V'ifs'qa) seems to suggest that the first two paragraphs are D'Orayta. In challenging Rashi's approach (above) to the early Keri'at Sh'ma problem, he doesn't allow for the bedtime Keri'at Sh'ma to be sufficient; among his concerns are that we only say the first paragraph, and we must "read at least the first two paragraphs, which include acceptance of the yoke of God's rule and the yoke of Mitzvot...". The rationale here may be along the same lines as the argument for the first paragraph - since the Mitzva of reading the Sh'ma is mentioned in both paragraphs, both of them make up the Torah's definition of the Mitzva. An analogue to this is the Mitzva of Tefillin, which is mentioned in four Parashiot in the Torah - and all four must be written inside the Tefillin.

(6) Rambam seems to suggest that all three Parashiot make up the Torahic level of the Mitzva (MT Keri'at Sh'ma 1:2). When we get there, we will discuss his approach, which is a difficult one to defend. Significantly, Rambam does not reckon the daily obligation to remember the Exodus - which is the reason for reading the third Parasha - in his count of Mitzvot.

In conclusion, we see that there is a wide range of approaches to Keri'at Sh'ma, in source, amount and motivation. Along with fulfilling the Mitzva of Keri'at Sh'ma, we are also (a) worshipping God; (b) declaring His unity; © accepting His rule; (e) studying Torah.

We've introduced the Mitzva - now we'll begin to study Rambam's Hilkhot Keri'at Sh'ma from the Mishneh Torah. May we go from strength to strength.

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