

CHAPTER 5 - SHEMA

by Rabbi Dr. Azriel Rosenfeld

SHEMA (Deut.6:4-9; Deut.11:13-23; Num.15:37-41) must be recited with great concentration and intent (61:1), particularly the first verse; see 60:5;63:4,6. (In general, fulfillment of a Commandment requires intent; see 60:4.) It is customary to recite the first verse out loud and to cover the eyes while doing so (61:4-5,16;62:5), and to silently say "Blessed be the Name..." after the first verse (61:13). On the appropriate intentions at specific parts of SHEMA see 61:2-3,6-8,14-15. The TEFILLIN and TZITZIS should be touched when the verses in which they are mentioned are recited (61:25). SHEMA should be recited audibly if possible (see 61:26;62:3-4), and should be pronounced very carefully (62:1), even when reciting it in a language other than Hebrew (62:2). On specific details about the pronunciation see 61:16-21,23-24. [Similar care with pronunciation should be taken in reciting other prayers and in reading from Biblical books (61:22).]

The blessings "...Creator of light and darkness..." and "Eternal love..." (or "Great love...") are recited before SHEMA (59:1;60:1). The first blessing is recited even by individuals even though it contains the verses of KEDUSHAH (59:3), and it may be recited even by a blind man (69:2). On reciting these blessings with the leader or hearing them from him and answering "Amen" to them see 59:4;61:3. On omission of these blessings or errors in them see 58:4;59:2,5;60:2-3. It is customary for an individual to say "G-d, faithful king" before SHEMA; and in a congregation, the leader repeats "HA-SHEM your G-d is true" at the end (61:3). After SHEMA, the blessing "True..." is recited; on its importance see 66:10.

The verses of each passage of SHEMA must be recited in order (see 64:1). On what to do if part of SHEMA was (or may have been) omitted see 64:2-4; on cases of doubt see 67:1. On what to do if the recitation was interrupted see 65:1 and 75:1; on situations in which interruption is permitted in the SHEMA and its blessings see 66:1-9 and 69:1; on inserting religious poems (PIYUTIM) into the blessings see 68:1. It is forbidden to recite SHEMA twice in succession (see 61:9-12; similarly, "Amen" should not be said twice after hearing a blessing). However, if a congregation is reciting SHEMA, an individual should recite at least the first verse with them even if he has already recited SHEMA; see 65:2-3.

SHEMA may be recited in the morning after it is light enough to recognize an acquaintance (58:1), or if necessary, after dawn (58:3-4). Ideally, it should be recited shortly before sunrise (see 58:1), or as soon afterward as possible (58:2). It may be recited until the end of the first quarter of the day (58:1), or if necessary the first third; after that it may still be recited, but without the blessings (58:6). It is

customary to recite the first verse at the beginning of the morning prayers in case the entire SHEMA is not recited until too late (46:9).

It is not necessary to stand while reciting SHEMA (see 63:2), but it should not be recited while lying flat (63:1), and the first verse should not be recited while walking (63:3). A sleeping person should be awakened to recite at least the first verse (63:5), and a person who is working should stop for at least the first passage (see 63:7-9). On interrupting other activities to recite SHEMA if there is time to recite it after finishing see 70:3-5. On activities that excuse a person from reciting SHEMA, such as funeral preparations, see 71:1-6 and 72:1-5.

A woman is exempt from reciting SHEMA, but should recite at least the first verse (70:1). A child should be taught SHEMA when he is old enough (70:2). A person who is drunk should not recite SHEMA (99:1).

SHEMA should not be recited in the presence of the dead or in a cemetery (71:7); if adult nudity is in contact with any of the body, or any nudity is visible or is in line of sight with the heart (see 73:1-4;74:1-6;75:4-6); if a woman's singing is audible, or any part of her body or hair that is usually covered is visible (75:1-3); or in the presence of excrement that is uncovered or in contact with the body or clothing or can be smelled (see 76:1-8;79:1-3,9;80:1;81:2;82:1;87:3). [On the excrement of animals and children see 79:4-7;81:1 (see also 76:3 on a pig's mouth); on urine see 76:7-8;77:1-2;78:1;79:6;82:2;87:1-3; on semen see 76:4; on bad-smelling liquids see 86:1. On places where such things are commonly present see 85:1-2; in particular, on garbage dumps see 76:7 and 79:8; on toilets see 83:1-5 and 87:1-3; on bathhouses see 84:1; on cases of doubt see 76:7-8.] In such circumstances it is also forbidden to speak or think about Torah or to mention a Divine name, but it is permitted to speak Hebrew or to mention a Divine attribute or to warn someone against a forbidden activity (85:2). If SHEMA was recited under any of these conditions, it must be repeated (83:5). On the other hand, a person who is ritually impure is allowed to recite SHEMA, pray, and study Torah; see 88:1.

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