

248 LIMBS

by Rabbi Daniel Travis

"There are 248 limbs in the body, and each word of Shema serves to protect one of them" (Zohar Chadash, Rus 97b). However, when making a tally of all of the sections of Shema, one comes up with only 245 words. How do we make up for the three missing words?

"In order to make up the missing three words, the prayer leader should repeat the last three words of Shema, Hashem Elokeichem Emes (Hashem your G-d is Truth)" (Shulchan Aruch 61,3). This is based on the halachic principle of "shome'a k'oneh," that when one listens to words it is as if one said them personally. Therefore, these three words, in addition to the 245 words of Shema, bring us to the sum total of 248 words.

Ashkenazim who say Shema without a minyan should not repeat these three words, while the custom of Sephardim is to say them. An Ashkenazi should preface the Shema with the words "Eil Melech Ne'eman" (G-d, Faithful King). These three words bring him to the desired total of 248.

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