

## Fabrangen 2021

### Parsha VaEtHannan Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11

B. Laster

Although there are many topics in today's parsha, the focus of today's discussion is **The Shema**

V-EtHannan contains both the six words plus the first paragraph of the Shema AND it contains the 10 Commandments.

The Shema became part of our twice daily, Shabbat, and holiday liturgies.

The 10 Commandments did not.

This is certainly not a commentary on the 10 Commandments being less important. In fact, some commentators convey the idea that the Shema is an extension of the 10 Commandments—that it is an emphasis, an extension of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment: You shall have no other gods.

Roadmap ahead:

1. **I spoke to about 10 people**, inquiring about what meaning they derive from The Shema.
2. **That made me reflect** on my history with the The Shema.
3. **Many eras of Commentators**: What is The Shema? It is NOT a prayer. In fact, commentators point out that one must recite Shema BEFORE praying.

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1. **I spoke to about 10 people**, inquiring about what meaning they derive from The Shema.

*A friend told me that she and her husband say Shema together both morning and nighttime. Together, as a couple, they speak to God, confirming their human-God relationship, and at the same time, re-confirm their spouse-to-spouse relationship every day.*

*Another friend offered: "Form and function are both about Loving God.*

*One person told me that he sees the Shema as a "mantra" a statement of belief. A statement of intention: Let it be so!*

*He also remarked on the process of saying Shema: You must listen and say and receive all simultaneously*

*Laura Bellows relates that she learned from John Laster sometime during the last three decades the following:*

*You say Shema three times*

- *To Yourself*
- *To the Community*
- *In a whisper: As it is the last thing in our lives that we say. --so it is like a circle, then it is vertical in time*

*Rabbi Bellows continues with this understanding of the Shema:*

*Shema is a process*

*Sh= quiet yourself*

*Em= mmmm—hearing it*

*Ah= Ah!—the insights the revelations that you get.*

*Shema is a precious moment in the midst of a busy life.*

*One more thing, Laura said: Within the prayer service, It is very good preparation to get ready for The Amidah.*

*A friend said that people put all of their life and all of their death into saying the Shema.*

*That reminded me of the stories that have surfaced from our daughter, Talia, who is doing CPE, her fieldwork as a chaplain at a major hospital in Rochester, NY, this summer. She has used the Vidui....*

*That relates to the Rabbi Akiva story...*

One person explained that the meaning of the Shema for her is the actual ritual of saying it, rather than the words. She learned it as a child, saying it at bedtime. Now, she says it with her child each night.

2. **That made me reflect** on my history with the The Shema. Maybe today, as we have time for some breakout rooms, you also will be willing to share some of your history with The Shema.

I learned Shema when I was a little girl. I said it at night when going to sleep. It was what you were supposed to do. I don't exactly remember my mother teaching me this, (but I am certain because my father knew no Hebrew, did not have a Bar Mitzvah, & had had no Jewish education in his socialist, Zionist family). My mother must have taught me the six words. This drash is, in fact, a lasting legacy of my Mother, Vera Haas Plotkin, and her parents Lizzie Joel and Fred Haas, and Lizzie's parents, Clementine Goldmann (daughter of the longtime Rabbi of Eshwege, Germany) & Alexander Joel (of the family of Joel-Carlebach-Adler, who were the chief rabbis of Hamburg, Germany). For many years, I couldn't really attach meaning to the six words...so it was fortunate that I visited for 2-3 weeks in Gary, Indiana .....with my first cousins, daughters of my mother's sister. Becky, the oldest of the family is one year older than me. She had learned at home the first paragraph of the Shema and that summer she taught it to me. And, that has descriptive, as you know,

descriptive behaviors that did have meaning for me. My mother had attached a mezuzah to the doorpost of our house. My Opa, who lived with us or close by and ate all his meals with us for some years would lay tefillin each morning in our family room. I would peek in and see him wind the black bands around his arm and put the black box on his forehead and shuckle his morning prayers. So, it implied that I should speak of these words when I lie down and when I rise up and when I walk by the way....all the time trying to figure out what it all means:

*Something about*

*--my uncertain relationship with God*

*Something about*

*--my attachment to my predecessors and the people Israel through time & space.*

*Something about this God concept is universal.*

**3. From our Sages or Contemporary Commentators:** What is The Shema? It is NOT a prayer. In fact, commentators point out that one must recite Shema BEFORE praying.

*Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi said that the Shema must be said in its original language. Other—the majority of commentators-- say that it can be said in any language.*

*The Gemara says that the most important thing is that one should say the Shema with intention. The Gemara relates: **When they took Rabbi Akiva out to be executed, it was time for the recitation of Shema. And they were raking his flesh with iron combs, and he was reciting Shema, thereby accepting upon himself the yoke of Heaven. His students said to him: Our teacher, even now, as you suffer, you recite Shema? He said to them: All my days I have been troubled by the verse: With all your soul, meaning: Even if God takes your soul. I said to myself: When will the opportunity be afforded me to fulfill this verse? Now that it...***

*The Shema commands us to love God. How do we do that? Rambam (from the 12<sup>th</sup> century) provides suggestions about concrete actions that can instill a love for God.*

*Other commentators encompass God's love for us as a corollary of our love for God that is the essence of the Shema.*

Today, we will take time for some breakout rooms; You can listen to others and are invited to share some of your history with the six words or more of The Shema

#### **QUESTIONS:**

1. When and how did you learn the Shema?
2. How do you use and relate to the Shema now? What does the Shema mean to you? If so, what part, what words and what do they mean?
3. What rituals around the Shema do you do: when and where?  
So, HISTORY, MEANING TO YOU NOW, RITUALS?