

# ***Sh'ma* – Decoding the Key to Jewish Spirituality**

**An Exploration of the Multiple Meanings of the *Kriyat Sh'ma***

**Based on Biblical and Rabbinic Text Study**

**With sources for guided study**

**By Noam Zion**

## **BOOK ONE: *Kriyat Sh'ma* in Context**

**What is *Sh'ma*?**

**To Hear, Listen, Obey, Understand,  
Bear Witness, Promise, Crown, Believe,  
Declare, Unite, Meditate, Swear-to-the-Death  
or Confess on your Deathbed?**

**What Personal Statement Do We Wish to Make  
when Reciting *Sh'ma Yisrael* Daily?**

**Shalom Hartman Institute, TICHON Project**

**12 Gedalyahu Alon Street POB 8029, Jerusalem 93113**

**Tel. 972-2-567-5327 Fax. 972-2-561-1913**

**Jerusalem, 5763**

**For Internal Use Only**

## Foreword to the Educator<sup>1</sup>

The institutionalization of Tefillah – the daily *avodah shebalev* (service of the heart to God) – is problematic. Precisely because Tefillah is an unvarying daily obligation in a communal setting, prayer tends to become a performance lacking the essential inner intentionality of *kavannah*. Often all the texts organized in the Siddur tend to melt together into one mumbled reading without much inner differentiation. The “reader” – as opposed to the Jew who prays before God – is often not aware of the varied spiritual functions that different texts are designed to serve.

Schools face this problem daily. We may need more radical responses like transforming prayer into meditation (the ideal form of worship for Maimonides as well as many Neo-Hassidic mystical practitioners) or spiritual singing (Shlomo Carlebach’s great contribution to our generation) or spontaneous composing of one’s own requests – *Tachanunim* (a demand of the Mishna). But first we ought to make ourselves and our students aware of the original goals of the great Rabbinic creation – the service of God in words within a minyan using standardized forms.

In particular, this curricular source book explores *Kriyat Sh’ma* which is not technically a “prayer,” that is a request, at all and was never called by the Rabbis a *tefillah* – a term originally reserved for standing before God in a personal dialogue to present one’s list of requests, *Sh’moneh Esrei*. But what is *Kriyat Sh’ma* intended by the Rabbis to be? How do we shape our consciousness when reciting it and how might we reshape our rituals of recitation to express and to evoke these Rabbinic spiritual functions.

We offer a series of modular units that explore the multiple and conflicting understandings of *Kriyat Sh’ma* that may be taught in a course or as part of *Iyun Tefillah* – the theoretical study of the Siddur in close conjunction with the practice of verbal worship. Our goal is not skill development in text study nor an affective journey into the soul’s resources for connecting to God nor a halachic study of how a Jew prays. But through the close study of the texts – including many halachic texts - that frame the three “too well-known” paragraphs of *Kriyat Sh’ma*, we will discover what affect, what intellectual concentration and what acts of will were the aims of *Kriyat Sh’ma*. Perhaps we will find the attitude most appropriate to our personal and communal *kavanah*.

These units provide educators with a variety of texts, questions, analyses and pedagogic suggestions from which they may select what is most appropriate to their upper school, college-age or adult student. What unites them all is the approach to *Kriyat Sh’ma* that finds its meaning not necessarily in translation and commentary on its “text” but in the “context” in which it is set in the Torah, in the Temple, in the synagogue, in the Siddur, and in the daily schedule of the individual.

---

<sup>1</sup> Special thanks to Baruch Lazewnik, Jaclyn Ruben for help editing this project, which was translated from Hebrew. Thank you to David Dishon and Steve Israel for their many comments.

# What is *Kriyat Sh'ma*?

## Table of Contents

### BOOK ONE: *Kriyat Sh'ma* in Context

#### Overview of the Educational Units

#### General Introduction to the Significance of *Kriyat Sh'ma*

- Unit I. *Kriyat Sh'ma* - Is it a Prayer?
- Unit II. *Kriyat Sh'ma* in its Sefer Dvarim Context
- Unit III. The Historical Connection Between *Kriyat Sh'ma* and the Ten Commandments

#### Sources and Guideline Questions for Each Unit

### BOOK TWO: Torah Study or Ceremony?

- Unit IV. *Kriyat Sh'ma* as Torah Study
- Unit V. *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a Ceremony

### BOOK THREE: Matters of the Heart – Intentionality / *Kavanah*

- Unit VI. Intentionality (*Kavanat Halev*) in *Kriyat Sh'ma* – For Which Verses?
- Unit VII. What is the *Kriyat Sh'ma* Intentionality (*Kavanat Halev*)?  
Acceptance of God as Sovereign (*Kabbalat Ol Malchut Shamayim*)
- Unit VIII. What is the *Kriyat Sh'ma* Intentionality (*Kavanat Halev*)?  
Recognition that God is Unique
- Unit IX. *Kriyat Sh'ma* as an Expression of Love –  
"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart  
and with all your soul and with all your might"

## **An Overview of the Educational Units:**

### **The Various contexts of *Kriyat Sh'ma* and their meanings**

#### **Unit I. *Kriyat Sh'ma* - Is it a prayer?**

The opening is geared towards differentiating between the perceptions of prayer and *Kriyat Sh'ma* respectively. We begin by inductively reviewing the students' knowledge and assumptions regarding the essence of prayer. We continue by clarifying a surprising issue that will serve thereafter as a research question: ***Kriyat Sh'ma* does not fit conventional definitions of a prayer (petition, praise and thanks)**. Therefore, the very attempt at defining *Kriyat Sh'ma* is the key question of the unit. The definitional focal point takes us beyond the details, to a larger perspective enabling a general view of the essence of *Kriyat Sh'ma*.

The ideational message is that *Kriyat Sh'ma* is different from a prayer. **In prayers, the relationship with God is one of request and private conversation directly with God. In *Kriyat Sh'ma* we do not stand before God nor does dialogue with God take place.** Thus there is a need for understanding the essential content of *Kriyat Sh'ma* and its place in the siddur. In the following chapters we seek different patterns highlighting *Kriyat Sh'ma*'s unique format.

#### **Unit II. *Kriyat Sh'ma* in its Sefer Dvarim context**

We began with the Biblical context of the paragraphs of *Sh'ma* in order to emphasize that *Kriyat Sh'ma* was originally part of the Torah, **before** The Rabbis decided to place it in the siddur surrounded by its own blessings. **What is the original meaning of the paragraph of *Sh'ma* and what new meaning did The Rabbis wish to give it when forming the institution of *Kriyat Sh'ma* and its blessings?**

When examining the original context of the paragraph of *Sh'ma* in Sefer Dvarim, a **significant relationship between *Sh'ma* and the Sinai Experience** is revealed. The Sinai Experience is described in detail in Moshe's address to the Jewish People. The connection leads us to understand that *Kriyat Sh'ma* entails an awareness of the Sinai Experience. There are many components to the *Kriyat Sh'ma*-Sinai Experience relationship. In this unit we focus on **the Sinai Experience as an experience, as an auditory revelation of Divine presence**. The Rabbis wanted Jews who read *Kriyat Sh'ma* to feel as if they were meeting God and hearing God's voice directly. *Kriyat Sh'ma* is an attempt to remind people of the historical Sinai Experience, and to try to recreate the sensation of directly hearing the Divine voice, each and every day. **The one-time national-historical revelation becomes a personal daily experience through *Kriyat Sh'ma***. In that sense, *Kriyat Sh'ma* is one of many ways in which The Rabbis have created dramatic personal connections between every Jewish individual and the central events which created the cultural-religious framework of Judaism.

#### **Unit III. *Kriyat Sh'ma* and the Ten Commandments**

In the previous unit we learned that *Kriyat Sh'ma* appears in the Torah in the context of Moshe's final public address. With all his rhetorical charm, Moshe presents the Sinai Experience to a generation that did not personally take part in it. In the third unit we focus on the **covenant content** of the Sinai Experience - the Ten Commandments. Historically, **the Ten Commandments belong to the complete reading of *Kriyat Sh'ma* which was customary during the Second Temple period**. Ritually, the Ten Commandments were read together with the three paragraphs of *Sh'ma* at the Second Temple. The Commandments were the very heart of *Kriyat Sh'ma*. Therefore, ***Kriyat Sh'ma* represents Jewish attitudes towards God as the "Issuer of Commandments" and towards Judaism as a source for a compelling, comprehensive value system**.

The main question in this unit is: to what extent can the Ten Commandments be seen as the essence of a Jew's framework of commitments?

#### **Unit IV. *Kriyat Sh'ma* as Torah Study**

This unit elaborates further the concept of *Kriyat Sh'ma* as primarily, a part of the Torah and not a conventional praise-request-thanks prayer. But instead of seeing *Kriyat Sh'ma* as the essence of the mitzvot included in the Sinai Covenant, here we emphasize **the mitzvah of Torah Study, Talmud Torah, originating from *Kriyat Sh'ma***. *Kriyat Sh'ma* teaches us the principle of **Talmud Torah** while itself being an example of it. The personality of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai represents the value of Talmud Torah, so he understands the essence of *Kriyat Sh'ma* as an experience of Talmud Torah. The paragraphs of *Sh'ma* represent the entire Torah not only as a source of practical mitzvot, but also as a source for intellectual study of the Torah.

#### **Unit V. *Kriyat Sh'ma* as Ceremony**

The ceremonial manner in which the paragraphs of *Sh'ma* were read by the Rabbis serves as a context which clarifies meaning. Contemporary *Kriyat Sh'ma* has its measure of ceremony as well. In this unit we examine the ceremonial form in which *Kriyat Sh'ma* was read during the Mishnaic period, then we attempt to explain the meaning of the ceremony.

Various commentaries focus on answering the question: "who said *Sh'ma Yisrael* to whom?". Through this question we become acquainted with the importance of **the public, formal reading** of these paragraphs. The importance is to be found in the ceremony of *Kriyat Sh'ma* more than in the study context or in an individual's heartfelt intentionality and concentration.

In this unit, two new perceptions regarding *Kriyat Sh'ma* and a Jew's spiritual world are revealed:

- (1) *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a public ceremonial reading is an act of **praise to the King**. Like the angels, Jews praise the King and reconfirm that God rules over the world. *Kriyat Sh'ma* expresses **admiration for the power and greatness of an awesome Divine presence in the world**. Through this statement, people ascend to the spiritual world of angles.
- (2) The ceremony of *Kriyat Sh'ma* can be understood as **testimony** to our loyalty to this God. Jews are witnesses to the reign of God over the world. *Kriyat Sh'ma* is a daily announcement that God is our God and we are God's nation.. **When making this testimonial statement, we do not ascend to the world of angels, we stand in this world as witnesses of God's rule over the land.**

#### **Unit VI. Intentionality (*Kavanat Halev*) in *Kriyat Sh'ma* – For Which Verses? (Quantity)**

Beyond reading the paragraphs of *Sh'ma* aloud, halacha requires a certain amount of intent, *kavanah*. This intentionality is not required throughout the entire reading of *Kriyat Sh'ma* and its blessings, just for a small portion of it: the verse *Sh'ma Yisrael*. Therefore, halacha focuses attention on the main part of *Kriyat Sh'ma* and demands spiritual internalization and identification with the idea of *Kriyat Sh'ma*.

Halachically, *Kriyat Sh'ma* does not fulfill its purpose without **shaping the internal intentionality of the reader** in a very specific way. In the following unit we explore the spiritual meaning of this halachic heartfelt intentionality.

#### **Unit VII. What is the intention of the heart of *Kriyat Sh'ma*? (Quality)**

**Acceptance of God as Sovereign (*Kabbalat Ol Malchut Shamayim*)**

In units VI-VII-VIII, we attempt to define the intention of the heart (*Kavanat Halev*) required halachically for the reading of the words of *Kriyat Sh'ma*. Halacha scholars have understood the ideational content of this intention in three ways:

- (1) Intention enabling understanding of what is being read, cognitively, as when reading any book.
- (2) **A willful act of accepting God's Kingdom and a commitment to keep God's orders, and maintaining loyalty to God's governance.** *Kriyat Sh'ma* does not merely express faith in God's existing Kingdom over the world, but is rather the very act of crowning God over us. In *Kriyat Sh'ma* Jews reconfirm God's authority over their personal selves. It is as if each day Jews repeat the words of the nation at Sinai: "You speak to us and we will obey". The **covenant** God signed with the Jewish people at Sinai is reconfirmed and again God becomes our God and we become God's people. ***Kriyat Sh'ma* is therefore a ceremony of renewing the covenant each day.** This commitment includes a willingness to pay the price of accepting God's authority over us in a world in which God does not yet reign alone. This price could even include dying in sanctification of God's name. The Jew's spiritual world, based on this understanding of *Kriyat Sh'ma*, is a world willfully chosen and proudly proclaimed by one prepared at anytime to die for this loyalty.

#### **Unit VIII. What is the *Kavanah* (intentionality) of the heart in saying *Kriyat Sh'ma*?**

##### **Proclaiming the Uniqueness of God (*Yichud Hashem*)**

A third explanation is offered in this unit for the *Sh'ma Yisrael* intention of the heart: **belief in God as a metaphysical Being that created the world and rules over it.** The Jew's attitude towards God is one of faith in God's presence and power. In *Kriyat Sh'ma* Jews remind themselves of this belief and proclaim their individual commitment to it. Belief in the uniqueness of God is not restricted to internal recognition, but requires the unity of our hearts and the focusing of our behavior in order to bear witness to the uniqueness of God in the world.

#### **Unit IX. *Kriyat Sh'ma* as an Expression of Love**

In this last unit we attempt to **categorize the essential approaches to *Kriyat Sh'ma* delineating the necessary individual human traits involved.** For example, *Kriyat Sh'ma* as Torah Study requires the activation of critical intellectual thought. *Kriyat Sh'ma* as reception of God's Kingdom activates the will to commit. The starting point for seeking the match between *Kriyat Sh'ma* approaches and human characteristics is: "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might*". *Kriyat Sh'ma* requires personal involvement with devotion of physical and spiritual energies to addressing God.

Through this analysis we explore the relationship between *Kriyat Sh'ma* and the blessing for donning Tefillin, which is mentioned in *Kriyat Sh'ma*. The symbolism of **Tefillin** as an engagement ring strengthens the *Kriyat Sh'ma* emphasis on **love and individual emotional devotion to God**. The Jew's spiritual world, with its daily expression of love of God, is taught in an exciting way by Rambam, when he describes the person who worships God "out of love."

## General Introduction to the Significance of *Kriyat Sh'ma*

### *Kriyat Sh'ma* as the Secret Jewish Password

During the Holocaust in World War Two, many Jewish parents placed their children in monasteries where they grew up as Christians and thus escaped the detection of the Nazis. After the war when many of these children were orphaned from mother and father, some of the monasteries – though heroic in rescuing the children's lives - were reluctant to return them to the Jewish faith. Special Jewish representatives visited these monasteries to try to identify the Jewish children, many of whom were 3-10 years old when first “deposited” in the Church's hands for safe keeping. Their lives had been saved but their “Jewish souls” and heritage without having a free choice about their spiritual destiny.

In one monastery the Jewish representative convinced the monks to allow him to try to identify Jewish orphans. He reflected on the best method to arouse the memories of these children who had been intensely trained in Catholic ritual practice for as much as six years. Finally as the children stood before him he decided to sing “*Sh'ma Yisrael*” and gradually the long forgotten memories of many children were aroused and they gathered around him and joined in the haunting melody of their early childhood. These young children had “heard” (*Sh'ma*) the words *Sh'ma Yisrael* in their hearts and now reasserted their faith in one God (*Echad*) from the midst of the Trinitarian faith in which they had been reeducated. They chose to separate their religious identity from that of the monks who had saved their lives.

Today in Israel in the era of the Palestinian terrorist suicide bombers who dress up as an Israeli soldiers or as an ultra-Orthodox Jews, the password – the Shibboleth - to verify their identity may again become the recitation of *Sh'ma Yisrael*, though it is not second nature to many secular Jews.

We may ask: What is the relationship of a rooted Jew to *Sh'ma Yisrael*? *Kriyat Sh'ma* is a kind of close friend that identifies a Jew and with whom a Jew identifies from young childhood through the end of life. In a traditional home parents put their children to bed by singing *Kriyat Sh'ma* and when the children begin to speak they are taught the first line of *Kriyat Sh'ma*.

When a young child knows how to speak, the parent teaches Torah and *Kriyat Sh'ma*.

Which verse of Torah?

Rav Hamnunah says: “Torah was commanded to Moshe as an inheritance for the community of Jacob.”

And what is the extent of *Kriyat Sh'ma* [to be taught a young child]? The first verse. (TB Sukkah 42a)

In day school and on Shabbat in the synagogue students become accustomed to sing *Kriyat Sh'ma* daily – even twice a day<sup>2</sup>. At one's bar/bat mitzvah the child often takes out the Torah and recites *Sh'ma Yisrael* and repeats it again in the *Kedusha* in the *Amidah*. For those who arrive at the synagogue early in *Birchot Hashachar* the abbreviated *Sh'ma* is also recited.

---

<sup>2</sup> A teacher once reported that on his way to the airport in Israel at 6 a.m., his taxi driver turned on the radio which begins its broadcasting day in Israel with a recitation of *Kriyat Sh'ma*. Piously but not very safely the taxi driver decided to show his religiosity by covering his eyes and reciting the first line with great fervor while his taxi speeded on down the highway – thankfully with no mishaps.

At certain dramatic moments in life, *Kriyat Sh'ma* becomes more than a familiar friend and serves as an occasion to declare one's basic Jewish loyalty to God. At Neilah on Yom Kippur it is repeated three times before the final Shofar blowing. At the end of a Jew's life – or God forbid, in a life-threatening moment, *Kriyat Sh'ma* are the last words of life. From life's beginning to its end, the Rabbis have established that this verse should resonate in a Jew's spiritual world, as an individual and as a member of a community. During the Holocaust, reciting " *Sh'ma Yisrael*" was a sign of upcoming death in sanctification of God's name. After the Holocaust, this song was the familiar tune calling the Jewish children who had been hidden in monasteries back home to their people and faith.<sup>3</sup>

Since *Kriyat Sh'ma* plays such a central role in Jewish prayer and has earned such a special place in the hearts of Jewish people throughout the centuries, it is imperative that we explore its meanings. With all due respect to the love and loyalty Jews have shown for *Sh'ma Yisrael* as a prayer and a symbol of Jewish identification, ***Kriyat Sh'ma* does not fulfill its purpose in shaping Jews' spiritual world until Jews fully comprehend its meaning.** Thus there is a great need for cognitive analysis and extensive examination of the world of Rabbinic thought which underlies *Kriyat Sh'ma*.

The scholars of the Mishna and the Talmud determined that *Kriyat Sh'ma* would be read as an integral part of the services to educate each individual to be loyal to the basic spiritual values of Judaism. Obviously, reading one verse or even three paragraphs cannot express the entire Jewish philosophy. And yet, *Sh'ma Yisrael* was indeed chosen to be the **key** that epitomizes the Jewish spiritual world. A well known story brings this point home. A gentile, upon considering conversion to Judaism came to elderly Hillel and asked him to summarize the whole of Judaism "standing on one foot". Hillel replied: "That which you hate - do not do to your fellow person, and now go study the rest of the Torah." Thus Hillel summarized the Jewish theory of mitzvot, not to discount the complexity of a Jew's duties, but rather to give a convert a **key** to understanding its main message and **an invitation** to begin an extensive study leading to a life of actions. From the story of Hillel we can understand the Rabbis' decision to search for an Essence representing Judaism, and we can understand their choice to place *Sh'ma Yisrael* center stage, it being a **key** to the Jewish spiritual world. The recitation of *Sh'ma* begins and ends the day of every traditional Jew, thereby enclosing all daily activities within a spiritual framework.

This entire extensive study unit is devoted to exploring the following question: **how do we use the key, known as "*Kriyat Sh'ma*, to open up and reveal to Jews the spiritual world of their people?** We have named this unit, simply, "What is *Kriyat Sh'ma*?" for we wished to clarify this fundamental question not only for the youngsters who are yet unfamiliar with the "prayer" of *Sh'ma*, but also for the elders who have been reciting it several times daily. We have an uncomfortable **suspicion** that even Jews who know *Kriyat Sh'ma* well and can even recite it by heart, do not truly understand what the meaning of *Kriyat Sh'ma* was to its founders - the scholars of the Mishna and the Talmud. This situation resembles a people who carry a heirloom key in their pocket which they received it as an inheritance. They are very familiar with its shape, for they have wrapped their fingers around it a hundred times. But because they have been passively carrying it for so long, they have forgotten which lock it opens. Perhaps they no longer remember that they possess a key to hidden treasures. We must locate the doors which this key opens and discover what is behind them, one by one. We will endeavor to uncover the hidden

---

<sup>3</sup> Ironically the Jewish guard and executioner responsible for Adolph Eichmann's hanging – his punishment for his major role in the Final Solution of the Jewish problem – recited *Sh'ma* on the morning before hanging him. So the last words Eichmann heard before his death were the same ones pronounced by so many of his victims before their deaths.

spiritual treasures the Rabbis have left there for us. Only after we know what *Kriyat Sh'ma* is for, can we recite it, not in superficial way, but carefully listening to its spiritual message.

### **What is *Kriyat Sh'ma*?**

You may ask: **How can we claim that many Jews do not know what *Kriyat Sh'ma* is?** After all, isn't *Kriyat Sh'ma* a central prayer, appearing in the siddur just before the petitional prayer of *Shmone Esrei*, expressing our belief in One God, right?

Surprise! ***Kriyat Sh'ma* is absolutely not a prayer in a conventional sense.** The Rabbis define “prayer” as a request for needs expressed by people when standing before the Divine Presence. These requests are accompanied by words of praise and are followed by words of thanks, as if to thank God in advance for granting our requests. However ***Kriyat Sh'ma* includes no request nor praise nor thanks. People reciting *Kriyat Sh'ma* do not feel as if they are standing in the Divine presence, nor is *Kriyat Sh'ma* a form of conversation and petition.** Even the very words *Sh'ma Yisrael* were not originally directed by human beings towards God. It is the Rabbis who created *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a one time prototype, different from the prayer of *Shmone Esrei* and from the many other prayers in the siddur. The Biblical excerpts of *Kriyat Sh'ma* are not prayers or songs or praise. Nor would it be precise to describe the special meaning of *Kriyat Sh'ma* in the eyes of the Rabbis as an expression of sheer belief in God. Judaism, unlike Christianity and Islam, has not chosen to demand a confession of faith in God in words. *Kriyat Sh'ma*'s form is not that of a theological-philosophical description of the essence of God.

The Rabbis saw in *Kriyat Sh'ma*, not a description of the theological content of faith, but an act which creates a spiritual framework for the lives of Jews. The meaning of that framework was greatly disputed and it was given many different explanations. The living framework of Jewish law (Halacha) and of the siddur preserved multiple approaches to the understanding of *Kriyat Sh'ma* to this very day. As we shall see, there were at least three main approaches:

(1)Some Rabbis saw in *Kriyat Sh'ma* **an act of studying Torah.** They held that the spiritual world of Jews should be based on their ability to study carefully and think critically about the Torah of God.

(2) Other Rabbis understood *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a reminder of the values in the **Ten Commandments.** A Jew's spiritual world, according to this approach, is a world of actions guided by basic values such as "you shall not murder" and "honor your father and your mother". These values shape Jews' consciousness as they pray, morning and evening. They provide guidelines for daily activities. Without incorporating these values, Jews do not fulfill their duty to serve the Creator, *Avodat HaBorei*.

(3) Further *Kriyat Sh'ma* may be seen as Jews' daily renewed decision **to take upon themselves “Adonai” as their God.** It is not a matter of metaphysical belief that there exists a shapeless God, it is **an event of free choice** in which all Jews **reread the Sinai covenant and reconsider their reaffirmation of its conditions.** According to this approach, *Kriyat Sh'ma* is not an expression of a believer's faith in the existence of God, it's their symbolic vote placed in the ballot box. That is how God's sovereignty is a result of the Jews' election of their Sovereign. .

In summary, the Rabbis have assigned various meanings to *Kriyat Sh'ma*, each representing a different Jewish outlook which we will soon explore in brief.

### **The context which clarifies essence**

This book includes a series of studies related to the central question "**what is *Kriyat Sh'ma*?**" through three separate questions each discussed in depth:

- (a) **When and how is *Kriyat Sh'ma* said?** These are matters of laws and customs.
- (b) **What is the content of *Kriyat Sh'ma* ?** This requires word analysis and commentary.
- (c) **What is the meaning and significance of the act of *Kriyat Sh'ma*?**

When the Rabbis created a new pattern of reciting Torah selections entitled *Kriyat Sh'ma* they did so independently of the Biblical format: it was not based on prayers of the ancestors, nor on the Temple rituals. They extracted the three biblical paragraphs from their context and provided them with a new meaning by determining that they be read together, morning and evening, in special ways. **The new context of the old paragraphs is what clarifies their essence as *Kriyat Sh'ma*.** In each chapter of the book we will become acquainted with the Rabbis' *Kriyat Sh'ma* in light of the new context into which they transplanted it.

This contextual approach to clarify the meaning of text is based on a simple educational truth: When people behold a novel custom it arouses their curiosity, for what they have seen differs from their everyday life. They ask one simple yet profound question: What is that? What are you doing over there? Gentiles watching Jews performing *Netilat Yadayim* most probably wonder: what's going on? The Jews would then have to explain something which they do as a routine, and explain its meaning to themselves as well, pondering the spiritual meaning of pre-meal preparations. An additional example may serve as a case in point. Parents know that four-year-olds ask endless questions about routine behavior. Parents are compelled to explain and justify proper use of silverware, and dressing up nicely for Shabbat. Children's naive questions are not marginal nor simplistic, for they force adults to truly comprehend the deeper meaning of their lives' value-driven routines. On Seder night, it is precisely the children's curiosity and naive questions which revitalize the adults' discussions on the meaning of the holiday, which they have performed *Sh'ma Yisarel* so many times before. **Familiarity creates obtuseness, routine kills curiosity. People end up assuming there is nothing further to discover regarding the nature of everyday things since they are acquainted with them within their natural context.** In prayers and even more so in *Kriyat Sh'ma*, there exists a danger that over-familiarity prevents people from researching and studying anew. Therefore, our challenge here is to find new ways to arouse renewed curiosity in the study of *Kriyat Sh'ma*.

The solution we offer to this educational problem is to study the context of *Kriyat Sh'ma* and not only its apparently-all-too-familiar content. **We will look at the vessel in order to determine and understand its content. We will take *Kriyat Sh'ma* from its familiar surroundings in the siddur, and transplant it into new contexts and old ones, provoking basic questions.**

Relocating *Kriyat Sh'ma* into a new context is not merely an exercise in intellectual stimulation, it actually creates new meanings. The same action in different context boasts a new meaning. Let us examine the example of *Netilat Yadayim*.

During the **Holocaust**, the Nazis approach a certain community, planning to slaughter it all. The rabbi asks for a suspension of the death sentence to prepare himself and his community. The Nazis oblige. The rabbi takes a pitcher and begins to wash his hands. He explains to his community that they are all about to partake in the mitzvah of *Kiddush Hashem*, and that they must first purify their hands. This dramatic new context for *Netilat Yadayim* changes its meaning significantly.

**There is, then, no one meaning to *Kriyat Sh'ma*.** It is irrelevant to ask the general question, "what is the essence of *Kriyat Sh'ma*?" The crucial question is "**what is the meaning of *Kriyat Sh'ma* within a specific context?**" In order to provide the students with a broad basis for the examination of *Kriyat Sh'ma* from multiple angles, we provide sources from *Kriyat Sh'ma*'s different contexts in each unit. We make no attempt at determining the "true" or historically original context of *Kriyat Sh'ma*, we merely contribute towards broadening the horizons and multiplying the prisms through which its meanings can be explored. We stress that above all, *Kriyat Sh'ma* is primarily a **key** to understanding various perspectives on the spirituality of Judaism.

## **Unit I. *Kriyat Sh'ma* - Is it a prayer?**

### **Unit Goals**

### **Source guide**

#### **Lesson A - General Introduction**

#### **Lesson B – Towards a Definition of the Concept of Prayer**

Source: *Kriyat Sh'ma* and its blessings

### **I. Introduction - *Kriyat Sh'ma* - Is it Really a Tefillah (a Prayer)?**

#### **Unit Goals**

*Kriyat Sh'ma* is entirely different from other prayers in the Siddur, such as the requests in the Amida, the expressions of thanks in Birkat HaMazon or the Tehillim of praise in Psukei D'Zimra. Thus we focus on the question: "What is the Sh'ma?" What kind of activity am I doing twice a day when reciting it and what Kavanah am I supposed to be having when reading those words? Obviously this question is central to the rabbinic creation of a fixed liturgy. Every Jew regards Sh'ma as a defining statement of Judaism. What do the Sh'ma's three paragraphs contain, which might explain its centrality in the Jewish liturgy? Or perhaps the content of these texts is only understandable from the *con-text*, how they are embedded in the brachot and rituals surrounding the recitation of the Sh'ma? There are multiple answers in Rabbinic tradition rather than one essential idea. This unit is devoted to exploring the many special meanings attributed to the Sh'ma and contrasting them and showing how they lead us to read and to experience the familiar words of the the Sh'ma in often surprising ways. Each view of Kriyat Sh'ma reveals a different Rabbinic approach to the essence of Judaism.

#### **Lesson 1- - Opening Discussion and General Introduction**

When introducing the topic of the Sh'ma to the students we must justify the choice of Sh'ma as a focus of study and relate it to the conceptual world of the students. (We will probably have to overcome such initial reactions as - "been there, done that" - for, who is not familiar with the Sh'ma?).

(1) It would be appropriate to begin with a review of the centrality of Kriyat Sh'ma in the siddur, and the utterance of the words "Shma Yisrael" both as a twice daily routine and as an expression of faith in special situations. As a daily routine, Sh'ma appears in one form or another in *Birchot HaShakhar*, before the Amidah, in the Kedusha, and in the bedtime prayers. In more dramatic settings "Shma Yisrael" is said both during the closing prayer of Ne'ila on Yom Kippur before the final Shofar blast and also upon one's death bed. Rabbi Akiva cried out "Shma Yisrael...God is One" prior to his death in sanctification of God's name when slain by the pagan Romans as did the martyrs of German Jewry during the Crusades when refusing to accept the Christian belief in the trinity. From that time on *Kriyat Sh'ma* became a standard practice for every Jew before death. (See the example of the use of Sh'ma to identify Jewish children hidden in monasteries during the Holocaust mentioned in the general introduction to this study guide). Jews have always been fond of *Kriyat Sh'ma* for it has been perceived as an expression of the essence of their Judaism. Therefore its content and messages are most worthy of examination and study.

(2) The problems associated with learning Kriyat Sh'ma are often not due to discounting its importance, on the contrary, they are usually the result of overexposure to it on a routine basis. Thus we recommend shortening the discussion of the importance of Sh'ma and instead challenging the students who "recite" Sh'ma to see that they may never have studied it. Despite the unquestioned centrality of the Sh'ma and its daily utterance, we do not "study" the Sh'ma, as we do the weekly Torah reading. A barrier has been erected between the experience of prayer and the act of study. Our familiarity with the Sh'ma has not resulted in a deep understanding and knowledge of its essence, structure or evolution within Halakha. On the contrary, routine has obscured more than it has clarified the meaning of the Sh'ma.

To avoid praying routinely the Rabbis have recommended we set aside time for a more critical study of prayer, entitled *Iyun Tefillah*. In TB Shabbat, 127 (a section which appears in the siddur as a brief occasion for learning after reciting the bracha for Torah study at the beginning of the Shacharit morning services) states: "These are things which a person eats their fruit in this world and their further reward await him/her in the next world. They include: ...**prayer study** *Iyun Tefillah*". This unit is devoted to prayer study, focusing on *Kriyat Sh'ma*. We need to find ever new approaches to the Sh'ma so our daily repetition will not become

routinized and boring. "Each day the recitation of the Sh'ma should be **a novelty to each person**. As if it were something which he had not yet been heard, something of which people are very fond." (Aruch Hashulchan, Orach Chaim 61). It is not a simple task to take special interest in that which is routine, therefore in this unit many sources will be included, by means of which we shall reveal several opposing approaches to the very concept of Kriyat Sh'ma. While searching for the unique aspects of the Sh'ma we shall earn the added benefit of exploring various approaches to the essence of Judaism.

## **Lesson 2 - An Attempt at Defining the Concept of Prayer - Class/Group Exercise**

(1) A study of the uniqueness of Kriyat Sh'ma by comparing it to other sections in the siddur.

As an introduction to prayer study, we begin by attempting to define Tefillah.. Then we can judge whether *Kriyat Sh'ma* could be included within that definition. Working in small groups or using a blackboard, *a comprehensive list of recommendations for the definition or characterization of prayer* can be compiled. The list could include: praise, thanks, requests of a personal or national nature, songs of praise for God, a conversation with God, worshiping God, standing before the King of Kings, etc. It is important to emphasize at the beginning of this activity that we're looking for characteristics of prayer in general (not of *Kriyat Sh'ma*) so that we can observe the gap between our understanding of prayer and the content and role of *Kriyat Sh'ma*.

(2) After eliciting the definitions, we move on to analyze the first paragraph of Kriyat Sh'ma and examine its content. Results might include: a Divine command, a Torah portion, faith in God, the mitzvah of learning Torah and teaching it to our children, the mitzvot of tefilin and mezuzah, the mitzvah of loving God. Focus solely on the first chapter of the Sh'ma, lest the quantity of text be at the expense of quality and depth of analysis.

(3) Now let us make a comparison between the content of Kriyat Sh'ma and the definition of prayer. The opening sentence merits attention: "Shma Yisrael" is probably addressed by God to humans ("Listen, people of Israel"), whereas prayer, by definition, originates from the person who experiences feelings of thanks, praise or need who expresses them verbally to God. Prayer is comprised of people's words, written by them, whereas Kriyat Sh'ma is a collection of quotes from God's book. Kriyat Sh'ma also

lacks the element of expressing needs. Kriyat Sh'ma might also lack the feeling of standing before God, as Rashi writes (TB Brachot 25b): "For Tefillah one must imagine oneself as if standing, fearful, before the Sovereign. But during *Kriyat Sh'ma* one is not speaking to or standing before the Sovereign."

### **Summary of the Introductory Unit**

It is recommended to address the following points during your summary:

(1) We have found that it is not possible to include Kriyat Sh'ma within the definition of "a prayer." In fact, **it is known as "*Kriyat Sh'ma*", the reading of the Sh'ma, and not "Tfila Sh'ma"**. (The Rabbis use the word "Tfila" only as a technical term for the Amida).

(2) Analyzing the content of Sh'ma showed a series of non-successive quotes from the Torah, transplanted into a new location in the siddur, set among various brachot just prior to the prayer of Shmone Esrei (the Amida).

### **Preview of the Next Unit**

Therefore, the key to understanding Kriyat Sh'ma is understanding its various contexts and **how its meaning is highlighted differently depending on the context**. The contexts we shall address during the following unit include: the literary context in the Torah; the historical context of its recitation in the Second Temple; the ritualistic context and how it is read; the Halakhic context determining upon what one is required to focus in order to fulfil the obligation of the mitzva of Kriyat Sh'ma; the context of Kriyat Sh'ma and its relationship with its various brachot, and the connection between the mitzvah of Kriyat Sh'ma and the mitzvah of tefilin and its blessings.

The exercise involving the definition of "prayer" and its comparison to the first parasha of the Sh'ma was based on the assumption that an unformed individual who prays perceives Kriyat Sh'ma in its context within the successive order of all the other tfilot, it being located in the siddur after Psukei D'Zimra and before the Amida. But that specific context sheds light only partially on the special meaning of Kriyat Sh'ma, and that is where the exercise comes in: it is meant to encourage us to search for additional, more appropriate contexts.

The central question, "What is *Kriyat Sh'ma*?" will be explored by bringing contextual sources from Rabbinic literature and later Halakhic texts. Each source contributes its explanation of the essence or purpose of *Kriyat Sh'ma* in a significantly different way. This may help enable each student to find an approach which

highlights their personal experience of Kriyat Sh'ma and to help educators frame the actual recitation of Sh'ma in different ways, all of them halachic (for example, to read with *taamei hamikra* as a Torah reading experience or to stand up and proclaim it as an oath of allegiance or to read it in English with different translations to emphasize its content) .

*Kriyat Sh'ma* and *Shmone Esrei* appear one after the other in the siddur and are recited successively (without interruption). The Talmud refers to their juxtaposition as: "attaching redemption to prayer" *somkin geulah l'tefillah*. But it would be a mistake, both Halakhic and historical, to reduce *Kriyat Sh'ma* and *Shmone Esrei* to the same conceptual essence. *Kriyat Sh'ma* is a mitzva from the Torah, whereas *Shmone Esrei* is a Rabbinic mitzvah enacted by the scholars (*m'd'rabbanan*). Their reciting times are different, as are most of their respective halakhot. Placing them side by side was the result of a much later decision, and despite contemporary usage of the term "prayer", *Kriyat Sh'ma* must not be mistakenly placed into that category.

#### **Suggested Additional Activities for Unit One**

- (a) The students can be asked to analyze the motifs and focal points of each of the three parshiyot of the Sh'ma, and present them by means of a chart. Different teams can compare the different parshiyot and look for common or unique elements. This activity both refreshes the students' familiarity with *Kriyat Sh'ma* and emphasizes to them the multiplicity of elements and thus the difficulty in defining the central elements.
- (b) Pop-interviews could be conducted with adults to receive their perspective and definition of the essence of prayer and of *Kriyat Sh'ma*.

## **Unit II. The First Paragraph of "Sh'ma" in its Sefer Dvarim Context**

**Introduction – *Shmone Esrei*, Petitional Prayer, versus *Kriyat Sh'ma***

### **Source Guide**

#### **Lesson A - The Concept of Mishne Torah**

Source #1 - Deuteronomy chapters 4-6

Source #2 - Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, on "Hearing" (*Shmiah*)

#### **Lesson B - A Verbal Analysis of the word "Sh'ma" in its Sefer Dvarim Context**

Source #3 - various commentaries on the word "Hear" (*Sh'ma*). Rabbi David (14<sup>th</sup> century Spain), author of the *Aburdarham* commentary on the siddur.

#### **Lesson C – “In each generation one must see oneself as if”**

Source #4 - A Midrash on "*and make them known to your children*" (Deuteronomy 4: 9), TB: Brachot 22a

Source #5 - TB: Brachot 21b

Source #6 - Passover Haggadah

Source #7 - A Midrash on "*with which I charge you this day*" (Deut. 6, 6).

Source #8 - Halachot regarding Kriyat Sh'ma.

Aruch Hashulchan, Orach Hachayim, chapter 61.

## **Unit II. The First Paragraph of the Sh'ma in its Sefer Dvarim Context**

### **Introduction: Petitional Prayer *versus* Kriyat Sh'ma**

The Jew cries out in prayer to God: "*Hear our voice*" and during *Shmone Esrei* we list our pressing matters and our needs of the hour: health, security, livelihood. These are the everyday issues upon which our daily appeal to God are constructed. This phenomenon could be compared to the relationship between a husband and wife. Their daily encounters focus on satisfying immediate needs and asking for assistance in order to complete different tasks. At its best, in both a marital relationship and a prayer of requests **routine communication expresses intimacy and a feeling of great closeness, and interdependence as well as urgency**. People pray in the hope that God is overseeing each and every minute detail in their lives, taking interest in whatever concern is currently at the top of their agenda.

Important assumptions of a Jew's relationship with God are at the base of this perception, and should be acknowledged. On what grounds do people assume that God is indeed listening to their prayers? How do people develop the feeling that they are in fact in God's presence while praying? Why should God address the needs of a Jew? What of God's end of the conversation, what are the Divine requests from the people?

By establishing an order of brachot and prayers, the Rabbis attempted to clarify the assumption upon which the mutual relations between God and God's people are built. This **order of brachot** is also meant to provide a coherent framework to address God in a prayer of request. The Rabbis formulated **petitional prayers** so that they begin with words of praise for God as *Magen Avraham* – “the protector of the ancestors of Israel” and as the benevolent provider for all living things. As champion of these fine qualities, a Jew can then address God. But there is more to the relationship between the Jewish people and God as is depicted by the Rabbis' order of prayers in the siddur than mere dependence on the part of people and patronage on the part of God. There is also a mutuality rooted in a bilateral treaty dating back to biblical times. It was decided upon by The Rabbis to read the three Sh'ma paragraphs from the Torah in order **to strengthen consciousness regarding the covenant between Jews and their God**. In order to foster a stable and meaningful relationship between two people, and even more so in the case of a person and God, attention must be paid to the understanding and strengthening the comprehensive framework which brings together people and their God. Daily interactions of negotiation for the satisfaction of immediate needs and provision of services do not suffice. This relationship is not associated with making requests as in Shmone Esrei. We shall study the meaning of Kriyat Sh'ma as an attempt to define the basic constitution that shapes the mutual relationship between the people and God.

### **Strengthening Covenantal Consciousness**

We begin by asking: why must we *separate Kriyat Sh'ma* from the request-oriented prayer of Shmonei Esrei? How do these two units fulfill different roles yet complement each other in defining the relationship between the people and God? This contrast can be understood by a **marriage metaphor**. People are often engaged in negotiation with members of their family and society without questioning the framework which unites them. A married couple is likely to engage in many conversations during any given week, each conversation dealing with various day to day arrangements and mutual child rearing issues. At times it seems as though they have forgotten that their interactions are based on the unspoken premise of an existing

covenant upon which they agreed in the past. In that covenant they chose each other out of love and a will to build a joint life of mutual assistance. **From time to time it is important for every couple to recall the motives of their marriage decision and their greatest loving moments in order to bear the hassles and friction of everyday interactions.** In light of their wedding day memories, they will realize that satisfying immediate personal needs is not the essence of their relationship. The chosen relationship is not merely an agreement to provide mutual services. Their willingness to ask for help and offer it to one another is an expression of love and commitment, the very foundation of their relationship.

The marriage we are concerned with here is **the marriage of God and the People of Israel, beginning at Mount Sinai.** This longstanding mutual history with its moments of glory and trying times alike, constitutes the foundation for the two parties to the Sinai covenant to identify and feel connected with one another. It is with regard to this mutual choice and love that Jews feel at liberty to address God with requests for help and expect interest and empathy. On the other hand, if Jews ignore the historical perspective and the general character of the covenant, and fail to treat God as more than a wealthy and generous relative from whom favors can be asked, the relationship could easily degenerate into materialistic transactions.

Daily matters are certainly on our mind during prayer. One of the purposes of Kriyat Sh'ma is to return our focus to the moment of the creation of the covenant with God. **Morning and evening, Jews take time out to focus on defining their relationship with God. People are asked to distance themselves from current thoughts that focus on solely current needs, in order to focus on identifying with an event which took place long ago.** That event determined and continues to determine the framework for a Jewish life and the framework for the relationship between God and the Jewish people to this very day. To this end The Rabbis have chosen three paragraphs from the Torah which remind us of fundamental events which played a major role in creating the relationship between God and the people: **the Exodus from Egypt and the Sinai experience.**

### **The Redemption from Egypt**

The last paragraph "*Vayomer*" of *Kriyat Sh'ma – VaYomer* - ends by identifying God as the savior of Israel: "*I am Adonai, your God who has taken you out of Egypt to be your God. I am Adonai your Lord.*" (Deuteronomy 16:41). In light of this event, Jews who prepare to pray and ask for their needs are not only looking after their own wellbeing, but affirming the **Redeemer / redeemed relationship** before God. This relationship provides a basis for the belief that God takes an interest in an individual's needs, just as God has

responded to the people in the past. God is not only omnipotent Creator who shows mercy for creatures, but also a God with a historical identity tied to special ways to one nation since their redemption from slavery. Raising awareness of this most significant redeeming event its significance requires us to bring it to life and bring individuals to identify with it. To this end, the Rabbis determined that not only in *Kriyat Sh'ma* but also on the Seder night of Passover, **"One must see oneself as if I participated in the Exodus from Egypt." On the Seder night**, we employ numerous means of tangible identification which include matza and bitter herbs, as we recite Biblical excerpts with rabbinical interpretations. *Kriyat Sh'ma* is not as plentiful in props. **But in both *Kriyat Sh'ma* and Seder a national event of the past becomes the basis for an individual's attitude towards God in the present.** The mitzvah is to remember the Exodus from Egypt every day of our lives. The trigger to our memory is the recital of the paragraph of *Vayomer* in *Kriyat Sh'ma*, which shapes a Jew's consciousness.

### **Reconstructing the Sinai Experience, The First Paragraph of Sh'ma**

The original context of the paragraphs "*Shma*" and "*VeHaya Im Shamo*" is meant to return the individual to the experience of *Ma'amad Har Sinai*. The "Sh'ma" paragraph is quoted from the speech given by Moshe before his death, while he is explaining to the new generation who are about to enter Israel what happened at Sinai and why it was a unique and singular event, worthy of serving as the basis for the life of the nation in future generations. Moshe's difficulty is the same one the Rabbis encountered when trying to establish *Kriyat Sh'ma*. **How are we to pass on to future generations the experiences that have shaped our cultural values and outlook?**

Returning to the family metaphor, we might speak of *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a daily revisit to our wedding day. The family framework may be seen the fruit both of decisions and feelings originating in the period of their romantic courtship, as well as of many critical highs and lows during many years of marriage. Parents may be caught up in daily squabbles so they might do well to remind themselves of their starting point so as not to lose the sense of context for their everyday lives. Unlike the couple themselves, the children who inherited the family framework, lack consciousness of the formative event of wedlock and many of the critical stages along the way. It is difficult for children to appreciate the romantic choices hidden in the past which still provide validity for the family covenant. It is even difficult for the children to understand the deep feeling their parents feel towards them as they lack any recollection of the pregnancy and birth experiences and the devoted care during their tender years. The family metaphor can be applied to the relationship between the

new generations of the Jewish people and God. The danger here is the heirs of the covenant will not understand the **founding spiritual experience** - its spirit, its roots, and its pathos. Here lies the potential tragedy and the educational challenge of any community seeking continuity with a historic covenant.

We claim that it is not possible to construct a relationship with God and the continuity of Judaism merely on the expression of our current needs before God. Focusing on the present without understanding the history of the relationship between God and God's People is not a strong enough foundation for a covenant. One must return to **the foundational event** of this relationship. We must open our hearts and their ears to hear the revelation which once so fascinated our ancestors. Moshe's words "*Sh'ma Yisrael*" were an address to the generation which entered and conquered Israel, for Moshe wanted this new generation to review the history of their ancestors and to hear the words of God spoken at Mount Sinai. In Deuteronomy 4-6 Moshe describes the Sinai experience as an awesome and singular event and focuses on the voice of God which was heard by the entire nation. **He demands attention not only to the content but to the experience of Sinai.** In response to God's revelation before God's chosen people, Moshe asks them to love God with all their heart and soul. The relationship with God does not begin with the people's request to God, "*Hear our voice*," but rather with God asking the nation to hear the Divine voice and meet God on Mount Sinai. The nation's reaction to this awesome and rare revelation of God created the framework for the mutual relations for generations. **The voice of God through Kriyat Sh'ma and the voice of the Jew through *Shmone Esrei* complement each other, together forming a living dialogue.**

Rabbi Soloveichik describes this dialogue in his article entitled "*The Lonely Man of Faith*" in two stages.. **In the biblical era God initiated the dialogue through God's prophets; in the rabbinical period people initiate the relationship through prayer.** In light of this dichotomy, *Kriyat Sh'ma* which is quoted from the prophet Moshe (who is passing on God's living words) represents an experience of prophecy. God addresses us by means of a single revelation at Sinai and through this initiative a covenant, which defines the relationship of all Jews towards Him for all generation to come, is created. **Each morning and evening people must see themselves as if they stood at Sinai and heard the voice of God** and attested to their willingness to love God with all their heart. We must endeavor to build our lives on that crucial meeting.

#### **Divine Requests, The Second Paragraph of the Sh'ma**

In choosing the second paragraph of Kriyat Sh'ma, the Rabbis attempted to provide content for the experiential encounter with the Voice of God at Sinai. In addition to the contact created by the very revelation of the Divine Presence before the people, **a bilateral covenant** was signed at Sinai. The covenant

includes demands and promises" if you listen to, that is, obey diligently, my commandments... then I will give rain for your land". And if not, "the anger of the Lord will be ignited against you". Before Jews make their petitions during *Shmone Esrei*, they read *Vehaya Im Shamo* and recall the bilateral covenant of the Torah. In it, the satisfaction of personal needs is dependent upon meeting God's requirements. **God listens to peoples' voices if they heed the Divine words.** God makes demands of people, and so people in prayer are not simply pleading before the mighty God, rather they come as a party to the Sinai covenant, here to claim their rightful privileges.

Imagine the following domestic metaphor where man and woman still play very traditional roles: After dinner, a wife asks her husband: "Would you please wash the dishes? I'm very tired." This woman is not simply pleading with her husband nor is she seeking his compassion. Most likely, there exists an unspoken agreement between them in which one partner cooks and the other washes the dishes. To be appreciated this encounter must be understood within the greater context of their relationship. So too the relationship between God and the people. *Vehaya Im Shamo* illustrates how the relationship is built upon *Midat Hadin* / Judgement and not only *Midat Harachamim* / Mercy. In this relationship there is a kind of equilibrium and **mutuality**, not a unilateral dependence.

In summary, *Kriyat Sh'ma's* three paragraphs can be perceived as an attempt by the Rabbis to define and create individual identification with the most basic relationship between the Jewish people and God. The roots of this relationship date back to the foundational events in Jewish national history described in the Torah. The Rabbis determined that paragraphs commemorating the Sinai Experience with its covenant and the redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt should be read twice daily. The goal is to create a personal relationship by bringing those events to life for each and every individual. **By juxtaposing *Kriyat Sh'ma* to the petitional prayer of *Shmone Esrei*,** the Rabbis have attempted to expand the foundation of the God-Jewish people relationship beyond that of people begging for their immediate needs before their kind and merciful Master. In the paragraph *Sh'ma Yisrael*, as becomes clear from its Deuteronomy 4-6 context, our relationship with God is based on hearing the Divine voice and personally experiencing the revelation and not only sounding our voices and asking to have our needs met. In the paragraph *Vehaya Im Shamo*, the bilateral covenant defines the mutual relationship between God with the Divine demands and the people who perceive the fulfillment of their requests as a well deserved reward for keeping their end of the deal, namely obeying God's mitzvot. In the paragraph *Vayomer*, God's relationship with the Jewish people is described as that of Redeemer and redeemed people. In all of the paragraphs, the goal is to strengthen the individual's consciousness as a party to the covenant with God.

**UNIT II. EDUCATOR'S GUIDE TO THE SOURCES:**  
**The First Paragraph of the Sh'ma in its *Sefer Dvarim* Context**

**Goals of the Educational Unit**

- (One) We will examine the meaning of *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a **return to the Sinai Experience** by exploring the biblical context from which the Rabbis derived the first paragraph of Sh'ma. The Sh'ma appears there in Moshe's speech before the new, younger generation entering Israel. Its purpose in *Sefer Dvarim*, the *Mishne Torah* (Deutero-Nomy, the second giving of the law), is to recall the highlights of the Exodus from Egypt and the journey in the desert toward the Land of Israel. Moshe's goal was to deliver a meaningful spiritual narrative to the next generation who did not themselves experience either slavery or the Sinai covenant. The educational problem at hand is that Moshe is only able to deliver an abridged review of the main events and experiences. Just as *Sefer Dvarim* summarizes the books before it, so *Kriyat Sh'ma* summarizes the experience of the Sinai covenant. This second generation entering Israel will then have to convey these unique foundational experiences to their sabra children and so on across all the future generation gaps. Words, the oral and auditory tools of a great speaker like Moshe, must compensate for lack of full sensory encounters of sight, smell and feeling that their ancestors felt.
- (Two) We will analyze the various uses of the verb Sh'ma in Deuteronomy 4-6 and through them explain the meaning of the unique opening of *Kriyat Sh'ma* – "***Shma Yisrael.***" We will examine the connection between the event described – the **sound of the voice of God at Mount Sinai** (along with the *kolot* of the Shofar and thunder)- and oral nature of the way these recollections are conveyed in Moshe's highly rhetorical speeches.. The Rabbis understood *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a **daily repetition of this Sinai *Shmiah* (hearing) experience reproduced in the language of Moshe's first public, oral reprise of the events.**
- (Three) We will present the **educational method that explains text through context i.e."context clarifying essence"** - *drishat simuchim*. For example, the very same paragraph of Sh'ma takes on a different meaning in its context in the siddur as opposed to its original *Sefer Dvarim* context.

## Lesson A - The Concept of *Mishne Torah*

### (A) Problem Definition - A Search for the Original Context of the Sh'ma

We begin the study session by addressing the necessity of understanding the paragraph of Sh'ma's context outside of the siddur. Without knowing the original context, it is difficult to understand the meaning of the words in the Sh'ma paragraph. We recommend noting these difficulties while studying the Sh'ma paragraph out of a **Tanakh** before reading the siddur context. The difficulties include who is speaking the words *Sh'ma Yisrael*? Who is addressed in this form? (In the siddur context, it is recited by all Jews). What are "these things" which must be "*Leshanen*: studied repeatedly by rote," "tied on our arms" and "written on our doorposts?" What day is referred to in the phrase "which I command you *today*"?

In order to answer these questions we require an examination of the biblical context. The importance of studying *Sefer Dvarim* is not limited to understanding single words removed from their siddur context, but rather it provides a contribution to the understanding of the essence of *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a whole.

### (B) The Method of "Context Clarifying Essence"

It is important to explain the educational method of this book by introducing and exemplifying how the meaning of a word is contingent upon not only its content but its context as well. An examination of a phenomenon or a text without exploring its framing could be misleading. Familiarizing ourselves with the general framework enables more correct and profound understanding. For example, a torn piece of a sign stating: "...back" - was it a chiropractor advertising his cure to your **backache**? Was it a daylight savings time ad reminding us to turn **back** the clocks? Was it a political statement regarding a politician who went **back** on his word? A word such as "Shma" is defined in a Hebrew dictionary in a variety of ways (including: to understand, to hear, to obey), and the true meaning in a certain instance can only be understood in its sentence context. Here we will try to explain *Kriyat Sh'ma* in different contexts, not only its verbal content.

### (C) The Original Context of the First Paragraph of Sh'ma in *Sefer Dvarim*:

#### Defining Moshe's Problem

Shifting our attention from the verbal difficulties of the first paragraph of Sh'ma, we turn to examine its context in *Sefer Dvarim* (where both the paragraphs Sh'ma and *Vehaya Im Shamo'a* appear). Assuming a general familiarity with the literary background of *Sefer Dvarim*, we can address the concept of ***Mishne Torah***. In *Sefer Dvarim*, Moshe is introduced as an individual standing, prior to his death, and speaking before a generation born in the desert, who did not experience the Egyptian slavery. (According to some traditions, Moshe was addressing a group not older than 20 years). This generation is about to enter the Land of Israel and therefore it is important to summarize before them the lessons learned from the Exodus from Egypt and the Sinai Experience, so that these lessons are sure to be remembered and applied in the future. The reception of the Promised Land and its preservation in the hands of the Jews are contingent upon the observance of the **covenant rules** agreed upon by the people and God in Sinai after the Exodus from Egypt (these details are listed in the paragraph *Vehaya Im Shamo'a*). Moshe, as an aging spokesperson, has an

**educational problem:** people tend to learn life lessons best by personal, first-hand experience. The generation entering Israel did not experience the central events of Jewish history - the Exodus from Egypt and the Sinai Experience. **How is it possible to pass on and preserve from one generation to the next such awesome experiences and teach the lessons of the Divine covenant so that they will be applied in the future?** It is a difficult educational challenge, as will tell you any history teacher who tries to bring to life the experiential meaning of events of the past, such as the Civil War or the Declaration of Independence. So too in the personal sphere: older siblings experience difficulty when trying to share with younger siblings those family occasions in which the young ones did not participate or cannot remember.

For further study consider the Jewish tradition of the **ethical will**, to be written alongside a financial one. People try to summarize what they have learned and pass on the essence of their life experience to their children. It is so difficult to summarize a lifetime of experiences in a small document! How can we describe experiences in an impressive and reliable manner emphasizing the lessons most valuable to the future generations? As an exercise, students can try writing an ethical will for a younger sibling or friend in preparation for their Bar/Bat Mitzvah, or upon entering school. etc. *SeferDvarim* is Moshe's **ethical will** which he leaves to guide the Jewish People.

#### **(D) The Paragraph Sh'ma in its Deuteronomy 4-6 Context- The Sinai Experience**

##### **Source #1 Deuteronomy 4-6**

After clarifying the general context of *Sefer Dvarim*, we can study the oratorical style used by Moshe in his speeches. Flipping through the topics appearing right before the Sh'ma (Deuteronomy 4-6), a list can be compiled, including: obeying mitzvot, describing the Sinai Experience, repeating the Ten Commandments, the Jewish People asking Moshe to mediate between them and the experience of the direct Divine voice. This activity can be carried out in small teams. After completing the general overview, we recommend focusing on the analysis of several key verses. For examples, **Deuteronomy 4:1; 5:1 and 4:9-16** portray the purpose of Moshe's repeating the description of the Sinai Experience - **his role as educator**. God entrusts Moshe with the role to "*teach you the rules and laws to be fulfilled in the land you are passing through in order to inherit it.*" The tools for teaching how to obey mitzvot and to practice loyalty to God is to emphasize and pass on from one generation to the next a **live description of the Sinai Experience:** "*Only take heed, and guard your soul diligently lest you forget the things which, your eyes saw and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. So make them known to your children and your children's children*".

Here we must ask, why is it important to relay the experiential side? What is the experiential content of the Sinai Experience?

- 1) The experience of a large crowd hearing the Voice of God provides a imprint of **Fear of God** which is essential to the obeying of mitzvot for generations. "The day that thou stoodest before the Lord thy God in Horeb when the Lord said unto me: "assemble Me the people and I will make them **hear** My words. That they may learn to **fear** Me all the days that they live upon the earth and that they may teach their children".

A person who actually attended the event as it took place feels differently towards the intellectual content of the covenant. But to a certain extent, an impressive description can convey this emotional message.

2) The fact that God was heard but not seen at Sinai teaches us that God, by God's very nature, is not tangible, and therefore there is no point in creating idols. We must keep the second commandment, stating "you must not make a graven image".

"You heard the voice but you saw no form, only a voice...for you saw no form on the day that the Lord spoke to you in Horeb out of the midst of fire. Lest you deal corruptly, and make a graven image."

This experience teaches the true faith in God.

3) A third experiential element appears at the end of **Deuteronomy, chapter 4:32-35**. What took place at Sinai was not an everyday occurrence that every generation will experience firsthand. The problem is not only caused by the gap in history between present and past but also by the fact that **the Divine revelation was a one-time event**.

"For ask now about the days past, which were before you from the day that God created humanity on the earth ...whether there has been any such thing as this great thing is, or has anyone **heard** anything like like it?"

The experience as a one time event establishes our faith in God as the exclusive god. ("Hear O Israel, The Lord our God, The Lord is One"). "You saw and came to know that the Adonai is the Lord, and no one else."

There is no scientific way to discover and understand this experience first hand, it can only be relayed from one generation to the next.

**Source #2: Rabbi S. R. Hirsch on *Shmiah* - Hearing and the Oral Tradition –**

**A Dual Explanation of *Sh'ma Yisrael***

(Germany, late 19<sup>th</sup> century, founder of Modern Orthodoxy, quoted in *Netiv Binah* by Rabbi Jacobson from commentary on Deuteronomy 4:35, page 79).

**"Moshe could only have told one generation that they learned of the Divine essence by means of actual seeing and hearing. Therefore the Torah states (Deuteronomy 4: 35) "You saw and came to know that the Adonai is the Lord, and no one else." The generation who participated in the Exodus from Egypt and some of their offspring from the next generation beheld actual Divine intervention when God cast off the shackles of Egyptian slavery. They actually heard, that one and only time in history, when God spoke to the people. All future generations base their belief on *shmiah* – oral tradition.... Our knowledge of God, the blessed One, is based on this concept of hearing and this second-hand testimony."**

For additional depth, the following source can also be studied. **Rabbi S. R. Hirsch**, was a leader of modern Orthodox Judaism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany. Hirsch begins with the premise that the Sinai Experience does not repeat itself every generation, **therefore** Jewish tradition compels each Jew to tell its story from generation to generation, from Jew to Jew. The content of the experience is **Divine Revelation**, but in a play

of words Hirsch admits that actual *shmiah* of the Divine Voice will not occur again, but by *shmiah* of the words of God, of the Oral Torah, (Mishna) we can sound and hear in a living tradition from generation to generation. It is customary to define "*M'Pi Hashmuah*" both as "from the mouth of God" and also "from the mouth of the Oral Torah". Rabbi Hirsch's commentary leads us towards the profound and essential change in the meaning of the words Sh'ma *Yisrael*. The Halakha which determined the reading of Sh'ma *Yisrael* for generations to come has compelled us **to sound** orally, the story and the lessons of the original *Shmiah*.

#### **An Additional Activity**

1. In order to illustrate the difficulty of conveying any experience together with its interpretation, ask several people can each be asked to **separately** describe an experience they had **together**. You can then compare the relative success at reconstructing the event and the degree of commentary in each person's story.
2. Compare Moshe's description of the Sinai Experience in Deuteronomy 4-6 with the Torah's description of the Sinai Experience in Exodus 19.

## Lesson B - A Verbal Analysis of the Word Sh'ma in its Sefer Dvarim Context

### (a) Overview

In the previous lesson we examined the context of the Sh'ma paragraph in *Sefer Dvarim*, focusing on the problem of relaying a central experience such as the Sinai Experience. In this lesson we will focus on the special linguistics of Sh'ma *Yisrael* and see what can be learned about the word Sh'ma from its *Sefer Dvarim* verbal context. Studying the word Sh'ma serves not only scientific-linguistic research; but the word Sh'ma also serves as a **key word** in the literary structure of chapters 4-6. (A key word appears repetitively throughout a biblical chapter, in different forms with unique yet linked meanings. Both Nechama Leibowitz and Martin Buber analyze this concept in great detail). In the case of Deuteronomy 4-6, the word Sh'ma is a key word regarding the **content** of the speech - the description of hearing the Divine Voice at Sinai, and also to the **form** of the speech - publicly sounding the words and understanding them. At the end of the lesson we will focus on one meaning of Sh'ma *Yisrael* - hearing the living Voice of God speaking from Mt. Sinai. In light of this commentary, the paragraph Sh'ma *Yisrael* is meant to return us to the historical moment of Divine Revelation.

### (b) Dictionary Exercise

It is possible to research the many meanings of the conjugations of the root Sh'ma using a Hebrew dictionary. We can then attempt to apply each meaning to the paragraph Sh'ma *Yisrael* and note how the meaning of the entire Sh'ma paragraph changes accordingly.

### (c) Analysis of the Key Word Sh'ma in Deuteronomy 4-6 (Sources #1-2-3)

#### Source #3: David Abudraham – Three Understandings of Sh'ma

(Spain, 14<sup>th</sup> century)

*Sh'ma* can be understood to concern three interrelated consecutive issues.

- (1) The first is the voice which we perceive by the sense of hearing, like "And Jethro heard" (Exodus 18, 1).
- (2) The second follows the first and means "understanding," as in "you will be exiled to a nation whose tongue you shall not understand" (Deuteronomy 28: 43).
- (3) The third builds on "understanding" and goes beyond it to "acceptance"[and obedience], as in "you shall listen diligently" (Deuteronomy 11: 13).

All three senses are present in Sh'ma, as it is a mitzvah for every Jew to *hear* about it, to *understand* it and then to know that our God is the one and only God and to *accept* upon ourselves the yoke of responsibility of the Divine kingdom.

We will mention several explanations of the word Sh'ma according to the linguistic uses in Deuteronomy 4-6, and try to understand these uses in their respective contexts. The word Sh'ma serves as a **key word** in these chapters, uniting these chapters from a literary point of view.

**1. To hear by means of the sense of hearing - Deuteronomy 4:12 and 33.**

In this context God reveals Himself as a Voice so that we do not perceive Him as tangible, and do not create idol images. Hearing also illustrates God's proximity, creating an awesome experience for the people to be in tangible contact with God without dying. In light of this explanation, *Sh'ma Yisrael* means **hear and listen to the Voice of God speaking and revealing itself to Israel**. Note the extraordinary meeting between God and people without harm coming to them which recalls the burning bush whose fire caused no injury. (To emphasize the power of the original voice which goes beyond content, you can play a recording of a famous leader such as Martin Luther King Jr. This creates direct contact with the individual and the passion of his/her words in their original setting and time frame).

**2. To make things heard and leave an impression - Deuteronomy 4: 36 and 5:19**

Here too, we are talking about a tangible sound but the emphasis is on the creation of fear and respect. The raised voice is meant to discipline. Therefore *Sh'ma Yisrael* is a call for listening out of fear to the Great Voice of God.

**3. To listen to the commander, to keep, observe and obey the rules - Deuteronomy 4:1; 5:1.**

Hearing is not only the reception of a sound or a great impression, it is also a call for compliance. *Sh'ma Yisrael* means listen, obey and receive God's authority as the one and only authoritative God.

**4. A rumor passed by word of mouth - Deuteronomy 4: 6 and 32.**

"*Has such a tale ever been heard?*" A rumor is a kind of message passed by word of mouth, its content impressive and attention arousing. Thus *Sh'ma Yisrael* is a call to listen to the surprising new rumor just in. This opening is meant to attract curiosity and leave a powerful impression.

**5. To hear and to consent to God's request and to hear God's request - Deuteronomy 5: 25**

This *shmiah* is initiated by God. Beyond receiving the voice of those praying, it means the prayer was accepted. This is the meaning in the *Shmone Esrei* of the phrase, "*hear* our voices, have mercy on us", and "the One who *hears* prayer".

**6. In the explanation of Rabbi David Abudraham** there appears another meaning (source #3). *Shmia* can mean understanding, as in "*a nation whose tongue you do not understand.*" The same use of *Sh'ma* appears in the Book of Proverbs (also known as Wisdom Literature, which shares much content and style with Deuteronomy). Therefore, *Sh'ma Yisrael* means "understand and know" that God is one, as is quoted from Deuteronomy 4: 35 "You saw and came to know that the Adonai is the Lord, and no one other."

**Moshe as an intermediary between the Divine Voice and the People**

Moshe, who mediates between the Voice of God and the frightened nation, conveys God's words to the people. "I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the Lord (Deuteronomy 5:5). These words introduce the Ten Commandments. When Moshe mediates, he lessens the effect of the direct Voice of God on the people. Nonetheless, he increases the attention to important details. It is possible to explain *Sh'ma Yisrael* as an opening **call for attention**, prior to the sounding of the Divine words through prophet mediation. *Sh'ma* emphasizes to listeners that what follows is meant to be listened to carefully, with the utmost attention, respect and fear since they are words of revelation coming directly from God.

## Lesson C – “In Every Generation you must see yourself as if you participated in the Exodus from Egypt”

### (a) Overview

The institution of *Kriyat Sh'ma* was established by the Rabbis to reconstruct the Sinai Experience daily.

### (b) Parallels in chapters 4-6 and *Kriyat Sh'ma* - A discussion

**Moshe's speech** in the earlier chapters of *Sefer Dvarim* evokes a lively description of the Sinai experience (both emotive and accessible to the senses) of the Jewish people standing beneath the mountain while receiving the Ten Commandments. Moshe attempts to recreate the entire experience, not simply to repeat the constitutional content of the Sinai Revelation. Moshe is trying to **personalize a national experience** for the next generation. They in turn must be able to pass it on further not only as information but by **creating a feeling in the nation as if it too relived the Sinai Experience** and personally heard the Divine Voice of God's Revelation. The historical distance is canceled. The covenant signed at Sinai includes each future generation directly.

In parallel fashion, *Kriyat Sh'ma* too is meant to create the feeling of hearing the Voice of God directly and of returning the reader to the very day on which the Ten Commandments were first issued and received. In the paragraph *Sh'ma* this idea is expressed in the phrase "Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day." In **Moshe's address** to the generation entering Israel, most of which did not actually stand at Sinai, Moshe presents the nation as if it had an experience equal to his own - a prophet who saw God face to face. "It was not with our fathers that the Lord made this covenant, but with us the living, every one of us who is here today. **Face to face** the Lord spoke to you on the mountain out of the fire" (Deuteronomy 5: 3-4).

### (c) Analysis of Rabbinical Sources on Reliving the Sinai Experience (Sources #4-8)

**Source #4: Midrash on the verse - "*Make them known to your children and your children's children.*" (Deuteronomy 4, 9-10), TB Brachot 22, TB Brachot 71**

**"*Make them known to your children and your children's children*" is followed afterwards in the Torah by "*On the day you stood before Adonai your God at Horev (Mount Sinai).*" So we reason: Just as in the latter verse you stood in fear, respect, and shuddering in awe, so here when teaching your children you should do so in an atmosphere of fear, respect, and trembling in awe.**

**Source #5: TB Brachot 21, 72**

**Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi said: Anyone who teaches one's child Torah, is considered as if the child received it on Mount Horev, as is written "*Make them known to your children and thy children's children*", and then later on "*On the day you stood before Adonai your God at Horev (Mount Sinai).*"**

### Source #6: The Passover Haggadah

In every generation, you must see yourself as if you participated in the Exodus from Egypt. For God not only redeemed our ancestors, but God redeemed us too. As it says in the Torah: "*God took us out of there in order to bring us and give us the land which God had promised our ancestors.*" (Deuteronomy 6:23)

### Source #7: Midrash on "which I command you today" (Deuteronomy 6, 6) - Sifrei

"Which I command you today" - so that they should not be perceived by you as an old monarchical decree, but rather as a new monarchical decree that all hurry to read."

### Source #8: Laws of *Kriyat Sh'ma* (Aruch HaShulchan, Orach Haim, 61)

"And each day (*Kriyat Sh'ma*) should be as a novelty, as something that has not yet been heard, so one is most fond of it".

The Rabbis take an experiential-historical perspective on educating the nation. The phrase "which I charge you **this day**" is not only a quote from a historical source but also a duty: we must heed the words of God as if they have just been revealed to us at Sinai. The *midrash* of *Sefer Dvarim* expresses this idea: "Which I charge you this day" - "they (*Kriyat Sh'ma* and all the things said at Sinai) should not be perceived by you as an old monarchical decree (which repeats things known) but as a novel monarchical decree (revealing a new and exciting message) that all hurry to read."

In Rabbinical sources on TB *Brachot* 21-22, special emphasis is given to how **every parent is obligated to inform about and illustrate the Sinai Experience to every generation**, as an integral part of passing on the Jewish tradition. In the classical study of the Torah and Mishna when rabbi and student meet, we have the same educational role initiated by Moshe at the desert of Moav in his *Sefer Dvarim* speech. It is this idea which the Rabbis express on Seder night: "In each and every generation one must see oneself as if I participated in the Exodus from Egypt". The Rabbis must have understood that **carrying on a tradition throughout the generations is not a simple matter of relaying content and information, rather it is imperative to pass on the one-time magnificent experience by means of dramatic reconstruction**. They hoped that *Kriyat Sh'ma* would suffice to fill this need.

### (d) Appraising the Rabbis' Educational Challenge

*Kriyat Sh'ma* is then meant to constitute a **dramatic-experiential reconstruction of the sounding of the Voice of God and the Divine Revelation at Sinai**. This one time experience ought to become a daily experience, that is the goal for which we strive.

But this perception of *Kriyat Sh'ma* poses difficulties. In reading the paragraphs of the *Sh'ma* daily one cannot really experience anything as dramatic as the original revelation. The words say "*which I charge you this day*," as if the revelation is repeated daily however those words do not easily become a vision or an experience equal to that of hearing God's word. Essentially, an event of revelation, miraculous and distant in

time, cannot truly be recreated. And practically speaking, even a dramatic reconstruction loses its effect when repeated twice daily. The Rabbis wished **for every Jew to experience the emotional power of the reception of the Torah in the present tense**, a revelation, splendid and evoking positive, vivid sentiment just as we feel when presented with an amazing novelty. It would seem that Seder Night succeeds much more at the task of dramatic, experiential re-experiencing of an event, while *Kriyat Sh'ma*, as is **currently** recited in synagogues, does not fulfill its goal. In this sense, the definition of *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a reconstruction of the Sinai Experience does not suffice for people who wish to impart meaningfulness to their daily *Kriyat Sh'ma*.

**(e) A Day Devoted to the Reliving the Sinai Experience –**

**Chag Matan Torah and the Shavuot Night Tikkun**

The Rabbis have attempted to reconstruct many experiences within the framework of Jewish prayer and ceremony:

1. The Exodus from Egypt (Seder Night and the Passover holiday)
2. The Creation of the world (the experience of "the act of creation anew each day" in the bracha of *Yotzer Hame'orot*, and the holiday commemorating the creation of the world, namely: Rosh Hashana)
3. The Parting of the Red Sea (recitation of "who is like You" and "shall reign" in the bracha of *Ga'al Yisrael* after *Kriyat Sh'ma*, and celebrating the seventh day of Passover as the day of the Parting of the Red Sea)
4. Wandering in the desert (building a sukkah and dwelling in it on Sukkot)
5. The Holiday of Shavuot - *Chag Matan Torah*

Regarding the Sinai experience, it is surprising to note that unlike the Exodus from Egypt, there are **no holidays in the Torah to commemorate this central event**. Perhaps for this reason The Rabbis determined that *Kriyat Sh'ma* would be recited as the daily reminder of the Sinai Experience. The Rabbis also identified the holiday of Shavuot, which appears in the Bible as an agricultural festival, as the holiday on which God gave us the Torah, *Chag Matan Torah*. The Kabbalists of Safed added the custom of the **Shavuot Night Tikkun** in order to enhance the study experience. Today it is the custom in Jerusalem to gather at dawn at the Western Wall to pray the morning service of *Shacharit* after having studied all night. It is a congregational event reminiscent of the Sinai Experience, as the light engulfs the congregation when the sun rises over the Kotel at 5:00 a.m.

## **Unit III. The Historical Connection between Kriyat Sh'ma and the Ten Commandments**

### **Introduction - Kriyat Sh'ma:**

#### **A Pledge of Faith or a Review of the Ten Commandments?**

### **Unit Goals**

### **Source Guide**

#### **Lesson A - Kriyat Sh'ma and the Ten Commandments**

Source #1 - The order of readings in the Second Temple  
(Mishna, Tractate Tamid 5.;TB Brachot 11b)

#### **Lesson B - Kriyat Sh'ma as the Essence of Judaism**

Source #2 - The comprehensive version of Kriyat Sh'ma (TY Brachot 1,5).

Source #3 - The omission of the Ten Commandments from Kriyat Sh'ma  
(TY Brachot 1:5).

Source #4 - The attempt to renew the daily reading of the Ten Commandments  
(TB Brachot 12a).

#### **Lesson C - Kriyat Sh'ma as representing the Ten Commandments**

Source #5 - The commentary connection between Kriyat Sh'ma and the Ten Commandments (TY Brachot 1:5)

Source #6 - TY: Brachot 1:5

Source #7 - Rabbi David (14<sup>th</sup> century Spain), author of the *Aburdarham* commentary on the siddur

Source #8 - The Vilna Gaon (Lithuania, 18<sup>th</sup> century), commentary on the siddur

#### **Lesson D - A Practical Reminder (Mnemonic) of the Ten Commandments**

Source #9 - "*Thus you shall be reminded*," the paragraph of tzitzit.  
Rashi's commentary (Numbers, 15).

Source #10 - "*Thus you shall be reminded*" (TB: Menachot 43b)

Source #11 - the daily Torah reading by the king (Deuteronomy 17: 14-20).

Source #12 - Two Torahs (TB Sanhedrin 21, Geonim commentary).

### Unit III- The *Kriyat Sh'ma* and the Ten Commandments: A Pledge of Faith or a Review of the Ten Commandments?

**In the Christian and Muslim religious worlds, the essential pledge or confession of faith is the cornerstone of an individual's religion.** It is imperative to declare one's belief in several basic principles such as the birth of Jesus from the Virgin Mary and belief in the Trinity in Christianity, or the belief in Muhammad as a prophet in Islam. Minor variations in these statements of faith have led to separation into factions and to bloody inner-faith wars. Their insistence on dogma-based formulas can be explained in part by the desire to isolate for the average believer the essential from the inessential within a complex religious culture, and in part by the need to create an ingroup-outgroup dichotomy as far as religious membership is concerned. **From the point of view of the individual believer, such a formula provides a simple mantra summing up the religious essentials, which can be repeated easily on a daily basis.** At first glance, one could claim that this is precisely the role of *Kriyat Sh'ma* in Judaism: a statement of faith. "*Hear O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord Alone*" is a sentence expressing absolute belief in one God, and it is the central phrase of *Kriyat Sh'ma*.

But this wasn't always the case. The verse "*Shma Yisrael*" was not always at the center of *Kriyat Sh'ma*. Up until the end of the Second Temple period it was customary to read the Ten Commandments prior to the paragraphs familiar to us today as *Kriyat Sh'ma*. In *Sefer Dvarim* it seems that the paragraph *Sh'ma Yisrael* (Deuteronomy 6) is essentially an appendix to Moshe's speech in which he repeats the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 5). Plausibly, the phrase "Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day" in the *Sh'ma*'s first paragraph, refers to the Ten Commandments. Therefore, **it was not the statement of belief "God is One" which stood in the center of *Kriyat Sh'ma*, it was the Ten Commandments**, the majority of them practical mitzvot. This fact clarifies the importance of the paragraph *Vehaya Im Shamo'a* which describes the reward and punishment system contingent upon the adherence to the covenant, its main practical tenets being the Ten Commandments. In the contemporary Sephardic siddur one may still find the Ten Commandments in brackets, interspersed among the words of the three paragraphs of *Kriyat Sh'ma*. Rabbi Ba has expressed this idea in the Talmud: "The Ten Commandments are the essence of *Sh'ma*" (TY Brachot 1:5).

This historical fact that during the Second Temple period the Ten Commandments were read as the central part of the paragraphs of *Kriyat Sh'ma* leads to far reaching conclusions pertaining to understanding the core of Judaism. The essence of Judaism, which every Jew was commanded to repeat twice daily, is not therefore based on a theologian belief in the unitary nature of God, but on central mitzvot for people to observe. **When deciding to place the Ten Commandments in the center of the daily reading, the Rabbis attempted to shift the emphasis from the realm of faith to the realm of action, from that of people's opinions about God's nature to the Divine demands from the people.** How different Judaism would have been if the commitment to declare faith had been through **the 13 attributes (*midot*)** of God which were revealed to Moshe at Sinai, instead of through the ten mitzvot God revealed in God's covenant with the Jewish People.

In those few moments, morning and evening, when people put aside their daily tasks and instead dedicate their attention and thoughts to their relationship with the Divine, one might expect to find emphasis on the upper worlds and human spirituality. But that is not the case. The Rabbis composed the siddur where the prayer of *Shmoneh Esrei* deals mainly with people's requests for their human materialistic needs in this world. Even the ancient *Kriyat Sh'ma* which included the Ten Commandments called people's attention to human behavior (including person-to-person relationships). **The Ten Commandments form a value framework to be applied each day.** The time of *Kriyat Sh'ma* is therefore set aside to prepare ourselves to fulfill Divine commandments in daily areas of life as respect for parents, refraining from desiring that which belongs to another, to prohibiting theft in commerce and remembering the Shabbat in all its holiness.

### **How can we understand the relationship between reading the Ten Commandments and the practical Jewish lifestyle?**

The Ten Commandments are a **reminder** to people that they have behavioral duties of an ethical and spiritual nature. Like the tzitzit mentioned in the paragraph, *Vayomer*, the Ten Commandments are there to remind us to distance ourselves from seduction and observe the Divine mitzvot. The **tzitzit** serve this task by being a tangible symbol. The Ten Commandments do it by providing us with an abridged version of the covenant with God. Even the **king** mentioned in Deuteronomy 17 is described as always toting around a Sefer Torah that reminds him, as he fulfills his monarchical obligations, that there is always a higher authority.

Furthermore, reading the Ten Commandments cannot guide a person through the entire gamut of everyday behavior. That would require reading the entire Torah alongside books of Halakhic rulings. But if we were to do so, we would lose the advantage of condensation and essence.

What the Ten Commandments most certainly do provide is **a set of central values** to be considered by Jews when planning their day, and once more at night in evaluation of the day's events. Carrying around a portable set of behavioral ethics compels people to make judgment calls and put their value beliefs to practical tests. *Avodat Hashem* must be expressed every day, and not exclusively by means of worship or philosophical prayer. Unfortunately, it is no longer customary to read the Ten Commandments or mention the people-to-people mitzvot and the people-to-God mitzvot as an integral part of the prayers. In Judaism, a tendency has developed, not unlike other religions, to separate between the belief in one God with its duty to praise the Divine, and the duty to realize and apply the covenant in everyday actions. Prayer in synagogues seems at times to serve as a spiritual shelter, a break from the mundane everyday activities, in order to grow closer to God. What is often missing is the renaissance of prophecy and our feeling of having been sent on a mission to apply Jewish values in everyday life. In the petitionary prayer there is a natural tendency to emphasize human passivity and ineptitude versus God's active role in mercifully providing for all. By means of the Ten Commandments it is possible to counteract that passivity with the active element of Judaism - the mitzvot. **The mitzvot motivate people to act in the world, to express their belief in God who has commanded them, by realizing the covenant values in everyday reality.** This is the ancient message regarding Judaism which emanates from *Kriyat Sh'ma*, meant originally to place the Ten Commandments in the center of every Jew's consciousness twice a day.

### **III. The *Kriyat Sh'ma* – The Connection between the Ten Commandments and *Kriyat Sh'ma***

***"Take to heart these instructions which I charge you this day"***

#### **Unit Goals**

In this unit we discuss the profound connection between *Kriyat Sh'ma* and the Ten Commandments. As we learned in Unit II the connection between them is revealed in the Sefer Dvarim context from which the paragraphs *Sh'ma* and *Vehaya Im Shamo* were extracted and relocated in *Seder HaAvoda* in the Second Temple. In this unit we study **the connection between them** through the order of prayers **customary in the Second Temple**, there **the Ten Commandments were read together with *Kriyat Sh'ma***.

Our goals in this unit are:

- (a) To show how the order of *Kriyat Sh'ma* has been altered over the generations, and to examine the subsequent historic contexts of its utterance and how this contributes to understanding *Kriyat Sh'ma*.
- (b) To strengthen the perception of *Kriyat Sh'ma* **as a return to the Sinai Experience** (as we discussed in the previous unit). In light of the Temple customs, it seems that the most important element of the Sinai Experience which they wished to commemorate through daily worship is the **value-content aspect of the reception of the Torah**. At Sinai we were given mitzvot that guide our lives. Through daily recitation people are called upon to apply these values in their behavior.
- (c) To understand that *Kriyat Sh'ma* is still **a representative of the Ten Commandments**, despite the fact that they are not read today as part of *Kriyat Sh'ma*.
- (d) To understand the roles of *Kriyat Sh'ma* and the Ten Commandments **as daily reminders of basic values**. At the beginning and end of each day we repeat the principles that are supposed to guide our actions. We will explain the need for a reminder and the means through which people remind themselves of these principles.
- (e) To develop the concept of *Mishne Torah* (which was discussed in the previous unit) and introduce the concept of a minimal but representative "epitome or essence." *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a reminder of the Ten Commandments, captures the essence of the Torah, not only to aid memory but also to set priorities. If we perceive *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a repetition of the Ten Commandments (which are the content of the Sinai Experience), then we can deduce that the essence of Torah is mitzvot between God and the people, and mitzvot between people and their fellow people, guiding a Jewish person's behavior, dawn till dusk. God is normative and commanding. Our response to God requires that we internalize the values God has established. *Kriyat Sh'ma* calls religious people to clarify what their basic values are and to remind them to behave in accordance with them at all times - "when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up."

## Sources and Educational Guidelines - Lesson Plans

### Lesson A - Kriyat Sh'ma and the Ten Commandments (Source #1)

#### Introductory Goal – Showing that there is a Historical and Essential Connection between Kriyat Sh'ma and the Ten Commandments

*Kriyat Sh'ma* is significantly connected to the content of the Ten Commandments both by its Sefer Dvarim context and its worship context of the Second Temple. In contemporary times, that connection is not apparent since the paragraphs of Sh'ma are read from the siddur rather than from the Torah, and Sh'ma is read without the addition of the Ten Commandments. Therefore, prior to dealing with the **meaning** of *Kriyat Sh'ma* in light of the Ten Commandments we begin by examining the historic connection.

#### Introductory Textual Problem: The Sh'ma's Obscure use of the Term "these words or instructions" (HaDvarim Ha'Ele).

When we read the first paragraph of Sh'ma *Yisrael* anew, a question emerges: what are "*these instructions with which I charge you this day*"? These **things** are the subject matter of the entire latter part of the paragraph. There we are commanded to repeat *them*, speak of *them*, tie *them* on our arms (Tefillin) and write *them* upon our door posts. According to the second paragraph - *Vehaya Im Shamo'a* (Deuteronomy 11), these same "things" should be put on the heart, the arm and the doorposts.

The answer entails studying the original context in Sefer Dvarim. In Dvarim 11 "things" could refer to the promise of reward and the threat of punishment depending on how we observe the covenant as is specified at the beginning of the paragraph *V'haya Im Shamo'a*. This explanation does not suit the first paragraph of Sh'ma (Dvarim 6). But generally speaking, the things in both paragraphs are **the details of the covenant** formed between God and the generation that enters Israel. Moshe's speeches are given in preparation for that great moment. It is the same covenant, identical in content, to that of the Sinai. In the immediate context of Deuteronomy 5-6, it seems that "these things or instructions" refer to **the Ten Things** that God told the Jewish people during the Sinai Experience [Note the similarity in Hebrew between *Dvarim* (things) and *Dibrot* (commandments)]. These are the basic mitzvot that God chose to write on the two Tablets, it is important to repeat the Ten Commandments over and over at all times, and to symbolize them in tangible signs upon our body (Tefillin) and our houses (Mezuzah)..

#### Kriyat Sh'ma in the Second Temple (Source #1)

##### Source #1: The Order of Readings and Brachot in the Second Temple

A Mishna from Tamid chapter 5 (TB, Brachot 11b).

**"The official said to them: recite one blessing! They recited it and read the Ten Commandments, "Shma", "Vehaya Im Shamo'a", "Vayomer", and blessed the Jewish people with three blessings: Emet Veyatziv, Avodah and the blessing of the Priests/ Birkat Kohanim. And on Shabbat one blessing is added for the benefit of the outgoing Temple guard."**

*Kriyat Sh'ma* has been associated with the Ten Commandments, not only in Sefer Dvarim but also in the Second Temple. **In the Mishna Tamid chapter 5**, there appears a description of **the Ten Commandments followed by reading the paragraphs Sh'ma and Vehaya Im Shamo**. These readings were performed, presumably, out of a scroll with blessings recited before and after the reading, similar to our custom in synagogues today. The reading during *Shacharit* services in the Second Temple included one continuum as follows: The Ten Commandments, *Sh'ma*, *Vehaya Im Shamo*, *Vayomer*, without any difference between reading the Ten Commandments and the three paragraphs of *Sh'ma*. Therefore Rabbi Ba (TJ Brachot 8:1) concluded that "The Ten Commandments are the very core of *Sh'ma*." There is further evidence from the Second Temple period: a set of **Tefillin** was discovered at Qumran, the location of the Judean Desert sect usually called Essenes who dwelt there prior to the destruction of the Second Temple. In the compartment of the forehead of the Tefillin, one parchment included the entire text of the Ten Commandments from Sefer Dvarim together with the *Sh'ma* paragraph continuously. Apparently, the members of the sect understood "these things" to mean that the Ten Commandments must be tied to one's arms and as a sign between one's eyes.

Beyond studying the Mishna and addressing the connection between *Kriyat Sh'ma* and the Ten Commandments, we advise elaborating on the differences between prayer at the Temple and prayer in synagogues today. It is important to understand that the Rabbinical period was a period of formalizing the order of prayers. The Rabbis stood before various options from which they made choices. (See Joseph Heinemann's book: *Prayer in the Periods of the Mishna and Talmud*). By describing the Qumran findings, we can learn of the social and religious **multiculturalism** during this period, as well as the **competitiveness between sects** and more traditional or mainstream groups. This religious rivalry is the historical background which led to the separation of Christianity from Judaism and to the concept of Christianity's argument with Rabbinic Judaism that the laws are no longer binding with perhaps the exception of the Ten Commandments. That dispute finally led to the cancellation of the Jewish custom of reading the Ten Commandments each day. (There is plenty of fascinating material describing the Judean Desert sect and the amazing discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. See Yigal Yadin's books, encyclopedias and of course the internet. Be sure to catch the exhibit at the Israel Museum's Shrine of the Book on your next visit to Jerusalem). The vibrant, dynamic process of change in worship in Eretz Yisrael 2,000 years ago is illustrated nicely by *Kriyat Sh'ma*.

### **Discussion: The Essence of *Kriyat Sh'ma* and its historical context**

Now that we have substantiated the claim that *Kriyat Sh'ma* is connected to the Ten Commandments, we can discuss the following question: **why were the Ten Commandments chosen to be recited every day?** The discussion should include mention of the importance Judaism sees in practical mitzvot and not just belief. In the Temple, worship was not limited to "Hear O Israel Adonai is our God, Adonai is One", it included the Ten "Things" / *Devarim* as well. Thus *Kriyat Sh'ma* does not only deal with mitzvot between people and God as is apparent by its context in the siddur and within its blessings. It also deals with mitzvot between people. The inclusion of the Ten Commandments in *Kriyat Sh'ma* transfers the emphasis when remembering

the Sinai Experience. Rather than internalizing the experience of hearing the Divine voice, we concentrate on directing our lives according to the legal and value content given at Sinai.

Later in the discussion let us ask: **why must this content be repeated every morning and evening, why must it be taught to our children, spoken repeatedly and symbolized in tangible ways?** After all its moral content is neither difficult to understand nor to remember. It is important to stress the tension between understanding, agreeing rationally, and applying values in everyday life. The goal of reciting the Ten Commandments daily is not to demand faith, but it is to educate people to behave according to a specific value system. The danger here is that reciting values as part of prayer will not effect actions after people depart from the synagogue and move on with their daily schedule. At the end of this unit we will explain the function of the mitzvah of *tzitzit* in light of these difficulties.

## Lesson B. *Kriyat Sh'ma* as Essence (Sources #2-4)

### Source #2: The Expanded Version of *Kriyat Sh'ma*

"Rabbi Yehuda son of Zevoda says: Logically the episodes of Balak and Bilam should have been read every day. ... Why should the episode of Balak be read? Rabbi Hunah said: for it mentions lying down and arising.

So why are they *not* read? So as not to burden the public (*Tirchat Hatzibur*).

Rabbi Yossi son of Rabbi Bon said: for it mentions the Exodus from Egypt and the Divine kingdom.

### Source #3: The Decision to Omit the Ten Commandments from *Kriyat Sh'ma*

(TY Brachot 1:5)

Rabbi Ba: From here (the Temple service) we learn that the Ten Commandments are the essence of *Sh'ma*.

Rabbi Matna and Rabbi Shmuel son of Nachman both say: Logically, the Ten Commandments should have been read each day. And why are they *not* read? To prevent the sectarians (Christians) from claiming that the Ten Commandments alone were given to Moshe at Sinai."

### Source #4: Attempts to Revive the Recitation of the Ten Commandments Each Day

(TB Brachot 12a).

Mishnah - "And they read the Ten Commandments, *Sh'ma, Vehaya Im Shamo'a, Vayomer, Emet Veyatziv, Avoda, and Birkat Kohanim*".

Talmud - Rabbi Yehuda quoted Rabbi Shmuel, who said: Even outside the Temple they had also intended to read this order of readings, but it was already cancelled because of the Christians' claims. ...

Rabba son of Bar Hannah intended to institute the reading of the Ten Commandments in Sura (Babylon). But Rav Hisda said to him: it has already been canceled because of the Christians' claims.

Ameimar intended to institute the reading of the Ten Commandments in Nehardea. But Rav Ashi said to them: they have already been cancelled because of the Christians' claims.

Mishnah - "And on Shabbat one blessing is added for the benefit of the outgoing guard".

Talmud - Which blessing? Rabbi Helbo said: the outgoing guard says it to the incoming guard, and it is: God who has placed the Divine name in this house will bring love and fraternity and peace and friendship among you."

After establishing that the Ten Commandments were read on a daily basis, many **questions** arise: Why did we stop reading them? Why were the Ten Commandments chosen to be read in the first place, and not a different paragraph from the Torah? Why did the Rabbis choose one Torah excerpt thus giving it preferred status over other Torah portions? Couldn't that cause a dangerous differentiation between the Ten

Commandments and the entire 613 mitzvot? Could we understand the phrase (from the first paragraph of the Sh'ma) - " these are the words or instructions with which I charge you this day " as referring to all the mitzvot and the entire Torah?

All these questions address the concept of **essence or epitome** of the Torah covenant. The search for the essence is not intended to make the rest of the Torah superfluous, rather it simply identifies a certain part or idea as emblematic of the whole. **Three aspects** of this issue should be addressed:

1. Why is it desirable to condense the Torah and propose an essence?
2. What excerpt should serve as the ultimate essence in your opinion?
3. What are the disadvantages to determining a specific part to serve as the essence (note what caused the cancellation of reading of the Ten Commandments)?

After considering these issues we may be able to form opinions regarding the attempt to "boil down" to the Torah to a bite-size text and the Rabbinical dispute surrounding it.

### **1. Why is it desirable to condense?**

This discussion could begin with **Moshe's** educational difficulty. He is about to repeat the main tenets of the Torah to the new generation prior to his death. His *Mishne Torah* condenses law and national history. If he refrains from giving the abridged version, he will not have enough time to tell it all before he dies, and the listeners will grow weary and confused, no longer able to differentiate the important details from the less significant ones. Any student trying to take notes in class is familiar with this problem: lot's of information, little time/space. Mundane, practical considerations are at the heart of the decision to condense.

The purpose of *Kriyat Sh'ma* is, similarly to Moshe's original challenge, to educate an entire nation that has limited intake abilities and very limited time. ***Kriyat Sh'ma* is then an attempt at condensing the whole of Judaism and addressing its basic principles.** The Rabbis determined that a small portion of the Torah be read, to ensure that value education take place. These core values would be internalized into the heart of every Jew by reciting *Kriyat Sh'ma* twice in a day. In some ways the Rabbis decision to focus on only three paragraphs of the Sh'ma resembles God's choice to make the Ten Commandments stand out, by writing only them on the Tablets, even though many other mitzvot were given to Moshe at that time.

### **A Word of Caution to the Educator of Halachically Observant Students:**

Many observant Jews believe that there exists a danger that if one mitzvah is accentuated it could be a slippery slope leading to arbitrarily choosing what one chooses to observe and one chooses to ignore. Accordingly, a prevalent opinion appearing in Pirkei Avot posits that all mitzvot and all principles in Judaism are equal in value and therefore equal in authority. So you should be aware of the fact that there could be a clash between the goal of this unit - teaching the concept of value condensation and the mitzvot represented by *Kriyat Sh'ma* - and an assumption on the part of some more traditional students that it is forbidden, dangerous or simply mistaken to differentiate and categorize some mitzvot as more important and less so.

Our approach to this problem is to refrain from advocating a position on this question and instead trying to assist the students in understanding both opinions. The dispute is apparent in the historical fact that during the Second Temple period the Ten Commandments were read, a custom which Amoraim in Babylon attempted to reestablish. "Finally" (until another attempt is made), this custom was canceled due to the Christian sectarian claim that **only the Ten Commandments are binding**. The Rabbis understood the educational need to determine the basic principles of Judaism, and there is no harm in that. It is important to all Jews to clarify for themselves what the essence of their Judaism and values are. Nonetheless, **there exists a plausible danger that a person or sect will attempt to determine what the essence of Judaism is in order to exempt themselves from all other mitzvot**. This fear of modern Orthodoxy was realized, in their judgment, in the early Reform movement which identified only the ethical mitzvot – especially the Ten Commandments – as the eternal moral mitzvot that rendered by comparison many of the other mitzvot outdated.

## 2. Which excerpt should serve as the ultimate essence?

Here is another reason for condensing our beliefs and core values::

"Rabbi Yehuda son of Zevuda says: according to the law they should have read the paragraphs concerning **Balak and Bilam** each day. And why are they not read? **So as not to inconvenience the public**" (TY Brachot 1: 5).

It raises a practical problem regarding inconveniencing the public. It also opens the discussion in a more general direction: why limit the reading to only the paragraphs of Sh'ma or the Ten Commandments? Perhaps there exist other paragraphs which capture the essence of the Torah in a better way or merely from a different angle? The reason the episode of Balak was considered for inclusion in *Kriyat Sh'ma* is related to the mention of the morning and evening readings. Our point here is to emphasize that The Rabbis choose, after much deliberation and careful consideration, which paragraphs to include in *Kriyat Sh'ma*. They considered both the content and the nation's ability to consistently read these paragraphs.

### For further discussion:

#### (a) **A Role play: Choosing representative material.**

Introduce the following situation to the students: They are preparing a one-day seminar for non-Jews who would like to become familiar with Judaism. Which sources would they hand out and why? Dealing with choosing an appropriate essence highlights the difficulties encountered by the Rabbis, and the role of *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a condensed reading of the entire Torah given at Sinai.

(b) In TB Makot 23-24 you will find an additional source to enhance the discussion about reducing the mitzvot to minimal essence. The midrash describes the 613 mitzvot which were epitomized first into 11 mitzvot and then three and finally further into one single mitzvah. Discuss.

## 3. What are the disadvantages of determining an essence of Judaism?

After the concept of essence has been clarified we hope some of the students will criticize the idea. Encourage their thoughts and conduct a debate between the students as preparation for studying the texts on the “Claim of the Christians.” To enhance the discussion, you can tell the story (TB Shabbat 31, Sefer HaAggada 158: 15) of the non-Jew who addressed Shamai and then Hillel asking them to summarize Judaism "on one leg". **Hillel accommodated his request, while Shamai blatantly refused. Shamai** ever loyal warns of the dangers of simplistic summary. Any condensation is made at the expense of other mitzvot and discounts the importance of all else. Also, condensations detract from an individual’s ability to determine his or her own essence. When mitzvot are at stake, the question becomes acute. If we claim that the Ten Commandments are the essence of the Torah, it could be understood that people who keep only these have kept the “main thing” and the rest is negligible.

These difficulties reemerge when examining the historical problem of the Jewish-Christian argument regarding the content of *Matan Torah* at Sinai. **Many Christians hold that only the Ten Commandments were given at Sinai and therefore only they are binding.** The rest are additions initiated by Priests (Kohanim) and the Rabbis. Following this claim, some Christians of Jewish origin exempt themselves from the obligation of keeping the rest of the mitzvot in the Torah, claiming that they are insignificant, and not Divine or eternal. The Rabbis decided to cancel the reading of the Ten Commandments each day **because of the Christian's claim that "only those were given to Moshe at Sinai"** (Jerusalem Talmud Brachot 1:5).

Nonetheless, tension remains between the need for condensation of the Torah by reading the Ten Commandments and those fearing misunderstanding and heresy. In Babylon during the Amoraic period, centuries after the destruction of the Second Temple, there was another attempt at reinstating reading the Ten Commandments (TB Brachot 12). It is important to remember that in Babylon there was not a large Christian community, so the claim regarding the Christian argument was not sounded. The danger of understanding the Ten Commandments as the essence which exempts us from the duties of the entire Torah was not relevant. The great Amoraim of Israel too wished to reinstate the ancient tradition, but it was decided to refrain from doing so. In any case, many commentators see *Kriyat Sh'ma* as representing the Ten Commandments. The ramifications of this discussion on Jewish education are far more extensive than the issue of *Kriyat Sh'ma*. The jury is still out regarding the minimal requirements for Jewish studies curriculums for various Jewish schools (Just Torah? Mishna too? Jewish thought? Which books? Which values?).

## Lesson C - Kriyat Sh'ma as representing the Ten Commandments (Sources #5-8)

### Source #5: Kriyat Sh'ma and The Ten Commandments

(TY Brachot 1:5).

Rabbi Simon: "*You shall study it night and day.*"

Question: Why in particular are these two paragraphs (*Shma* and *Vehaya Im Shamo*) read each day?

Answer: Rabbi Simon said: For they mention laying down and rising up.

Rabbi Levy said: For the Ten Commandments are included in them.

### Source #6: Links between Kriyat Sh'ma and The Ten Commandments

TY Brachot 1:5

1- *I the Lord am your God* – "*Hear, O Israel, Adonai is our God.*"

2- *You shall have no other gods besides Me* – "*Adonai is One/Alone.*"

3- *You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord your God* – "*You shall love the*

Lord your God." Someone who loves a king does not swear falsely upon his name.

4- *Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy* – "*so that you shall remember.*"

5- *Honor your father and your mother* – "*so that you and your children will live long lives.*"

6- *You shall not murder* – "*and you will soon perish.*" One who kills is killed.

7- *You shall not commit adultery* – "*You shall not follow your hearts and eyes.*"

Rabbi Levy said: the heart and eyes are like two procurers of sin, as is written in Proverbs: "*Son, give me your heart and your eyes shall become jealous through me*". God said: if you devote your heart and eyes to me than I know you are mine.

8- *You shall not steal* – "*You shall gather in your new grain*" - not the grain of your fellow.

9- *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor* – "*I am Adonai your God*" and it also says "*Adonai the Lord is truth.*"

What is truth? Rabbi Levy said - God said: if you bear false witness against a friend, I find you as guilty as if you had testified that it was not I who created the heavens and the earth.

10- *You shall not crave your neighbor's house* - inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. Your doorposts, not that of your fellow's.

### Source #7 The Vilna Gaon,

Lithuania 18<sup>th</sup> century. Commentary on the Siddur;

"Teach them diligently to your children" - parallels "*You shall not murder*", like one who does not teach one's child Torah - it is as if he killed him."

Source #8 Rabbi David Abudraham, Spain 14<sup>th</sup> century,

"Here you have heard the First Commandment (Exodus 20: 2) "*I Adonai am your God*", and you affirmed God as your sovereign when you by replied (Exodus 24, 7) "*All that the Lord has spoken we will faithfully do.*" Therefore "*Hear O Israel Adonai is our God*" means that God does everything, God is our God, and it is to God that we turn and from God whom we ask for our needs, for Adonai is God our Lord.

The Third Commandment (Exodus 20;7) "*You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord your God*" is parallel to "and you shall love the Lord your God." for someone who loves the King does not swear falsely by God's name. And it says "with all your heart" for love depends on the heart, and oaths are taken on things known to the heart and hidden from the eye. As is written (Zecharia 8:17) "And do not contrive evil against one another, and do not love perjury, because all those things I hate declares the Lord." this teaches us that false oaths contain hatred and not love. True oaths contain love, as is written "you shall hold fast to Adonai, and by God's name shall you swear"(Deuteronomy 10:20) and "Being strongly drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob, and in love with the maiden"(Genesis 34:3).

The Fourth Commandment (Deuteronomy 5: 12) "*Observe the Shabbat day and keep it holy*" is parallel to "Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day", and it is written (Exodus 16:25) "for today is God's Shabbat" meaning observe that which I have commanded you regarding honoring the day, it is destined to be the holy Shabbat since the days of Creation (which is derived by applying the method of *gezeira shava*), and on Shabbat the Torah was given. (TB Shabbat 87a).

The Fifth Commandment (Exodus 20:12) "*Honor your father and your mother*" is parallel to "impress them upon your children", for you should teach them the mitzvahh of the Torah to respect their father and mother and implant it in their hearts from a young age and then they will remember it well into adulthood. And what of "Recite them when you stay at home"? It is parallel to (Exodus 20: 12) "that you may long endure", meaning, when your children see you respecting your elder parents in your home, they will mirror your behavior and respect you.

The Sixth Commandment (Exodus 20: 13) "*You shall not murder*" is parallel to "and when you are away," for most of the murders occur on the road. The prophet writes (Hosea 6: 9): "like the ambush of bandits who murder on the road to Shechem," to inform you that if you fear God when you travel the roads you will not be killed.

The Seventh Commandment (Exodus 20, 13) "*You shall not commit adultery*" is parallel to "when you lie down." Thus it is written there (in Leviticus, 20, regarding incest): "if a man lies with a woman" to remind you upon lying down to refrain from forbidden relations.

The Eighth Commandment "*You shall not steal*" is parallel to "bind them as a sign on your hand" so that you do not steal with them.

The Ninth Commandment "*You shall not bear false witness*" is parallel to "let them serve as a sign on your forehead" so that you do not testify to anything other than that which you have seen.

The Tenth Commandment (Exodus 20, 17) "*You shall not crave your neighbor's house*" is parallel to "inscribe them on the doorposts of *your* house" and not of your fellow person, "and on your gates", and not on your fellow person's gates.

The meaning of *Kriyat Sh'ma* remains unclear after the decision to cancel the reading of the Ten Commandments as an integral part of it. What did the Rabbis want us to concentrate on when reciting the phrase "take to heart these words or instructions"? What is the importance of reciting and repeating *Kriyat Sh'ma* without the Ten Commandments context? Despite the cancellation of the reading of the Ten Commandments, many Rabbis began to teach that the three paragraphs of *Sh'ma* are meant to express the ideas and values of the Ten Commandments. Thus they succeeded in circumventing the cancellation of the recitation of the Ten Commandments without opening themselves up to the Christian critique.

The goal of this lesson is to show that *Kriyat Sh'ma* is still treated as a continuation of the Ten Commandments, in content and meaning as well as archeologically and historically. Rabbinical midrashim attest to the vast relationship between *Kriyat Sh'ma* and the Ten Commandments, enhancing the simplicity of the *pshat*. Truly understanding *Kriyat Sh'ma* implies going beyond the mere verbal meanings. Perhaps the students could be encouraged to seek hints of the Ten Commandments inside the paragraphs of *Kriyat Sh'ma* prior to learning the Rabbinical midrashim.

In the Talmud Yerushalmi they ask: "why do we read two paragraphs ("*Shma*" and "*Vehaya Im Shamo*") each day? Rabbi Levi said: "**because the Ten Commandments are included in them**". The Talmud Yerushalmi suggest that oblique references to the Ten Commandments do appear in the two first paragraphs of *Kriyat Sh'ma*. An additional midrash explicates how all the Ten Commandments are included in *Kriyat Sh'ma*. In the Spanish Abudraham commentary on the siddur, a similar midrash appears, weaving the Ten Commandments into all three paragraphs of *Kriyat Sh'ma*. This version of the *Sh'ma* interspersed with the Ten Commandments is often printed in contemporary Sephardi siddurim.

## Lesson D - A Reminder of the Ten Commandments (sources #9-12)

### Comparing the Paragraph about *Tzitzit* and the Opening Paragraphs of *Sh'ma* (sources #9-10)

#### Source #9 "So that you Remember" - Rashi on Parashat *Tzitzit* (Numbers15)

"Instruct them to make for themselves *Tzitzit* " - named for the tassels hanging from its corner, like (Ezekiel 8) that says "and God took me by the *Tzitzit* of my hair on my head".

Another possibility. *Tzitzit* is named based on the verse "look at it" in *Kriyat Sh'ma* and in (Song of Songs 2) "*Matziz* / Peering through the lattice."

#### Source #10 "Thus you shall be reminded" - TB Menachot 43, p.2.

"Look at it and recall all the commandments" – because seeing leads to remembering, and remembering leads to doing.

In this lesson we shall elaborate on the concept of *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a daily verbal “reminder” (mnemonic) to observe the mitzvot and to direct everyday behavior in accordance with specific value-principles. The verbal reminder is similar in function to the symbolic one – *Tzitzit*. **We begin by comparing the first and third paragraphs of *Kriyat Sh'ma*.**

In these two paragraphs the educational values are conveyed  **vividly by means of tangible articles**. In the *Sh'ma* paragraph there are both the mitzvah of "Recite them...when you lie down and when you get up" and the mitzvot of symbolization by means of Mezuzah and Tefillin. In the paragraph of *Vayomer*, (also called *Parshat Tzitzit*) we are commanded to symbolize all the mitzvot by tying fringes on the corner of **every** square garment (not only the Tallit used in the synagogue or during davening). Since the Ten Commandments deal with directing people's behavior everywhere and at all times, the Torah commands that the *tzitzit* should be worn and seen by Jews everywhere, all the time (or at least during the day when natural light makes them more visible). These tangible symbols are there to remind us of two equally important things: to observe mitzvot and to refrain from succumbing to sinful desires. *Tzitzit* are like tying a string around our finger or using any other kind of visual reminder so that we don't forget something important (ask the students to give other examples of mnemonic like this and rate their effectiveness).

When studying the paragraph of *tzitzit* it is important **to differentiate between means and end**. The *tzitzit* is a tangible means and a functional reminder of the end: observing mitzvot. "Look at it and recall all the commandments of the Lord and observe them". *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a repetition of the Ten Commandments is also a reminder directing people to observe mitzvot all day long. But there is **an important difference between the mitzvah of *tzitzit* and *Kriyat Sh'ma* despite the common goal of encouraging value oriented behavior by people**: *Kriyat Sh'ma* appeals to people's minds and understanding, while the *tzitzit* is directed towards people's senses. *Kriyat Sh'ma* is based on our sense of hearing. *Tzitzit* is experienced through sight.

*Kriyat Sh'ma* comprises a study session. *Kriyat Sh'ma* is located at the beginning and end of each day in a short time-out from all activities. *Tzitzit* reminds people of values busy with daily activities. It is ready to flash them a red warning sign as they near a dangerous area of attraction to wrongdoing. Rashi explains the word "*tzitzit*" to mean something which affects the senses of sight and touch. "And instruct them to make for themselves fringes" - named for the fringes hanging from the garment, as in "God took me by the hair of my head" (Ezekiel 8). Or another explanation: *tzitzit* - named for "look at it" as in "Peering through the lattice" (Song of Songs 2).

Perhaps the main difference is that *Kriyat Sh'ma* is meant to instill values into the heart as in "Take to heart these instructions." **If the values are internalized**, they then are applied in the everyday behavior of Jews. This of course does not guarantee a defence against the enticements of the outside world. *Tzitzit*, on the other hand, **is an external symbol** to warn us to beware of our inclinations (the heart) from leading us astray in the wrong direction in case the values were not fully internalized ("*so that you do not follow your heart and eyes in your lustful urge*"). Rashi explains the paragraph of *tzitzit* in light of its location in the Torah adjacent to the story of the spies (Numbers 13-14): "So that you do not *follow* your heart" is the same term used for "to *spy out* the land"(Numbers 13). The heart and eyes serve as the body's spies scouting out things of value to be conquered, so they are procurers of desires and often of sinful desires. "The eye sees, the heart lusts and the body commits the sin," says Rashi. In *Kriyat Sh'ma*, recited while wearing *Tzitzit* and *Tefilin*, the intellectual appeal and the tangible reminder are complementary. It would be fair to assume that all people are in need of both types of reminders.

**In summary**, in this short study of the paragraph of *tzitzit* it is important to emphasize the common purpose of *tzitzit*, *tefillin*, *mezuzah* and morning and evening *Kriyat Sh'ma*. Their function is to **infuse daily life with values and reminders of the mitzvot and not to separate between everyday life and the sacred aspects of life, between mundane everyday moments and the historical one-time national moments such as Matan Torah.**

In Unit II the emphasis was placed upon the attempt to recreate the **drama** of the Sinai Experience daily. Here we stress the need for **practical daily reminders** in observing mitzvot, so the pragmatic not the theatrical is central in how we recite the Sh'ma. There exists no presumption that Jews will feel elated each day as if they had heard God's living words. The importance of daily repetition of *Matan Torah* in this context is due to its affect on behavior rather than its emotive or even its dogmatic content. Not the confession of faith in one God but the list of the Ten Commandments hidden in *Kriyat Sh'ma* explains why each day we repeat what is so well-known. Generally people do not feel they are going through crisis of faith every morning and evening so that cannot be the main point of the recitation. Rather, **the million dollar question is: do we live according to the values in which we believe?** This problem requires constant repetition of familiar passages about the mitzvot even it is boring ritual.

Maimonides (Rambam) explains (in Hilkhos Mezuzah 6:13, based on a Rabbinical midrash from Talmud Menachos 43b) that the tangible symbols mentioned in *Kriyat Sh'ma* - *mezuzah*, *tefillin* and *tzitzit* - are

**reminders**, meant to save people from sin. We all fail to behave in accordance with our value system because of the human trait of unintentional forgetfulness, intentional repression of promises and commitments made, Thus we must be surrounded by “reminders.”

### A King's Reminders (Sources #11-12)

#### Source #11: The Torah Reading by a King Deuteronomy 17: 14-20

#### Source #12: Two Torahs. One Portable, One Stationary

TB Sanhedrin 21.

"The sovereign shall write a copy (*Mishna Torah*) of this Teaching (a Torah written for him) on a scroll" (Deuteronomy 17:18),

The sovereign writes two Torahs for himself, one to take with him and a second that is stored in his library. The one which escorts him on his travels becomes a kind of talisman, and he holds it on his arm, as is written (Psalms, 17:8) "I am ever mindful of the Lord's presence, He is at my right hand, I shall never be shaken."

The Geonim were in disagreement regarding the content of the talisman (*Kamea*).

Rav Nachshon Gaon says: The king writes only the Ten Commandments on the talisman.

Other Geonim - The king writes all 613 mitzvot on the talisman.

One can see a parallel to the daily *Kriyat Sh'ma* in the Torah reading by the king as described in **Deuteronomy 17, 14-20**. The king holds great power and thus it is important to regulate his usage of it by means of a **guiding value system** so that he does not act on his personal desires and pride. Kings usually act in a pragmatic, managerial way and can easily forget theoretical principles and ethical and religious restraints. Therefore the king is commanded to write a Torah or *Mishne Torah* (the Book of Deuteronomy or parts of it). "**Let it remain with him and let him read in it all his life**". But the king does not have the time to study in a regular daily way being entrusted with governing, judging and conducting war. How can this dilemma be resolved?

The Mishna's solution (Mishna Sanhedrin 2:4) to **the king's educational problem** is **writing** an entire Torah once in his life and "**toting it around**" everywhere. Writing is a tangible form of study, a way of taking ownership over the content in a concrete way. Taking the Torah scroll everywhere is a reminder of what has been studied and what he wrote himself. There is a discussion in the Gemara (TB Sanhedrin 21) regarding the question: how can a king carry a whole Torah scroll around with him all the time? The solution: writing a "*Mishne*" Torah, which can be interpreted as two Torah scrolls of which one is appropriate for palace use and the other for travel. The Rabbis differentiate between **writing** which requires scholastic concentration and **taking** or carrying as a kind of reminder, between an entire Torah scroll which remains at home for times of leisure when the king can study at ease, and a Torah made as a kind of talisman to be placed upon the

king's arm as is written "I am ever mindful of the Lord's presence, He is at my right hand, I shall never be shaken."

Talmud commentators disputed over what was written in the traveling Torah which was like a talisman or amulet. Rav Nachshon Gaon posited that it had only **the Ten Commandments** written inside, while other Geonim held that it included **a listing of the Torah's 613 mitzvot**.

#### **Additional activities**

(1) In order to bring home the difference between a reminder comprised of words versus a reminder comprised of actual symbols: the students can be divided into two groups each of which chooses one of the two types of reminders (words or symbols) to teach younger children to refrain from destroying school property and equipment (the mitzvah of Bal Tashchit).

(2) As an art project, they can create a talisman or visit museums or Judaica websites which feature micro-caligraphy .

### **Summary of Unit III**

The major points of this unit, *Kriyat Sh'ma* and the Ten Commandments, can be summarized into four categories:

(One) ***Kriyat Sh'ma* as a daily reading is meant to educate people about the basic principles that should guide their behavior.** This morning and evening recitation in an abridged form, concise in content and time consumption, creates a framework for a day of activity in which we deal with practical ethical issues. Whether we perceive daily life as laden with sinful opportunities, or as presenting difficult yet interesting challenges for Jews who try to act morally. No matter the challenge, *Kriyat Sh'ma* is there to provide **a moral starting point and anchor**. The comparison to the Ten Commandments shows that *Kriyat Sh'ma* does not deal solely with issues of belief but with behavioral ones too. Thus in the context of this unit, the meaning of *Kriyat Sh'ma* is to be found in its ability to create moral orientation for practice and application in daily life.

(Two) Since *Kriyat Sh'ma* is a condensed framework for opening and closing a day of activity, it must be **allocated concise content. Twice a day Jews must clarify for themselves their basic values by which they live.** The precise content of this summary "essence" may be discussed and disputed but the very idea of repetition and condensation seems undeniably important, both morally and intellectually.

(Three) *Kriyat Sh'ma* is meant to instill values into everyday life and to apply those values both by regular readings and **tangible symbols**. For the **king** (Deuteronomy 17), his form of *Kriyat Sh'ma* so to speak is to read from his own personal Torah scroll. This is the sovereign's tangible symbol, similar to *Tefillin* or *Tzitzit* in that he actually carries or wears the Torah himself as a talisman on his arm. The Rabbis decided that the king's writing of his own Sefer Torah is also an obligation for every Jew though few actually observe this mitzvah. Still the idea is that we are all like the king in our obligation to rule ourselves by the Torah and that we all need to recite at least a few paragraphs of *Sh'ma* (from Deuteronomy also called *Mishne Torah*) with the midrash commentary that they include the Ten Commandments. Our tangible symbols or reminders are the *mezuzah, tefillin and tzitzit*, explicitly mentioned in these paragraphs of *Sh'ma*.

(Four) There exists a danger that if only the summary essence and reminders are dealt with and observed, people might forget the importance of the rest of the Torah and all the other complex aspects included in it. The justification for condensation into several short paragraphs and a mere ten important mitzvot is based on the practical educational difficulty of limited time, space and span of attention. The short reminder is meant to encourage Jews to study more extensively and apply the principles in their behavior more rigorously. (As Hillel said to the gentile interested in conversion: *zil ugmar* -Now go and continue the learning to complete the explication of this initial axiom). **The Torah must not be reduced into a limited, simplistic mantra. It is complex and extensive. Education cannot rely on reminders alone.**

In the following unit we will see that *Kriyat Sh'ma* is not just an essence of the main tenets of the Torah, it is one example of Torah study devoted to a certain excerpt, based on the premise that the entire Torah is most worthy of study, the more the better. *Kriyat Sh'ma* not only prepares Jews for their daily **life activities**, it encourages them to **lead a life of scholastics**.

# Sources and Guideline Questions

## Unit I. *Kriyat Sh'ma* - Is it a Prayer?

### Lesson A - General Introduction:

*Tefillah*, Petitional Prayer, versus *Kriyat Sh'ma*

### Lesson B – Towards a Definition of the Concept of Prayer

Source: *Kriyat Sh'ma* and its blessings

## Kriyat Sh'ma and Shemone Esrei from Siddur

## Unit II. The First Paragraph of "*Sh'ma*" in its Sefer Dvarim Context

### Introduction

### Unit Goals

### Sources and Guiding Questions

### Source Guide:

### Lesson A - The Concept of Mishne Torah

Source #1 - Deuteronomy chapters 4-6

Source #2 - Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, on "Hearing" (*Shmiah*)

### Lesson B - A Verbal Analysis of the word "*Sh'ma*" in its Sefer Dvarim Context

Source #3 - various commentaries on the word "Hear" (*Sh'ma*). Rabbi David (14<sup>th</sup> century Spain), author of the *Aburdarham* commentary on the siddur.

### Lesson C – “In each generation one must see oneself as if”

Source #4 - A Midrash on "*and make them known to your children*"  
(Deuteronomy 4, 9), TB: Brachot, 22a

Source #5 - TB Brachot 21b

Source #6 - Passover Haggadah

Source #7 - A Midrash on "*with which I charge you this day*" (Deut. 6, 6).

Source #8 - Halachot regarding *Kriyat Sh'ma*.

Aruch Hashulchan, Orach Hachayim, chapter 61.

**UNIT II. SOURCES and Guideline Questions:**  
**The First Paragraph of the Sh'ma in Its *Sefer Dvarim* Context**

**Source #1: Deuteronomy 4-6**

Questions

1. In chapter 4 Moshe speaks before the members of the new generation who are about to enter Israel. Read chapter 4: 8. How does Moshe perceive his role in relation to the Jewish people and what is his main message?
2. In Chapter 4: 9-16 Moshe describes the Sinai Experience in detail and to convince the next generation to abide by the mitzvot "but make them known unto your children and your children's children." Which details of the Sinai Experience does Moshe emphasize and why? Why do you think it is important to Moshe, in addition to repeating the content of the covenant, to describe the experiential side of the Sinai Experience?
3. Read chapter 4, 32-36. What was special about the Sinai Experience? What is the significance of this unique characteristic?
4. The root of the Hebrew word Sh'ma, to hear, appears not only in the Sh'ma *Yisrael* paragraph but also in many forms throughout Deuteronomy 4-6. Understanding the word in its various conjugations is the key to understanding the paragraph Sh'ma *Yisrael* in its context. Compile a list of the different uses of the word Sh'ma in these paragraphs and divide them into categories.
5. In light of the Deuteronomy 4-6 context and the various meanings of the Sh'ma root, how do you understand the opening of the Sh'ma *Yisrael* paragraph? Why do you suppose Moshe chose this special phrase?

**Source #2: Rabbi S. R. Hirsch on *Shmiah* - Hearing and the Oral Tradition**

(Germany, late 19<sup>th</sup> century, founder of Modern Orthodoxy, quoted in *Netiv Binah* by Rabbi Jacobson from commentary on Deuteronomy 4:35, page 79).

**"Moshe could only have told one generation that they learned of the Divine essence by means of actual seeing and hearing. Therefore the Torah states (Deuteronomy 4: 35) "You saw and came to know that the Adonai is the Lord, and no one else." The generation who participated in the Exodus from Egypt and some of their offspring from the next generation beheld actual Divine intervention when God cast off the shackles of Egyptian slavery. They actually heard, that one and only time in history, when God spoke to the people. All future generations base their belief on *shmiah* – oral tradition.... Our knowledge of God, the blessed One, is based on this concept of hearing and this second-hand testimony."**

- 1) According to Rabbi Hirsch, what is the difference between the Sinai Experience of the members of Moshe's generation and our experience?

- 2) What is the importance of *shmiah* to the passing on of a tradition? What are the disadvantages of *shmiah*?
- 3) How can the concepts of *Oral Torah* and *Sh'ma Yisrael* be understood in light of Rabbi Hirsch's explanation?

### **Source #3: David Abudraham – Three Understandings of *Sh'ma***

(Spain, 14<sup>th</sup> century)

*Sh'ma* can be understood to concern three interrelated consecutive issues.

(4) The first is the voice which we perceive by the sense of hearing, like "And Jethro heard" (Exodus 18, 1).

(5) The second follows the first and means "understanding," as in "you will be exiled to a nation whose tongue you shall not understand" (Deuteronomy 28: 43).

(6) The third builds on "understanding" and goes beyond it to "acceptance"[and obedience], as in "you shall listen diligently" (Deuteronomy 11: 13).

All three senses are present in *Sh'ma*, as it is a mitzvah for every Jew to *hear* about it, to *understand* it and then to know that our God is the one and only God and to *accept* upon ourselves the yoke of responsibility of the Divine kingdom.

- 1) Rabbi David provides three meanings in the Tanakh for the word *Sh'ma*. Do these meanings also appear in Deuteronomy chapters 4-6? Give examples.
- 2) How does each meaning of the word *Sh'ma* clarify the significance of the verse *Sh'ma Yisrael*?
- 3) Which meaning of *Sh'ma Yisrael* do you find most suitable? Why?

### **Source #4: Midrash on the verse - "Make them known to your children and your children's children."** (Deuteronomy 4: 9-10), TB Brachot 22, TB Brachot 71

"*Make them known to your children and your children's children*" is followed afterwards in the Torah by "*On the day you stood before Adonai your God at Horev (Mount Sinai).*" So we reason: Just as in the latter verse you stood in fear, respect, and shuddering in awe, so here when teaching your children you should do so in an atmosphere of fear, respect, and trembling in awe.

### **Source #5: TB Brachot 21, 72**

Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi said: Anyone who teaches one's child Torah, is considered as if the child received it on Mount Horev, as is written "*Make them known to your children and thy children's children*", and then later on "*On the day you stood before Adonai your God at Horev (Mount Sinai).*"

- 1) Moshe commands the Jewish people to announce what took place at the Sinai Experience and retell it to every generation. The Rabbis have connected this announcement with the concept "today" of the reception

of the Torah at Sinai. In light of these midrashic sources, what is the experiential content of the announcement?

- 2) In what way is this announcement supposed to affect both the people sounding it and listening to it respectively?

### **Source #6: The Passover Haggadah**

**In every generation, you must see yourself as if you participated in the Exodus from Egypt. For God not only redeemed our ancestors, but God redeemed us too. As it says in the Torah: "*God took us out of there in order to bring us and give us the land which God had promised our ancestors.*" (Deuteronomy 6:23)**

- 1) According to the Rabbis who designed the Hagaddah, what is the experiential content of the Hagaddah reading meant to include?
- 2) What do the Hagaddah and the midrash texts on the Sinai experience have in common?
- 3) In light of this educational approach implemented by The Rabbis, what could be the role of reading the paragraph Sh'ma every day?

### **Source #7: Midrash on "*which I command you today*" (Deuteronomy 6: 6) - Sifrei**

**"Which I command you today" - so that they should not be perceived by you as an old monarchical decree, but rather as a new monarchical decree that all hurry to read."**

### **Source #8: Laws of *Kriyat Sh'ma* (Aruch HaShulchan, Orach Haim, 61)**

**"And each day (*Kriyat Sh'ma*) should be as a novelty, as something that has not yet been heard, so one is most fond of it".**

- 1) Read the paragraph Sh'ma. What does "today" (HaYom) mean in its Deuteronomy context?
- 2) How did the Rabbis understand the commandment of "today"?
- 3) To what extent do you find it possible to recreate the Sinai Experience by means of *Kriyat Sh'ma*? Explain.

What might prevent us from being able to re-create the Sinai Experience?

## **Unit III. The Historical Connection between Kriyat Sh'ma and the Ten Commandments**

### **Sources with Guideline Questions**

#### **Lesson A - Kriyat Sh'ma and the Ten Commandments**

Source #1 - The order of readings in the Second Temple  
(Mishna, Tractate Tamid 5.;TB Brachot 11b)

#### **Lesson B - Kriyat Sh'ma as the Essence of Judaism**

Source #2 - The comprehensive version of Kriyat Sh'ma (TY Brachot 1,5).

Source #3 - The omission of the Ten Commandments from Kriyat Sh'ma  
(TY Brachot 1:5).

Source #4 - The attempt to renew the daily reading of the Ten Commandments  
(TB Brachot 12a).

#### **Lesson C - Kriyat Sh'ma as representing the Ten Commandments**

Source #5 - The commentary connection between Kriyat Sh'ma and the Ten  
Commandments (TY Brachot 1:5)

Source #6 - TY Brachot 1:5

Source #7 - Rabbi David (14<sup>th</sup> century Spain), author of the *Aburdarham*  
commentary on the siddur

Source #8 - The Vilna Gaon (Lithuania, 18<sup>th</sup> century), commentary on the  
siddur

#### **Lesson D - A Practical Reminder (Mnemonic) of the Ten Commandments**

Source #9 - "*Thus you shall be reminded*," the paragraph of tzitzit.  
Rashi's commentary (Numbers, 15).

Source #10 - "*Thus you shall be reminded*" (TB: Menachot 43b)

Source #11 - the daily Torah reading by the king (Deuteronomy 17: 14-20).

Source #12 - Two Torahs (TB Sanhedrin 21, Geonim commentary).

### **III. SOURCES and Guideline Questions**

#### **The Historical Connection between *Kriyat Sh'ma* and the Ten Commandments**

##### **Source #1: The Order of Readings and Brachot in the Second Temple**

A Mishna from Tamid chapter 5 (TB, Brachot 11b).

**"The official said to them: recite one blessing! They recited it and read the Ten Commandments, "*Shma*", "*Vehaya Im Shamo*", "*Vayomer*", and blessed the Jewish people with three blessings: *Emet Veyatziv*, *Avodah* and the blessing of the Priests/ *Birkat Kohanim*.**

**And on Shabbat one blessing is added for the benefit of the outgoing Temple guard."**

1. What are the differences between the order of prayers which were customary in the time of the Second Temple and our contemporary siddur?
2. What was read during the Second Temple period together with the three paragraphs of Sh'ma? Why?
3. How could we explain the Sh'ma paragraph phrase "these instructions" based on the order of readings in the Temple/*Beit Hamikdash*?

##### **Source #2: The Expanded Version of *Kriyat Sh'ma***

**"Rabbi Yehuda son of Zevoda says: Logically the episodes of Balak and Bilam should have been read every day. ... Why should the episode of Balak be read? Rabbi Hunah said: for it mentions lying down and arising.**

**So why are they *not* read? So as not to burden the public (*Tirchat Hatzibur*).**

**Rabbi Yossi son of Rabbi Bon said: for it mentions the Exodus from Egypt and the Divine kingdom.**

1. Why do you suppose it was perceived desirable to read the story of Balak every morning?
2. Why do you think Torah portions should be read each morning?
3. What were the considerations leading to the decision to refrain from reading the Balak episode each morning? What is your opinion of such a claim when determining the order and framework of prayers?

##### **Source #3: The Decision to Omit the Ten Commandments from *Kriyat Sh'ma***

(TY Brachot 1:5)

**Rabbi Ba: From here (the Temple service) we learn that the Ten Commandments are the essence of Sh'ma.**

**Rabbi Matna and Rabbi Shmuel son of Nachman both say: Logically, the Ten Commandments should have been read each day. And why are they *not* read? To prevent the sectarians (Christians) from claiming that the Ten Commandments alone were given to Moshe at Sinai."**

1. What is the essence of the Sh'ma according to Rabbi Ba? Was that your impression upon reading the paragraphs of Sh'ma? Why? Why not?

2. The Christians ("Minim") are apparently Jews who converted to Christianity and continued to argue with Jews over the essence of the Torah. How can their words be understood? What is the danger in their claim?
3. How could a change in the order of *Kriyat Sh'ma* serve as a response to the Christians and strengthen the Jews' claim? Do you see a need to consider the opinion of the Christians when determining the order of our prayers?

#### **Source #4: Attempts to Revive the Recitation of the Ten Commandments Each Day**

(TB Brachot 12a).

**Mishnah - "And they read the Ten Commandments, Sh'ma, Vehaya Im Shamo, Vayomer, Emet Veyatziv, Avoda, and Birkat Kohanim".**

**Talmud - Rabbi Yehuda quoted Rabbi Shmuel, who said: Even outside the Temple they had also intended to read this order of readings, but it was already cancelled because of the Christians' claims. ...**

**Rabba son of Bar Hannah intended to institute the reading of the Ten Commandments in Sura (Babylon). But Rav Hisda said to him: it has already been canceled because of the Christians' claims.**

**Ameimar intended to institute the reading of the Ten Commandments in Nehardea. But Rav Ashi said to them: they have already been cancelled because of the Christians' claims.**

**Mishnah - "And on Shabbat one blessing is added for the benefit of the outgoing guard".**

**Talmud - Which blessing? Rabbi Helbo said: the outgoing guard says it to the incoming guard, and it is: God who has placed the Divine name in this house will bring love and fraternity and peace and friendship among you."**

- 1) After the cancellation of the custom of reading the Ten Commandments in the Temple some Rabbis still wished to read them in synagogues services outside the Temple. They tried to institute the reading of the Ten Commandments in synagogues in Babylon, Sura and Nehardea. Why do you think they wished to renew the custom of reading the Ten Commandments despite the Christians' claims?
- 2) Do you think that in Babylon during the Amoraic period - when there were few Christians - there was a legitimate reason not to renew the reading of the Ten Commandments? Explain. If it was in your authority to make the decision, would you renew the custom today? For what reasons?

#### **Source #5: Kriyat Sh'ma and The Ten Commandments**

(TY Brachot 1:5).

**Rabbi Simon: "You shall study it night and day."**

**Question: Why in particular are these two paragraphs (*Shma* and *Vehaya Im Shamo*) read each day?**

**Answer: Rabbi Simon said: For they mention laying down and rising up.**

**Rabbi Levy said: For the Ten Commandments are included in them.**

## Source #6: Links between *Kriyat Sh'ma* and The Ten Commandments

TY Brachot 1:5

1- *I the Lord am your God* – “*Hear, O Israel, Adonai is our God.*”

2- *You shall have no other gods besides Me* – “*Adonai is One/Alone.*”

3- *You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord your God* – “*You shall love the Lord your God.*” Someone who loves a king does not swear falsely upon his name.

4- *Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy* – “*so that you shall remember.*”

5- *Honor your father and your mother* – “*so that you and your children will live long lives.*”

6- *You shall not murder* – “*and you will soon perish.*” One who kills is killed.

7- *You shall not commit adultery* – “*You shall not follow your hearts and eyes.*”

Rabbi Levy said: the heart and eyes are like two procurers of sin, as is written in Proverbs: "Son, give me your heart and your eyes shall become jealous through me". God said: if you devote your heart and eyes to me than I know you are mine.

8- *You shall not steal* – “*You shall gather in your new grain*” - not the grain of your fellow.

9- *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor* – “*I am Adonai your God*” and it also says "Adonai the Lord is truth."

What is truth? Rabbi Levy said - God said: if you bear false witness against a friend, I find you as guilty as if you had testified that it was not I who created the heavens and the earth.

10- *You shall not crave your neighbor's house* - inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. Your doorposts, not that of your fellow's.

## Source #7 The Vilna Gaon,

Lithuania 18<sup>th</sup> century. Commentary on the Siddur:

"Teach them diligently to your children" - parallels "*You shall not murder*", like one who does not teach one's child Torah - it is as if he killed him."

- 1) Even after the cancellation of the daily reading of the Ten Commandments as part of what we now call the three paragraphs of Sh'ma, the Rabbis and medieval scholars continued to search for hints of the Ten Commandments in the paragraphs of Sh'ma. In which paragraphs of Sh'ma can the Ten Commandments be found?
- 2) What do you think stands to be gained by indirectly recalling the Ten Commandments every day? Explain.

**Source #8 Rabbi David Abudraham, Spain 14<sup>th</sup> century,**

"Here you have heard the First Commandment (Exodus 20: 2) "I Adonai am your God", and you affirmed God as your sovereign when you by replied (Exodus 24, 7) "All that the Lord has spoken we will faithfully do." Therefore "Hear O Israel Adonai is our God" means that God does everything, God is our God, and it is to God that we turn and from God whom we ask for our needs, for Adonai is God our Lord.

The Third Commandment (Exodus 20;7) "*You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord your God*" is parallel to "and you shall love the Lord your God." for someone who loves the King does not swear falsely by God's name. And it says "with all your heart" for love depends on the heart, and oaths are taken on things known to the heart and hidden from the eye. As is written (Zecharia 8:17) "And do not contrive evil against one another, and do not love perjury, because all those things I hate declares the Lord." this teaches us that false oaths contain hatred and not love. True oaths contain love, as is written "you shall hold fast to Adonai, and by God's name shall you swear"(Deuteronomy 10:20) and "Being strongly drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob, and in love with the maiden"(Genesis 34:3).

The Fourth Commandment (Deuteronomy 5: 12) "*Observe the Shabbat day and keep it holy*" is parallel to "Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day", and it is written (Exodus 16:25) "for today is God's Shabbat" meaning observe that which I have commanded you regarding honoring the day, it is destined to be the holy Shabbat since the days of Creation (which is derived by applying the method of *gezeira shava*), and on Shabbat the Torah was given. (TB Shabbat 87a).

The Fifth Commandment (Exodus 20:12) "*Honor your father and your mother*" is parallel to "impress them upon your children", for you should teach them the mitzvah of the Torah to respect their father and mother and implant it in their hearts from a young age and then they will remember it well into adulthood. And what of "Recite them when you stay at home"? It is parallel to (Exodus 20: 12) "that you may long endure", meaning, when your children see you respecting your elder parents in your home, they will mirror your behavior and respect you.

The Sixth Commandment (Exodus 20: 13) "*You shall not murder*" is parallel to "and when you are away," for most of the murders occur on the road. The prophet writes (Hosea 6: 9): "like the ambush of bandits who murder on the road to Shechem," to inform you that if you fear God when you travel the roads you will not be killed.

The Seventh Commandment (Exodus 20, 13) "*You shall not commit adultery*" is parallel to "when you lie down." Thus it is written there (in Leviticus, 20, regarding incest): "if a man lies with a woman" to remind you upon lying down to refrain from forbidden relations.

**The Eighth Commandment "You shall not steal" is parallel to "bind them as a sign on your hand" so that you do not steal with them.**

**The Ninth Commandment "You shall not bear false witness" is parallel to "let them serve as a sign on your forehead" so that you do not testify to anything other than that which you have seen.**

**The Tenth Commandment (Exodus 20, 17) "You shall not crave your neighbor's house" is parallel to "inscribe them on the doorposts of your house" and not of your fellow person, "and on your gates", and not on your fellow person's gates.**

1. Juxtaposing the Ten Commandments to the *Kriyat Sh'ma* creates somewhat far fetched commentary as far as the *pshat* but innovative as midrash. See for example the excerpt by the Vilna Gaon.
2. Choose four explanations by the Talmud Yerushalmi and the Book of Abudraham which you find most interesting and explain the innovation of each one.

#### **Source #9 "So that you Remember" - Rashi on Parashat Tzitzit (Numbers15)**

**"Instruct them to make for themselves *Tzitzit* " - named for the tassles hanging from its corner, like (Ezekiel 8) that says "and God took me by the *Tzitzit* of my hair on my head".**

**Another possibility. *Tzitzit* is named based on the verse "look at it" in *Kriyat Sh'ma* and in (Song of Songs 2) "*Matziz* / Peering through the lattice."**

#### **Source #10 "Thus you shall be reminded" - TB Menachot 43,**

**"Look at it and recall all the commandments" – because seeing leads to remembering, and remembering leads to doing.**

1. Read *VaYomer* about Tzitzit using the siddur and note the purpose of the Tzitzit (notice the repetition of the word "remember").
2. Provide further examples of tangible items which remind us to do something.
3. Written things, too, can serve as reminders. Like what?
4. Compare reading *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a specific reminder of the Ten Commandments and Tzitzit as a general reminder of mitzvot. Which means is more effective? How do the two complement each other?

#### **Source #11: The Torah Reading by a King Deuteronomy 17: 14-20**

#### **Source #12: Two Torahs. One Portable, One Stationary.**

**TB Sanhedrin 21.**

**"The sovereign shall write a copy (*Mishna Torah*) of this Teaching (a Torah written for him) on a scroll" (Deuteronomy 17:18),**

**The sovereign writes two Torahs for himself, one to take with him and a second that is stored in his library. The one which escorts him on his travels becomes a kind of talisman, and he holds it on his arm, as is written (Psalms, 17:8) "I am ever mindful of the Lord's presence, He is at my right hand, I shall never be shaken."**

**The Geonim were in disagreement regarding the content of the talisman (*Kamea*).**

**Rav Nachshon Gaon says: The king writes only the Ten Commandments on the talisman.**

**Other Geonim - The king writes all 613 mitzvot on the talisman.**

1. According to Deuteronomy, when does the king read his Torah? What is the purpose of this reading?
2. How did the Rabbis reach the conclusion that there are "two Torahs" from what is written in the verse? What is the essential difference between the two Torahs, and what is the purpose of the Torah which the sovereign takes with him on his travels?
3. Compare the Torah as a talisman to the *tzitzit* on a talit.
4. Try to explain why Rav Nachshon Gaon thinks that a sovereign writes only the Ten Commandments (like a talisman is written) and not the entire Torah.
5. Compare the everyday *Kriyat Sh'ma* reading by every Jew to the everyday reading of the Torah by the king.