

# ***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 TWO:**

***Kriyat Sh'ma* as Torah Study or Ceremony?**

**Shalom Hartman Institute, TICHON Project**

**Jerusalem, 5763**

**For Internal Use Only**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Unit IV. *Kriyat Sh'ma* as Torah Study<sup>1</sup>

<b>Introduction - The Spiritual World of Torah Study versus the World of a Petitional Prayer</b>	<b>Page 4</b>
<b>Unit Goals and Basic Assumptions</b>	<b>Page 14</b>
<b>Source Guide:</b>	
<b>Lesson A. - <i>Kriyat Sh'ma</i> as Torah Study</b>	<b>Page 17</b>
Source #1 - <i>Kriyat Sh'ma</i> according to Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai (TB Brachot 14b)	
<b>Lesson B - The Blessing "<i>Ahavat Olam</i>"</b>	<b>Page 20</b>
Source #2 - The Blessing " <i>Ahavat Olam</i> " before <i>Kriyat Sh'ma</i> of Evening Service (Arvit), Ashkenazi	
Source #3 - The Blessings of the Torah (TB Brachot 11)	
Source #4 - What is Counts as "Torah" in the Blessing over Talmud Torah? (TB Brachot 11)	
<b>Lesson C - <i>Kriyat Sh'ma</i> as Torah Study: The First Dispute between Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and his opposition</b>	<b>Page 25</b>
Source #5 - "Torah study is equal to them all" - the words of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai (TY Brachot 1,2)	
Source #6 - <i>Kriyat Sh'ma</i> - a Mitzvah from the Torah or determined by the Rabbis? (TB Brachot 21a)	
<b>Lesson D - Torah Study for the Laypeople (<i>Amei Ha'aretz</i>): - The Second Dispute between Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai - and his Opposition</b>	<b>Page 29</b>
Source #7 - "Let not this Book of the Torah cease from your lips - recite it day and night" (Joshua 1: 8)	
Source #8 - "Day and night" - ( <i>Shocheh Tov</i> Midrash on Psalms 1)	
Source #9 - Torah Study for Laypeople	
Source #10 - "Torah is loved by its students" (TB Brachot 63a)	

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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

**Introduction - "I believe" (*Ani Ma'amin*)** **Page 36**

**Guide to Sources** **Page 39**

**Lesson A - What is the Essence of Kriyat Sh'ma?**  
**Ceremonial Reading or Intentionality of the Heart?** **Page 43**

Source #1 - A Silent Reading or an Out Loud One? Midrash Hagadol for Deuteronomy 6:4

Source #2 - In the Holy Tongue or in Any Language? (TB Brachot 13a)

**Lesson B - Kriyat Sh'ma as a Public Announcement** **Page 47**

Source #3 - Rabbi David (14th century Spain), author of the *Aburraham* commentary on the siddur

Source #4 - The Kedusha of *Yotzer Hameorot* (Ashkenaz)

Source #5 - *Shirat HaYam* in the blessing of "Ga'al Yisrael," Rinat Yisrael siddur (Ashkenaz)

Source #6 - The Ceremony of *Prisat Sh'ma* and *Shirat HaYam* (Tosefta, Sota 6: 2-3).

Source #7 - The Rabbinic Story about our Ancestor Jacob / Yisrael, Midrash Sifri (Deuteronomy 31)

Source #8 - "*Baruch Shem Kvod Malchuto Leolam Vaed*"  
Maimonides, Sefer Ha'Ahava, Hilchot Kriyat Sh'ma 1:4.

**Lesson C - Kriyat Sh'ma as an Inner Affirmation** **Page 58**

Source #9 - Have I burdened you with my kingdom? (Vayikra Rabba on Leviticus 22,27).

Source #10 - The Beit Shamai - Beit Hillel Disputes (TB Brachot 10b)

Source #11 - Comparative Customs between the Land of Israel and Babylonia.

**Lesson D - The Relationship between Ceremony and Intentionality of the Heart** **Page 62**

Source #12 - "To Recite Sh'ma Yisrael Out Loud,"

Aruch Hashulchan, Orach Hachayim, chap. 61.

Source #13 - "But that was not the custom,"

Aruch HaShulchan, Orach Hachayim, chapter 61.

**English Sources and Guiding Questions:**

**Unit IV. Kriyat Sh'ma as Torah Study** **Page 64**

**Unit V. Kriyat Sh'ma as a Ceremony** **Page 70**

**Hebrew Sources** **Page 80**

## Unit IV. Introduction - The Spiritual World of Torah Study versus the World of a Petitional Prayer

### **Torah Study as a way of addressing God**

When do people sense the presence of God? When does live contact and emotional intimacy occur between Jews and their God? That would depend, naturally, upon the personality of each individual and his or her perception of Divine revelation. In rabbinical literature there exist at least two major competing approaches regarding the most spiritual place, the closest location to God:

(a) Rabbi Yitzhak said: **how do we know that God is found in the synagogue?** Since it is written: "God stands in the Divine assembly" (Psalms 82).

(b) Rabbi Halaphta says: **Ten people sitting together dealing in Torah matters, the Divine presence is among them**, as is written: "God stands in the Divine assembly" (Psalms 82)... and how do we know that the Divine presence is to be found even in the company of one individual? For it is written "In every place that I mention my Name I shall come to you and bless you (Deuteronomy)"(Avot 3:6).

On one hand, proximity to God is mediated by means of **prayer** in a minyan of ten people who ask for mercy and request the fulfillment of their personal and national needs. In this case the power of prayer depends on the public atmosphere. On the other hand, Divine presence is indeed found - even in the presence of just one individual - when one is studying **Torah. During Torah study there is maybe no emotional outpour based on our urgent needs, but a person who devotes mental-cognitive ability to problem analysis** in the realms of halacha, aggadah, Torah, and Talmud does feel incredible intellectual pleasure.

Can an educational experience match an experience of revelation? Does study hold the same great spiritual elation as in heartfelt prayer which directly addresses God? Is it possible to reach that kind of elation through legal texts and halachic disputes? For people who are studious and research-oriented, Torah study can no doubt provide emotional as well as intellectual climactic points. Torah study could arouse such people's spiritual powers to strengthen their bond with God.

Here are the words of Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik.<sup>2</sup> Describing the experience of study autobiographically, he expresses emotional, lyric elation.

**Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveichik –**  
**Torah Study as an Intergenerational Discussion**

I would like to tell of a **personal experience** that exemplifies the ideal of *Massora* (Oral Tradition) which we are discussing.

I remember, when I was a child, a lonely and solitary boy. I was afraid of the world, which seemed cold and strange. It seemed as if everything was mocking me. But I had one friend; do not laugh at me, it was Maimonides. How did we become friends? It's simple: we met.

Maimonides was a regular guest in our home. During that time my Father was regularly at my grandfather's table. The Chasid genius Rabbi Eliyahu Feinstein of Prozna, and we lived at his home. Father sat and studied Torah day and night. A group (not too large) of young Torah students (*Avrechim*) and excellent young men gathered around, thirstily drinking in his words.

Father's lessons were given in Grandfather's living room, where my bed stood. It was my custom to sit in my bed and listen to my Father's words. Father spoke always of Maimonides. And this is how he did it: He would open his Gemara. He would then read the issue at hand. Then he would say, the following. This is the commentary of HaRi and Ba'alei HaTosfot. Now let us study Maimonides and see how he explains it." Father always found Maimonides' commentary to be different from the others, and tended to deviate from the simple path. Father, almost complaining about Maimonides, used to say, "[We do not understand the underlying assumption of our Rabbi, nor do we understand his method of clarifying the issue at hand." As if he was addressing Maimonides himself: "Rabbi Moshe, why did you do this? Based on a flowing reading of the text," Father continued, "it would seem Ra'avad is correct in his claims." The members of the group would leap from their places and they would all offer their opinions. Father listened, then rejected each of their ideas. Then he repeated, "The words of our Rabbi are as hard as iron." Nonetheless, he would not give up. He rested his hand on his fist and sank deep into thought. The group was silent, they did not disturb his reflections. After a long time he would raise his head, very, very slowly, and begin, "Gentlemen, let us see..." and he would begin to speak. Sometimes he spoke for a long time, and sometimes he spoke shortly. I sharpened my ears and listened carefully to his words. I did not understand a single word about the matter at hand. Nonetheless, two impressions were imprinted deep in my young, naive mind:

Maimonides is surrounded by opposition and "enemies" who wish to harm him; his only protector is Father. If it weren't for Father, who knows what would have happened to Maimonides. I felt as if Maimonides himself was present here in the living room, listening to Father's words. Maimonides used

to sit with me in my bed. What did he look like? I can't tell for sure. But his portrait was reminiscent of Father's kind, lovely face. His name was like that of Father's too - Moshe. Father would speak, and the students, their eyes fixed on Father, would listen intently to his words. Slowly, gradually, the tension disappeared. Father marched forth strongly, bravely. New opinions were born and rose up. Halachot were formulated and defined with grand precision. A new light shone. The difficult questions were answered, the issue was explained. Maimonides emerged, a winner. Father's face shone with happiness and joy. He had defended "his friend," Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon. A satisfied smile could be seen on the lips of Maimonides. I too participated in this merry celebration. I was so very happy. I would jump out of my bed and race over to mother's room with the elating news: "Mother, mother, Maimonides is right! He beat Ra'avad. Father helped him. How wonderful is Father!"

But every not-so-often Maimonides did not get so lucky. His "enemies" surrounded him from all sides. The questions were hard as iron. The meaning of his words escaped Father. He tried to protect him with all his might, but salvation did not arrive. Father would get lost in thought, his head resting on his fist. The students and I, and even Maimonides himself, awaited Father's words in terrible suspense. But Father would lift his head and say sadly: "*Teku*" (acronym: Tishbi, the prophet Elijah, will explain difficult questions and problems). The words of Maimonides are very difficult. There isn't a carpenter nor the son of a carpenter who could figure out how to take it apart [Aramaic phrase implying difficulty]. The matter requires additional study. The whole group, Father among them, was sad, just like the High Priest on the Day of Atonement who would take leave and weep. Quiet grief was apparent on all faces; my eyes were tearing as well. I saw shiny tears in the eyes of Maimonides too.

Slowly I would come over to mother, and, with a torn heart, I would tell her, "Mother, Father is not able to resolve Maimonides - what shall we do?"

"Don't be sad," Mother answered me. "Father will find an explanation for Maimonides' words. And perhaps if he does not find one, maybe when you grow up you will find an explanation for Maimonides' words. The main thing is to study Torah out of happiness and admiration."

This experience belongs to my childhood, but it is not a golden fantasy of a small boy. This feeling is not mystic; it is a psychological-historical reality that lives in the depths of my soul at this very moment. When I sit down to study, I am immediately reunited with the scholarly *Massora* [Oral Tradition] bunch. The relationship between us all is personal. Maimonides on my right, Rabbeinu Tam on my left, Rashi sitting at the head of the table providing commentary, Rabbeinu Tam asking tough questions, Maimonides ruling, Ra'avad making reservations. They are all in my little room, sitting around my table. They look at me fondly, playing with me with trains of thought and Gemara, encouraging me and strengthening me as a father would do. Torah study is not is not just a didactic activity; Torah study is not limited to formal technical matters realized through invention and exchange of information. It is an

awesome experience of befriending many generations, coupling spirits together, uniting souls as one. Those who passed on the Torah and those who receive it rendezvous at a historical roadside inn.

As I have told you, Maimonides was my friend not only in childhood. We are friends today too. The difference between my childhood experience and my present one is to be found in one detail. In my childhood Maimonides was my friend. Now the partnership (*Chavruta*) has grown and is far more inclusive. All the scholars of the *Massora* from the days of Moshe until now have become my friends and comrades! When I solve the puzzle in the words of Maimonides or Rabbeinu Tam I see their shining faces, expressing gratification. I always feel as though Maimonides and Rabbeinu Tam kiss my forehead and shake my hand. This is not my imagination. It is a most profound experience. It is the experience of the tradition of *Torah SheBa'al Peh*.

(Rav Soloveitchik, "U'Vikashtem Misham" - in *Galui Venistar* pp.230-232)

### **What is the Service of the Heart (*Avodah SheBalev*)?**

Torah study can be addressed not only as the study of laws and customs enabling Jews to act in the world in accordance with God's requirements, it also provides an emotional experience of great value in bringing people closer to God. Therefore, we might expect to find a place for Torah study within the realm of worshipping God. In the Sifri (Midrash Ekev, paragraph 41) scholars disputed over the meaning of the concept *Avodah* ("service of God"), as defined in the paragraph *Vehaya Im Shamo'a* in the words "loving the Lord your God and **servicing Him** with all your heart and soul" (Deuteronomy 11:13). "Servicing God" - does this refer to **study** or **prayer**? The rabbinical dispute expresses two entirely different focal points in understanding the relationship people have towards God.

The **experience of prayer** is indeed diverse, but if we focus on the petitional prayer which is the very heart of Shmone Esrei, the Amidah (simply referred to by the Rabbis as "*HaTefilah*"), we discover a humble person asking for mercy before the King of Kings. In this clearly uneven dyadic relationship, people are clearly at a disadvantage, their needs and wants driving them to uncover their weaknesses before the omnipotent God on Whom they are entirely dependent. In this relationship it is apparent that the emphasis is on emotion rather than intellect, on belief and confidence rather than criticism, on human weaknesses and not strengths, on human shame and humility, not pride or achievement. In petitional prayer there exists an atmosphere of alertness and apprehension awaiting with hope the arrival of a positive answer; there is no confidence or happiness. Praying people's relationship with God is based on ultimate inequality as described in Psalms 123:

"*Shir HaMaalot* - A Song of Ascents. To You, enthroned in heaven, I turn my eyes. As the eyes of slaves follow their master's hands, as the eyes of a slave-girl follow the hand of her mistress, so our eyes are toward the Lord our God awaiting Divine favor."

Obvious at first glance is the fact that **the experience of study** is entirely different than the above experience of a “slave’s prayer!” People studying Torah are invited to activate their brains and their critical analytic abilities (not their belief system). After having solved a complex textual problem, people feel **a sense of strength and self respect derived from their achievement.**

Studying for the very sake of Torah (*Limmud L'shma*) is similar to playing an interesting game, full of challenges and riddles one must solve. It does not usually arouse feelings of fear or anxious anticipation like those of a person awaiting God's reply to urgent human requests, hoping the prayers will indeed be answered. In study there exists a certain measure of escapism from everyday mundane needs and wants, into a world of brilliant spiritualism, bursting with wise revelations and time-proven truths. **In study, it is personal curiosity which sets the pace rather than external pressures of financial or political crises.** World problems, which are reflected in the texts, are dealt with in a more sophisticated and intellectual way. When people's needs have them “up against a wall” of cruel reality, they lack the intellectual distance to put things into perspective. The ability for in-depth study assumes a preliminary ability to take a step back from the everyday stresses of provision. There is an opinion in the Talmud that it is best to study Torah prior to marrying, for "how can one study Torah with a heavy grinding stone around one's neck?" (TB Kiddushin) In more contemporary terms, how can devote oneself to deep study (or to writing a Phd.) when one has been awarded no generous scholarship and when starting a family with several dependents.

The God who is revealed in *Avodat Hashem* through Torah study is the God described in the blessing of the Torah, "who teaches Torah to God's nation, Israel." Alongside the respect appropriate between master and disciple, there also exists **emotional partnership through question-and-answer-negotiation** prevalent in Mishna study. The student and teacher are united in studying Torah *L'shma* in a combined effort to understand the difficult texts. They are not aligned opposite each other as a wealthy owner of goods and a poor pleader engaged in the rhetoric of petitional prayer. People **begging** for fulfillment of needs hope they will not have to return the following day and meet God under the same circumstances; they hope they will not have additional needs tomorrow. People **studying**, on the other hand, look to multiply textual and intellectual difficulties as spiritual challenges; they are confident in their ability to discover innovations everyday, to wrestle with hard issues and to enjoy each session with their teachers partaking in Torah study *L'shma*.

## **Two Mouths**

The experiential contrast between a petitional prayer and Torah study can be correlated with two types of religious personalities, or even two views on Jewish national survival. The great Torah scholar **Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai** (student of Rabbi Akiva, who lived during the Bar Kochba Revolt against Rome) **demanded complete separation between Torah and prayer, absolutely preferring the former:**

"Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai said: If I had been standing at Mt. Sinai when the Torah was being given to Israel, I would have demanded that God create two mouths for each person - one for Torah and one for fulfilling all needs." (TB Berachot 1:5, 3b)

In his opinion, prayer is about making requests for our mundane needs and is therefore of lesser status. Thus our study of Torah takes precedence over attending to our physical needs. Shimon Bar Yochai's fantasy about two mouths became a principle by which to live. When he learned of the great contributions the Romans had made to the material culture of the land of Israel - bridges, roads, buildings, public bathhouses, stable and prosperous political and commercial structures, an ever-improving standard of living - he scorned these achievements, which all focused on supplying physical needs. When the Romans came to apprehend him for his opposition to their regime, he hid in a cave for eleven years, studying Torah morning until night with his son. When he came out of the cave, he cursed the Jewish farmers who invested their time in agriculture and not in Torah. He despised their preference of current fulfillment of needs at the expense of immortality (TB Shabbat 33b).

This scholar's extremism exposes one of the dangers of singling out the ideal of Torah study as the only means of Divine service - *Avodat Hashem*. The danger is to be found in the study leading to disrespect for the weaknesses and needs of a human being as a non-spiritual and non-intellectual being. This disrespect could also result in a **social rift** between those graced with ability and intellectual drive and uncultured ignoramuses. In Talmudic sources, evidence can be found attesting to friction between the two classes, expressed by mutual jabs and insults. Mar Zutra, the Babylonian scholar, confesses that **scholarly students (*Talmidei Chachamim*) "call the people donkeys"** (TB Nedarim 81b). Rabbi Akiva attests to his own inclination to disparage the Torah scholar: "When I was an ignoramus I used to say: when I lay my hands on a scholarly student I shall bite him like a donkey" (TB Pesachim 49). In a period much later than that of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, the eastern European Jewry divided into **Hassidim and Mitnagdim**. Again, a line was drawn and bipolar tension created between scholarly students and ignoramuses. The **latter** were accorded much more respect within **Hassidism**, for their prayers were deemed honest. The simple Jew's ability to express needs in a free-flowing conversation with God while naively believing in Divine grace were highly appreciated. Sophisticated learning had failed to inspire vast groups in the nation, therefore the Hassidim celebrated prayer from the heart, which could be **equally expressed and performed by all**. Shalom Aleichem's **Teveye**, the key character in *Fiddler on the Roof*, is a good example of the proximity to God created by petitionary prayer.

The **Mitnagdim** (primarily the Vilna Gaon and the Brisk family from which Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik comes) mocked the ignoramus Hasid in the name of their ideal of Torah study (not prayer) as the most elevating **spiritual** experience. The members of the Mitnagdim could recite with great *Kavannah* (concentrated intention) the blessing of Rabbi Yehuda: "A person must recite each day the blessing: **Blessed is God for not having made me an ignoramus**" (Tosefta, Brachot 7). Thus they continued an ancient tradition of locating the study experience in the

center of *Avodat Hashem*. **"A person must stand and pray only after preparing oneself by studying something from the Torah."**

The contrast between the ideal of the Torah and that of prayer is not just a matter of elitist condescension and contempt for simple faith. **A huge spiritual gap exists between a person whose inner world is energized by the pleasure of intellectual stimulation, problem solving, and truth-seeking and a person whose heart is moved by personal needs, the needs of one's family and the needs of the entire nation in the fields of health, finance, social justice, and national redemption.** But it is not imperative to follow in the dichotomous footsteps of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. We shall now present **two ways to combine Torah study and prayer in harmony.** We address two issues arising from the previous discussion. Can *Avodat Hashem* by studying Torah be combined with *Avodat Hashem* through prayer? And, to what extent can the experience of a Torah student (*Talmid Chacham*) be a popular experience in which people from all walks of social life can find spiritual satisfaction?

We find **an attempt at combining the two approaches in the structure of the siddur.** In the siddur there are not only prayers such as *Birkot Hashachar*, *Psukei D'Zimra* and *Shmone Esrei*, but also units of Torah study such as the Torah reading, *Kriyat Sh'ma*, and the study paragraphs of *Birkot Hashachar* on the 13 *Midot* (Divine attributes) and the Mishna Peah which concludes with the famous saying "and Torah study is equal to them all." *Kriyat Sh'ma*, which is a study of three Torah selections, includes the biblical reference to the mitzvah of Torah study: "*v'shinatem l'vaneacha* - Impress them upon your children." The description of the extent of Torah study in *Kriyat Sh'ma* is somewhat similar to the lifestyle of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, who devoted himself solely to the Torah, as is written, "Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up." In the blessing of *Kriyat Sh'ma* the special experiential content of *Avodat Hashem* through Torah study is emphasized:

**"Ahavat Olam"** means that when studying, people feel loved by God, their teacher. There is a vibrant atmosphere full of the joy of learning in the Divine classroom.

**How can these two basic experiences of Torah study and petitional prayer be combined?** In the Talmud Yerushalmi an answer is offered to that challenge. "A person must stand up to pray in a mood shaped by a study of Torah." Another version substitutes "in a mood of joy." Commentators understood this "joy" as the *simcha* of the study of Torah. According to this statement, a person who wishes to request needs from God must prepare for the occasion. People then become akin to scholars who can understand and analyze God's words, as students learning from their Divine teacher "Who teaches Torah to the children of Israel." Afterwards, when praying *Shmone Esrei*, they have an enhanced, positive self-image, and a feeling of closeness with God as their teacher. **Discovering the powerful spiritual powers in learning and mastery counterbalances the feelings of weakness and inadequacy when begging for mercy and fulfillment of physical needs.** Torah study strengthens people before their meeting with their Creator in the *Avodat Halev*, worship of the heart, that is the petitional prayer.

But practically speaking, **in what way and to what extent can Jews, scholars and laypeople alike, be expected to participate in daily Avodat Hashem through Torah study?** *Kriyat Sh'ma*, unlike *Shmone Esrei*, is not about laypeople's immediate needs. It mentions a potentially exciting educational experience - day and night - to which laypeople are in fact not party. Yet that is what the Rabbis wanted to foster - to extend the popular participation in this learning experience, or at least give them a foretaste about what Jewish study is about. Even **Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai ruled that people who read *Kriyat Sh'ma* can see themselves as if they studied Torah day and night** (TB Menachot 99). By lowering the requirements, the Rabbis encouraged simple Jews to study a minimum of *Kriyat Shma's* three paragraphs each day.

In my judgment, however, this attempt is not an effective solution. ***Kriyat Sh'ma* does not constitute a sufficient experience of Torah study.** Reading the same paragraphs from the Torah every morning is not similar to inquisitive, innovative study. Quick, silent reading is not like the passionate give and take between students and teacher when disputing over commentary. **In the opinion of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, learning the written Torah, such as *Kriyat Sh'ma*, does not constitute serious, in-depth study in comparison to studying the halachic and aggadah-related disputes of the mishna** (Talmud Yerushalmi Brachot 1:2). After the description in the *Kriyat Sh'ma* blessing of *Ahavat Olam* "we will rejoice in the words of your Torah and speak of your laws," there could easily be disappointment in reading the all-too-familiar paragraphs of *Sh'ma* as an example of Torah study. In short *Kriyat Sham* should be regarded as Talmud Torah but only as mere **a reminder** to the people and to scholars alike, that it is desirable and worthy to perform *Avodat Hashem* each day by means of study. ***Kriyat Sh'ma* constitutes study inasmuch as it is a reminder for the mitzvah of study.** However, we would be able to achieve true, profound Torah study when we read *Shma* only if we changed its pace and nature. Due to our great appreciation of the spiritual power of the experience of Torah study, we find it preferable to strive for the enhancement and development of study in a variety of ways other than the standard recitation of *Kriyat Sh'ma* during *Shacharit* and *Arvit*.

### **Overview of the Lesson Plans - An Abstract**

**Lesson A:** We open by returning to the key question of the entire book: What is *Kriyat Sh'ma*? We seek a different definition of *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a whole and the paragraph of *Sh'ma* in particular in the words of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. **Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai defines the content of the first two paragraphs of *Sh'ma* as study**, and in spirit of his comment we will study the words of the paragraph of *Sh'ma* that deal with studying and teaching. Here we discuss the **experience of study** as a whole and how it is indeed fundamentally different from the experience of prayer. We further discuss an unresolved problem regarding the fact that reading the paragraphs of *Sh'ma* every morning does not usually foster an uplifting study experience due to familiarity with the paragraphs and for lack of innovation.

**Lesson B:** In this lesson we attempt to show how Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai's explanation of *Kriyat Sh'ma* is reflected in the content of the blessing recited immediately before *Kriyat Sh'ma*. **The blessings "Ahavat Olam" in the evening and "Ahava Rabba" in the morning address *Kriyat Sh'ma* as an act of study of a portion from the Torah, just like the blessings of the Torah prior to receiving an *Aliya* to the Torah, and before studying Torah.** The content of these blessings provides us with an additional characterization of the **experience of study**, namely, **studying out of love**. Love is the response to a God-given gift and studying that gift graces us with a teaching about life.

The sources included within the *mitzvah* of Torah study are not only the *chumash* presented (traditionally) at Sinai, but also all that was learned orally at Sinai (*Torah She'Baal Peh*) and all innovations in Torah study ever since. Expanding the concept of Torah emphasizes yet another characterization of Torah study: **the process of creation within the material that is being learned is a dynamic and continuous one**. This is not a case of recitation of old material, it is a constant process of innovation and expansion of the Torah.

**Lesson C:** In this lesson we delve into **the practical problem that reading *Kriyat Sh'ma* does not constitute an ideal study experience** because it lacks innovation, creation, and joy, and it usually embodies repetition of familiar material out of a sense of duty. Here we will discuss the stand of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, who did not recite *Kriyat Sh'ma* at all, since he was always studying Torah at much higher levels of sophistication and innovation. Here we pose a question: if *Kriyat Sh'ma* is meant to educate people to study, why shouldn't people who already know *Kriyat Sh'ma* study something else instead of rereading the three paragraphs of *Kriyat Sh'ma*? In answering this question, we will present an approach that **sees in *Kriyat Sh'ma* a reminder of the *mitzvah* of study**, which can be observed by means of studying various types of materials according to the learner's respective level.

**Lesson D:** In the next lesson we continue our attempt to understand the problem of *Kriyat Sh'ma* as an imperfect sample of study. Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai claims that *Kriyat Sh'ma* is a minimal framework for observing the *mitzvah* of Torah study. Full observance requires continuous study, day and night, of sophisticated Oral Torah material. **Therefore, *Kriyat Sh'ma*'s role is to create a popular daily framework for Torah study, inevitably minimal but meant to break the ground towards expansion and deepening of the study experience.** Incidental to this sugya the Rabbis raise the question of one's attitude toward study: **to what extent is it desirable to see in Torah study an obligation** - minimal or maximal - and to what extent should Torah study remain a voluntary act, preformed solely out of love?

**Lesson E:** In summary we return to this question: **how can the standard recitation, morning and evening, of *Kriyat Sh'ma* be transformed into a daily, novel learning experience?** A partial answer is to be found in the attempt to innovate with educational discoveries with each recitation of *Kriyat Sh'ma* and see in it material of study potential rather than just a pledge. By contrast, as we will see in the next unit, *Kriyat Sh'ma* can be seen from

an almost opposite angle, ***Kriyat Sh'ma as a ceremony***. *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a ceremonial reading is a public experience, including festive repetition of the foundational beliefs common to all, without either innovation, a personal touch, or an intellectual-critical dimension.

## Unit IV. Educational Guide to the Sources:

### *Kriyat Sh'ma* as Torah Study

#### A. Goals of the Unit

The paragraphs of *Sh'ma* are the sources of the central *mitzvah* in rabbinical culture - **the *mitzvah* of Torah study (*Talmud Torah*)**. During The rabbinical period, Torah study became not only an important Jewish value, but also a Jew's main activity during leisure time. The drive to analyze, study in-depth, and innovate from within the sources created the character of the intellectually adroit Jew: creative and critical. While narrowly construed, the *mitzvah* of *Kriyat Sh'ma* is the *mitzvah* to read, or better study, three Biblical paragraphs every day, which include in their midst the very *mitzvah* of Torah study itself. Understood broadly, it is reaffirmation of **the point of departure for the entire intellectual culture of Judaism**.

In this unit we take a look at *Kriyat Sh'ma* as Torah study, not as a pledge of faith in God, nor as a reminder of the practical *mitzvot* which we are obligated to observe, nor a covenant renewal ceremony around the Ten Commandments. Here we deal mainly with halachic sources discussing the *mitzvah* of *Kriyat Sh'ma*, the *mitzvah* of Torah study, and the relationship between the two. We must clarify the amount of time which must be spent on Torah study daily and to what extent *Kriyat Sh'ma* fulfills that obligation. The dominant persona in these disputes is that of **Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai**, who devoted all his time to Torah study, mocking mundane tasks and activities.

The goals of this unit are:

To show that *Kriyat Sh'ma* should be **an experience of learning** as well as a reminder of the halachic **source of the *mitzvah* of studying Torah morning and night**.

To understand the blessing of "***Ahava Rabba***" (The second blessing before *Kriyat Sh'ma*) as a blessing recited over the *mitzvah* of studying the paragraphs of *Sh'ma*.

To expand the **concept of "Torah"** to include all human commentary on the *chumash* including midrash, Talmud etc., right up to contemporary times.

To see in **God** not only an issuer of commandments but also **a teacher**, giving a gift of love which is the Torah. People who study must not see in their studies an obligation or burden, but rather a gift, a beloved object.

To see in *Kriyat Sh'ma* **a minimal daily study portion**. *Kriyat Sh'ma* presents Jews with an invitation to expand and deepen their study, while itself creating a minimal daily study standard, an island of intellectual life within a sea of daily activities concerning provision of livelihood.

To suggest that a more **creative educational approach** to reciting *Kriyat Sh'ma* is required in order to transform its daily repetition into a beloved experience, self-renewing and curiosity-arousing.

## **B. Basic Assumptions Underlying the Educational Approach of the Unit**

### **What Students' Attitudes towards *Kriyat Sh'ma* need to be Transformed or Reinforced?**

We assume that students see in *Kriyat Sh'ma* only a pledge of faith or just another a prayer. Students often think of God as a sovereign Ruler, commanding them to observe *mitzvot*, or alternately as a metaphysical Being to be believed in and worshipped by means of repetitive praises. To balance these notions, we will try to show that a critical **intellectual** dimension penetrates into the realm of prayer, the realm of belief, and the acceptance of *Ol Malchut Shamayim*. When Jews intend to *study* rather than "pray" the paragraphs of *Sh'ma*, they ought to come from a critical starting point in order to pose inquisitive questions, raise difficulties, and discover innovations. The experience of *Kriyat Sh'ma* as Torah study is meant to be entirely different from the experience of *Kriyat Sh'ma* as acceptance of *Ol Malchut Shamayim* or a confession of faith in monotheism.

An additional assumption is that for most people who pray, ***Kriyat Sh'ma* cannot be a truly learning experience** because the same paragraphs are repeated every day, there are no innovations, nor additional bits of information whatsoever. Yet there is no study without innovation, nor an educational experience without curiosity. **Even if theoretically *Kriyat Sh'ma* is indeed a part of Torah study, in practice it is usually a rote reading, read without any learning taking place.**

How can we overcome this gap between a lived experience of *Kriyat Sh'ma* and the rabbinic ideal that sees *Kriyat Sh'ma* as Talmud Torah?

Firstly, studying the material in this book could encourage the people who pray to seek innovations in *Kriyat Sh'ma* and discover how many things they didn't know about these paragraphs they can recite by heart. By studying *Kriyat Sh'ma*, its contents could become novel to them, morning and evening. Perhaps this study of Torah should be integrated within daily "services" before *Kriyat Sh'ma*.

Further, let us understand that ***Kriyat Sh'ma* is meant only as an appetizer to a day of study**. *Kriyat Sh'ma* is meant to remind Jews that they must study; it does not limit their study to repeating these familiar paragraphs. It is most desirable to take after Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai who learned new texts at the times of *Kriyat Sh'ma*.

*Kriyat Sh'ma* cannot be expected to serve as a perfect educational experience since it is only meant to be a minimal study portion, barely sufficient for the observance of the *mitzvah* of Torah study. People who do not derive satisfaction from this reading must draw the appropriate (and desirable) conclusions: study additional

materials. Nonetheless, preservation of the **minimal framework** of reading these paragraphs is meant to serve Jews when pressed for time or otherwise unable to study in greater depth. *Kriyat Sh'ma* poses **the challenge** of true study but is not the ultimate study in itself.

The final problem regarding teaching *Kriyat Sh'ma* as Torah study relates to the negative attitude towards study as a whole. In formal institutions of education, prevalent student opinions include the feeling that **studies are an unpleasant duty, which one wishes to get rid of by doing the bare minimum**. Oftentimes, Torah study may seem like another *mitzvah* and an additional burden which we must bear as loyal Jews. **But the blessing "Ahava Rabba" expresses an entirely different approach**. The Rabbis saw in the Torah a gift and in study a source of joy, and therefore studied out of love. Similar to things of which one is fond, people who study out of joy do not focus on "doing their duty" and "fulfilling the minimal requirement," rather they try to study as much as possible, in line with the notion of "recite it day and night." In this unit we wish to describe the experience of studying *Torah L'shma* out of love, in contrast to a feeling of "*kabbalat ol* - acceptance a burden," which characterizes other approaches to the *mitzvot* at large and to *Kriyat Sh'ma* in particular. ***Kriyat Sh'ma* as Torah study is an example of *Avodat Hashem* out of love.**

## C. Educational Guide to the Lesson Plans

### Lesson A - Introduction: *Kriyat Sh'ma* as Torah Study (Source #1)

#### Source #1- *Kriyat Sh'ma* according to Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai

(Land of Israel, 2nd century C.E. during and after the Bar Kochba Revolt) TB Brachot 14b

**Rabbi Yehoshua son of Korcha said: why is the *Sh'ma* recited first among the three paragraphs of *Kriyat Sh'ma* ? ...**

**Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai says: logically speaking, *Sh'ma* should come before *Vehaya Im Shamo* since the former teaches the mitzvah of learning and the latter teaches the mitzvah of teaching. *Vehaya Im Shamo* comes before *Vayomer* since the former teaches about learning and teaching and the latter about acting on what was learned.**

1. Rabbi Yehoshua son of Korcha tried to understand the essence of *Kriyat Sh'ma* according to the **logic** underlying the order of its paragraphs. How did Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai explain the order of paragraphs? What is the logic ("according to the law") underlying this order? Offer an alternative explanation to the paragraphs or an additional logic to the order.
2. Where is learning mentioned in *Sh'ma* and where is teaching mentioned in *Vehaya Im Shamo*?
3. Rabbi Yehoshua son of Korcha claims elsewhere, that the paragraph *Sh'ma* comes first because it represents the acceptance of the yoke of God's kingdom (*Kabbalat Ol Malchut Shamayim*).
4. What is the difference between Rabbi Yehoshua's emphasis and that of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai's in understanding the essence of *Kriyat Sh'ma*?

We return to our original question: **what is the essence of *Kriyat Sh'ma*?** *Kriyat Sh'ma* is an experience of Torah study. The *mitzvah* of *Kriyat Sh'ma* can be understood as a *mitzvah* of study, whose experiential content as Talmud Torah is very different than other understandings of *Kriyat Sh'ma* as the acceptance of the burden of *mitzvot* and of God's sovereignty. *Kriyat Sh'ma* as Torah study is advocated by Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai in the Talmudic context, in which the Rabbis dispute over how to arrange the order of paragraphs of *Sh'ma* and which blessing to recite over them.

Let us start with the biography and the position of **Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai** (TB Brachot 14b). Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai ("RaSHBI") concisely states the essence of each one of the paragraphs of *Sh'ma* respectively: **to study, to teach, and to take action**. By examining *Kriyat Sh'ma* we can easily discover the words in each paragraph from which RaSHBI derived his comment. In the first paragraph of "*Sh'ma*" the emphasis on study is missing from the first verses, appearing only implicitly in the words: "Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day." However "*V'shinantem* - Impress them upon your children" explicitly mentions the educational connection, emphasizing teaching. Yet only the verse "Recite them when you stay at home..." is most

explicitly about the *mitzvah* to study. Based on the *pshat*, the kind of study implied is not the reading of texts from the written Torah, but to ongoing conversations and discussions while performing daily tasks. RaSHBI's notion of study involves text study, though the texts may well be learned by heart. For him uniquely, study need not lead to action, rather it is study for the sake of busying oneself with God's words, dawn till dusk, at home and outside. It is important to note that the fact that RaSHBI's words do not seem like the simple textual meaning (*Pshat*) emphasizes the significance of his innovative commentary that much more. **RaSHBI wishes to understand the mitzvah of Kriyat Sh'ma as a mitzvah of Torah study** because he holds the experience of Torah study *L'shma* in the highest regard.

In the Talmud, RaSHBI's opinion is presented as an answer to the question of **Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Korcha** (who lived at the beginning of the Gemara period, approximately one-hundred years after the RaSHBI). **The question is: Why is "Sh'ma" located before the paragraphs of "Vehaya Im Shamo" and "Vayomer" in the successive order of the Kriyat Sh'ma paragraphs?** It would be false to claim that this order is based on their order of appearance in the Bible since *Vayomer* appears in Numbers and the others in Deuteronomy. The Rabbis who chose to arrange the paragraphs in the siddur in an order other than their original Biblical one, must have expressed their approach to *Kriyat Sh'ma* in that rearrangement.

Following RaSHBI's emphasis, the order of the paragraphs is not an historical question, rather it is one concerning internal logic. The Talmud uses the phrase "*min hadin*" meaning "logically." RaSHBI claims that study is a prerequisite to teaching and to certain behaviors. But he does not clarify his logic, therefore the students are encouraged to offer their hypotheses regarding his intention. Here are a few possible interpretations:

The logic of the order may be **a practical one**. One cannot take action before one has learned what to do and how to do it. This motif is different from the accepted emphasis on "we shall do and we shall hear" that the Jewish people proclaimed upon receiving the Torah at Sinai. For RaSHBI, *Kriyat Sh'ma* expresses the order of events in time: **understanding before acting**. It also expresses his disdain at actions that are not based on in-depth study.

An alternative understanding of the logic of the paragraphs of *Sh'ma* comes from a value perspective. **According to this explanation, Torah study is not a necessary means to action, rather it is in itself an action of even greater worth than other actions.** Studies must not be seen as a first step towards a life of activity. A student's obligation to attend school for 18 years is not understood here as required preparation of an adolescent for good citizenship and professional success. RaSHBI's opinion rules out the practical concept of study. Each day people must study for the very sake of studying, *L'Shma*.

**The RaSHBI's story** (TB Shabbat 33) expresses a nullification of the value of action in the world. He discredits the value of all the construction conducted by the Romans in the Land of Israel, and later, when the Romans came to arrest him, he hid in a cave for eleven years. There he and his son removed their clothes and entered the sand up to their necks. There these two "talking heads" protruding from the sand -studied. The impressive - yet frightening - image of a bodiless head represents an approach that **celebrates Torah study while completely neglecting**

**physical needs, study devoid of practical gain - Torah L'shma.** RaSHBI's ideal is then for people to study, not in order to take action, but as an end in itself. RaSHBI's character may not arouse identification, but it serves to clarify an unusual approach to understanding *Kriyat Sh'ma*.

We may compare the rationale of **Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Korcha** for the order of the paragraphs of *Sh'ma* to that of RaSHBI. Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Korcha speaks of **accepting *Oi Malchut Shamayim* in *Sh'ma*, and accepting the burden of *mitzvot* in "*Vehaya Im Shamo*."** He learns from the logic of the order of the *Sh'ma* that one must accept authority of his or her own free will prior to taking action. He does not claim that there exists a prerequisite demand of understanding, thus his opinion is closer to the accepted explanation of "*Naaseh v'Nishma* -we will do and we will hear." Later on, in Unit VII, we will discuss the opinion of Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Korcha at length on the subject of intentionality of the heart (*Kavannat Halev*). At this point, the comparison between RaSHBI and Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Korcha serves only to highlight the uniqueness of RaSHBI's stance: the experience of Torah study *L'shma* as a central principle in Judaism.

During the introduction we recommend **conducting a free and open discussion with the students about their various study-related experiences.** What is an ideal learning experience? How do they feel about it? What is their motivation to learn? How is the experience of study different from that of prayer? When does study become a burden? Could *Kriyat Sh'ma* become a genuine study experience? We recommend addressing the following points in the discussion:

Students feel curious and happy about discovering new things.

Study material should be adjusted to the areas of interest, level, and pace of each individual student. ("One does not study unless it is something one's heart desires" - *Ein adam lamed ele b'makom she libo khafetz*).

Interesting study lacks any feeling of coercion and burden. It is accompanied by happiness and free will. Boredom creates a feeling similar to carrying a heavy load. Repeating subjects with which one is overly familiar (like *Kriyat Sh'ma*) is, of course, not usually an activity preformed enthusiastically.

In contrast to petitional prayer, which requires believers to pledge their loyalty or to disclose their innermost feelings, Torah study requires **a critical-intellectual stand.** It is not an act of acceptance or surrender, it is an act of research, examination, and consideration out of free choice and loyalty to intellectual standards.

Unfortunately, *Kriyat Sh'ma* is not usually perceived as study, certainly not ideal study, since it lacks innovation, depth and personal adjustment to the level and area of interest of the individual student. **Therefore, it is our task in this unit to examine, both ideally and practically, to what extent the approach of RaSHBI, that identifies the *mitzvah* of Torah study with *Kriyat Sh'ma*, contributes to our understanding of daily *Kriyat Sh'ma*, both as it is and as it could be.**

## Lesson B - The Blessing "Ahavat Olam" (Sources #2-4)

### Source #2 The Blessing "Ahavat Olam" before Kriyat Sh'ma of Arvit

1. The blessings before and after *Kriyat Sh'ma* guide the reader's perception of *Kriyat Sh'ma*, thus clarifying its essence. Identify the words and ideas connecting the *Ahavat Olam* blessing with the paragraph of *Sh'ma*.
2. Mark the words of the bracha referring to emotional attitudes. In light of this blessing, what are the ideal feelings generated by Torah study? Do you ever feel that way about any sort of learning? What is your attitude to studying in general?
3. According to this bracha, is the gift of the Torah understood as the acceptance of the **burden** of God's kingdom and the **yoke** of mitzvot? Explain.

### Source #3 - The Blessings of the Torah (for further enrichment) TB Brachot 11

**Rabbi Yehuda quoted Shmuel: If one arises early to study prior to reading *Kriyat Sh'ma* [and its blessings] one must recite a blessing [for learning Torah]. After reading *Kriyat Sh'ma* one is no longer obligated to recite such a blessing, since having recited "*Ahava Rabba*" one has already fulfilled this obligation [to recite a bracha for studying Torah].**

**Which blessing should be recited [If one arises early to study prior to reading *Kriyat Sh'ma*]?**

**Rabbi Yehuda quoted Shmuel: "Who has sanctified us with God's mitzvot and commanded us to deal with matters of Torah" [*la-asok b'divrei Torah*].**

**Rabbi Yochanan says that one concludes this bracha as follows: "Who teaches Torah to the people of Israel [*Ha'arev na...Hamelamed Torah l'amo yisrael*].**

**Rav Hammuna said: "Who has chosen us from all the nations and has given us God's Torah. Blessed are You God, giver of the Torah" [*Notein HaTorah*].**

**Rav Hammuna said: This is the greatest of all blessings, therefore let us recite it in all these formulae.**

1. According to the halacha, Jews must recite a blessing prior to studying Torah. Since *Kriyat Sh'ma* is also considered Torah study, the blessings "*Ahava Rabba*" in *Shacharit* and "*Ahavat Olam*" in *Arvit* were established to be read as blessings over Torah study before the *Sh'ma*. Of what special case not covered by the usual halacha is Shmuel speaking in the Talmudic passage above?
2. The Rabbis disputed over which blessing should be recited over studying. Where do these blessings appear in the siddur? Why are they located there?

3. If you had to choose one blessing out of the three offered in the dispute, which would it be? What are your reasons?

### **Source #4 - What Counts as "Torah" requiring a Blessing over Talmud Torah?**

TB Brachot 11

**Rabbi Huna said: For Torah [or Tanakh] - one must recite a blessing, but for midrash - one is not obligated. Rabbi Eliezer said: for Torah and midrash - one must recite a blessing, but for Mishna - one is not obligated.**

**Rabbi Yochanan said: For Mishna too one must recite a blessing (but not for Talmud).**

**Rava said: Even for Talmud one must recite a blessing.**

1. Present the Gemara's opinions in the form of a table.
2. How can we understand the opinion of Rava, that even the words of scholars in the Talmud are considered "Torah" given by God and require a bracha?
3. What are the differences between the experiences of studying the Torah portion of the week (*Parashat Hashavua*), studying a Talmudic dispute, and hearing a Rabbinic aggadah? Which of them does the experience of *Kriyat Sh'ma* resemble, if any? Explain.
4. In your opinion, is *Kriyat Sh'ma* an experience of study?

The framing of *Kriyat Sh'ma* is created by the brachot designed by the Rabbis, after having extracted them from their original biblical context. They highlight the Rabbis' concept of the essence of *Kriyat Sh'ma*. The second blessing before *Kriyat Sh'ma* in the morning and in the evening presents *Kriyat Sh'ma* as an experience of Torah study. The opinion of the RaSHBI is not only an individual minority opinion about its historical significance, but reflects main sentiments of the blessing "*Ahavat Olam*."

We begin by analyzing motifs in the blessing "*Ahavat Olam*," recited during Arvit immediately prior to *Kriyat Sh'ma*. We have begun with the version of the blessing in Ma'ariv because it is shorter and concentrates entirely on the experience of study, while the blessing in Shacharit - "*Ahava Rabba*" - includes additional motifs such as redemption, return to the Land of Israel, and the uniqueness of God. The conceptual content of the blessing can be analyzed by a literary methodology:

**Mark - guiding words** such as "love" (4 times) and **synonyms to "Torah"** (commandments, statutes, judgments, and Torah).

**Search** - for a connection between "Recite them...when you lie down and when you get up" (*Sh'ma* paragraph) and the words of the blessing ("When we lie down as when we are awake, we shall always think and speak of your ordinances...On its teachings will we meditate day and night").

**Mark** - words expressing emotional attitude towards the Torah (**rejoice, love, sustains us through life**).

This blessing prepares people for *Kriyat Sh'ma* by creating a certain emotive atmosphere, expectations, and attitudes. At the same time, it explains the paragraphs and attributes a certain essence and a designated role to *Kriyat Sh'ma*. When analyzing the literary structure of this bracha it is important to address the following findings:

(1) Torah is a **gift of love** given by God to the Jewish people. The Torah and its *mitzvot* are *not* a burden, but a life-giving source ("sustains us through life" in *Ahavat Olam* and "taught...the laws of life" in *Ahava Rabba*). The Jewish lifestyle defined in the Torah is not a sacrifice offered to God, it is a **privilege** given by God to the Jewish people.

(2) It is not only God who expresses love for the Jewish people by giving them the Torah, the people too express their love and appreciation for the gift by always immersing themselves in observance of *mitzvot*. The Torah is not only discussed at the time for *Kriyat Sh'ma* ("when you lie down and when you get up") but also "**day and night**," that is, always and in every location (as in the first paragraph of *Sh'ma*: "Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up").

(3)The content of Matan Torah is **educational**. The blessing explicates the command "Recite" ("*Dibarta*") not only as "repeat" but also as "conduct conversation" and "meditate." The Torah is not just a set of practical *mitzvot*, it is material for intellectual, in-depth study.

The attitude towards study is one of **joy** and fondness. There is no sense of rote reading of Torah in order to rid oneself of a dutiful burden.

#### **For Further Enrichment - Compare the Motifs in "Ahavat Olam" and "Ahava Rabba":**

In "*Ahava Rabba*" there is emphasis on both "**study**" and "**action**" ("may we observe and practice its instruction, lovingly fulfilling all its teachings"). "*Ahava Rabba*" emphasizes the **difficulty** of study and the need for God's help: "**Have compassion** upon us. Endow us with discernment and understanding...Enlighten our eyes...Open our hearts to Your commandments." The internalization of study in "*Ahava Rabba*" is supposed to prepare the nation to observe *mitzvot* out of love and to worship God, fearfully yet lovingly, and finally to recognize, lovingly, that God is one ("Hear O Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is **One**"). Here, the fact that study comes first is for pragmatic reasons. The study is meant to introduce our hearts into the experience of *Avodat Hashem* and the observance of *mitzvot*. (The blessing "*Ahava Rabba*" follows the first explanation given to RaSHBI's words regarding study coming before taking action as practical prolegomenon).

#### **Types of Brachot**

After analyzing the ideational content of the blessing "*Ahavat Olam*," we recommend addressing its form and its role as a bracha: **What is the role of the blessing before *Kriyat Sh'ma*? How does the blessing explain the essence of *Kriyat Sh'ma*?**

Invite the students to categorize different types of blessings:

- a. *Birchot Nehenin* - blessings over acts from which we derive pleasure

b. *Birkot HaMitzvah*- blessings over *mitzvot*

(A) *Birkot Bakasha* - blessings of Shmone Esrei.

(B) *Birkot Shevach* - blessings of praise and thanks

Then ask them: What type of bracha is *Ahava Rabbah* or *Ahavat Olam*? Then study **Source #3** (TB Brachot 11), which discusses the obligation to recite a blessing prior to studying.

Just as blessings have been established to be said before eating or before observing a *mitzvah* - *Birkot HaMitzvah* - so the Rabbis formulated a blessing prior to studying Torah.

What formula was composed and why? One version of this blessing is familiar to the students, in the blessings of the Torah reading (recited before and after one goes up to the Torah). Usually, this Torah blessing is understood as a special one recited over public reading from the Torah scroll itself. But in light of the discussion in the Talmud, it seems that the essence of the blessing is simply **that it is recited over Torah study**. In other words, **public Torah reading and *Kriyat Sh'ma* are similar to studying any text of Torah**. The Amora Shmuel explains that anyone who already recited *Kriyat Sh'ma* and its blessings (especially "*Ahava Rabba*") has already fulfilled the duty of reciting a blessing prior to Torah study. "*Ahava Rabba*" constitutes the blessing before studying (reading) the Biblical paragraphs of *Sh'ma*, thus exempting students from reciting an additional blessing before their daily Torah study. Thus the Torah blessings recited before Shacharit would be superfluous. However if students have not recited Shacharit, you might begin the class by reciting this bracha. Generally, if they forgot to recite "*Ahava Rabba*" in the morning, or if they woke up early to study for a Torah test before praying, they must begin their studies with the blessing.) From this Talmudic discussion it is clear that ***Kriyat Sh'ma* constitutes studying Torah and therefore requires a blessing**. Halachically, the essence of *Kriyat Sh'ma* is study in accordance with RaSHBI, who, despite his extremeist views, was not alone in this understanding of *Kriyat Sh'ma*.

#### **For further enrichment: Expanding Definitions of Torah over which we recite a Bracha**

The dispute in this Talmudic section was conducted over the following question: **what types of study require a blessing?** This is a fundamental question for understanding the Divinity of Torah in particular and the concept of the study experience in general. The dispute opens with the question, what is worthy of the honorary title "**Divine Torah**" ("*Torat Elohim*")? What is worthy of receiving a blessing (either "*Noten HaTorah*" or "*Asher Kideshanu B'Mitzvotav VeTzivanu La'asok B'Divrei Torah*")? All the Rabbis agree that studying the *Chumash* (given to Moshe at Sinai in some sense) is worthy of special attention. Therefore the blessing of "*Ahava Rabba*" was determined to be read over biblical excerpts each morning. The scholars, however, dispute whether to expand the definition of **Divine Torah** to include:

- (1) The entire Torah; (2) Midrashim on biblical verses, innovated by the Rabbis studying the verses;
- (3) Mishna or Oral Torah; (4) Talmud, which explains the Mishna. One Aggadah claims that "even what a senior student **asks** the Rabbi today was already said by God to Moshe at Sinai" (Tanchuma, Weekly Portion of *Ki Tisa*, Book of Aggadah 345:375). In other words, **any conversation about**

**Torah that matters at any level is defined as Torah from Sinai** and is worthy of recitation of a blessing and respectful attention.

**Torah is an ever-expanding notion**, the more the Jewish people delve into its content. The experience of Torah study includes a **creative** element. This idea is expressed clearly in the Aggadah about Moshe's visit to the Beit Midrash of Rabbi Akiva. There, Rabbi Akiva was deriving laws from a close analysis of even the decorative crown-like swirls on the letters in the Torah of Moshe. He was discovering innovative ideas with which even Moshe himself was not familiar. Nonetheless, Akiva's creative interpretation was nurtured from the authority and inspiration of God at Sinai and attributed to Moshe (TB Menachot 29, The Book of the Aggadah 178). During the rabbinical period it was obvious that "**a Beit Midrash cannot exist without innovation**" (TB Hagiga 3, *Sefer HaAggadah* 245,278).

The practical question regarding *Kriyat Sh'ma* is, can daily *Kriyat Sh'ma* constitute a joyous experience of renewed learning?

## Lesson C - Torah Study versus *Kriyat Sh'ma* -

### The First Dispute between RaSHBI and his Opposition (Sources #5-8)

#### Source #5 - The First Dispute between Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and his Opposition:

##### “Torah Study is Equal to them All,” said Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai

TY Brachot 1:2

**Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai:** People like us who deal in Torah study do not stop even for *Kriyat Sh'ma*.

**Question:** But doesn't Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai acknowledge the principle regarding "one who learns the Law but does not intend to observe it - that it would have been better had that one never been created"?

**Rabbi Yochanan said:** About one who learns Torah without any intention of carrying it out, we say it would have been better if that one had never come out into this world from his mother's womb.

**Answer:** Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai's reasoning is that this is study and that is study and one does not cancel study for the sake of study.

**Question:** But reading *Kriyat Sh'ma* at its designated time is more beloved than words of Torah!

[Rabbi Meni said: One who reads *Kriyat Sh'ma* at its designated time is greater than one studying Torah - TB Brachot 10b.]

**Answer - Rabbi Yudan said:** Since Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai is so well versed in the words of Torah, for him *Kriyat Sh'ma* is not more beloved in his opinion than other words of Torah [That is, he is not more familiar and therefore more fond of *Shma* than other sections he has studied]...

**Furthermore, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai said:** One who studies Torah or Tanakh is and isn't really studying [as compared to the more serious study of the Oral tradition - Mishna. Therefore, for Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, who is studying Mishna, there is no need to stop studying Mishna in order to recite *Kriyat Sh'ma*, even when its designated time arrives.

1. Read the claim of the Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. In his opinion, *Talmidei Chachamim* who study Mishna all the time do not have to stop their studies in order to recite *Kriyat Sh'ma*. Every day, the entire nation must recite *Kriyat Sh'ma*, but the scholars of the Oral Tradition are completely exempt from reciting *Kriyat Sh'ma*. What is surprising about this opinion? What further questions need to be addressed on this matter? Does this opinion seem reasonable to you? Explain.
2. The rest of the excerpt quotes a give-and-take with Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai in which his opinion is attacked and he attempts to defend and explain it. In light of the discussion, what is Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai's concept of the essence of *Kriyat Sh'ma*?
3. Why does he perceive himself as exempt from *Kriyat Sh'ma*?

#### Source #6 - *Kriyat Sh'ma* - a Mitzvah from the Torah or from the Rabbis?

TB Brachot 21a

**Rabbi Yehuda said:** If one thinks that he has read *Kriyat Sh'ma* but is not sure - one does not need to repeat it. If in doubt whether or not the blessing after *Kriyat Sh'ma* - "*Emet Veyatziv*" - was read, then one repeats it.

What is the reason for this distinction? *Kriyat Sh'ma* is enacted by the Rabbis (*M'Drabanan*), while "*Emet Veyatziv*" is from the Torah (*M'Deoreita*).

[In Rabbi Yehuda's opinion, *Kriyat Sh'ma* is enacted by the Rabbis and it is our custom to follow the principle - "when in doubt about mitzvot enacted by the Rabbis, we go by the more lenient verdict. In the case of the blessing *Emet Veyatziv*, the essence of which is mentioning the Exodus from Egypt, it expresses a mitzvah from the Torah - to recall daily the Exodus - so when in doubt we repeat it.]

**Rabbi Yosef poses a further difficulty:** It is explicitly written "*V'shinatem* - Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up." [Isn't this a mitzvah from the Torah to recite *Shma*?]

**Abayei answered him by saying:** This verse obligates one to recite "them" (=words of Torah) morning and evening. [However it is not referring to these specific selections called *Kriyat Sh'ma* but to any selections from the Torah; there is only a general obligation to study words of the Torah day and night learned from this verse. It is only the Rabbis who established as mitzvah *D'rabbanan* that these specific paragraphs were to be used to fulfill this daily obligation].

1. Rabbi Yehuda claims that *Kriyat Sh'ma* - reading the well-known three paragraphs - is a mitzvah determined by the Rabbis. What difficulty does Rabbi Yosef pose regarding that opinion?
2. In Abbayei's opinion, the Rabbis determined those three paragraphs, but the mitzvah from the Torah of "Impress them...when you lie down and when you get up" refers to the obligation to study Torah every day and not to a specific reading.
3. What is the relation between the opinion of Abbayei and the opinion of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai in Source #5?

**Source #7 - "Let not this Book of the Torah Cease from Your Lips, Recite it Day and Night" (Joshua 1:8)**

Midrash, Dvarim Rabba, "*VaEtchanan*"

**Why did God give *Kriyat Sh'ma* to Israel? So that they might be able to observe the mitzvah: "Let not this Book of the Torah cease from your lips" (Joshua 1:8).**

**Source #8 - "Day and Night"**

*Shocheh Tov* Midrash on Psalms 1

"The Torah of Adonai is a Divine delight" (Psalm 1).

**Rabbi Eliezer says:** The people of Israel said to God:

Master of the Universe, we would like to immerse ourselves to the point of exhaustion solely in Torah study, day and night, but we do not have the time.

God said to them: Observe the mitzvah of tefilin and I will count it as if you immerse yourselves till exhaustion in Torah day and night.

**Rabbi Yehoshua said:** What Rabbi Eliezer said does not include nights since the mitzvah of Tefilin takes place only during the day.

**Rabbi Eliezer answered him by saying:** And why is this different then observing "and you shall speak of God's Torah day and night?"

**Rabbi Yehoshua answered:** That refers to *Kriyat Sh'ma*, that if a person reads it at *Shacharit* and *Arvit*, God counts it as if that person had studied Torah to the point of exhaustion, day and night.<sup>3</sup>

1. Read the full verse from Joshua 1:8 mentioned in Source #7. What does that verse require Jews to do as far as how they should spend their time? How is this demand defined in the Dvarim Rabbah commentary?
2. Read the midrash on Psalms in Source #8. What is the problem of the Jewish people? How is this problem connected to the verse "The Torah of Adonai is God's delight" (Psalm 1)?
3. What are the solutions of Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua?
4. In light of Rabbi Yehoshua's words, express your opinion on the following statement:

"The obligation of *Kriyat Sh'ma* is a mitzvah for the working class, not for Torah students or *Talmidei Chachamim*."

*Kriyat Sh'ma* might pale in comparison to the experience of ideal study, accompanied by happiness, creativity and intellectual depth, curiosity and innovation. **How can an experience of quickly reading well-known (often memorized) paragraphs constitute Torah study?** Furthermore, if Jews take the *mitzvah* of Torah study found in the paragraph of *Sh'ma* seriously, then they must study much more and surpass the level of sophistication found in *Kriyat Sh'ma*. For those whose daily activity is Torah study, the obligation to read the paragraphs of *Sh'ma* for the purpose of study might seem ridiculous. Our purpose in these lessons is to present this problem and explore different approaches to understanding **the relationship between *Kriyat Sh'ma* as less-than-perfect Torah study, and Torah study of improved quality.**

We begin with the saying of the Mishna scholar (*Tana*) Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai:

**"We who deal in Torah study do not stop even for *Kriyat Sh'ma*"** (TY Brachot 1,2).

A discussion develops in the Gemara which involves a heated opposition to the opinion of RaSHBI. **On one hand**, the simple logic of the RaSHBI states that if the essence of *Kriyat Sh'ma* is instituting the **study** of Torah excerpts every day, morning and evening, then those who are already dealing in Torah study (especially those studying more sophisticated issues from the Mishna and Talmud), naturally do not have to stop in order to read the paragraphs of *Sh'ma*. Furthermore, it would be forbidden and even ridiculous to cancel true in-depth study, in order to repeat that which five-year-olds know by heart.

**On the other hand**, what can be said against the stance of RaSHBI?

There is an instinctive reaction against a scholar who wishes to exempt himself from a central part of services that the entire Jewish people recite. That scholar **estranges himself from the public** and discredits the importance of *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a pledge of faith beyond its educational content.

RaSHBI's opinion is provocative, since he devotes his entire life to study, without concerning himself with the application of his studies. *Kriyat Sh'ma* is simply another *mitzvah* that is canceled out in the face of the principle that "Torah study is equal to them all." Here the Talmud Yerushalmi quotes the words of **Rabbi Yochanan, who condemns those who study about *mitzvot* yet don't actually observe them.** These two claims are based on the assumption that *Kriyat Sh'ma* is not only study but also a *mitzvah* in itself.

Even if we agree that the sole meaning of *Kriyat Sh'ma* is Torah study, it encompasses a special **fondness** that is the **result** of the frequency and intimate acquaintance of Jews with these paragraphs. There might not be any innovation in it, but studying something familiar holds a special feeling. *Kriyat Sh'ma* is an excerpt with which the entire public is familiar, and therefore the fondness is also a result of a feeling of social participation in an accepted educational experience.

One could claim that even if *Kriyat Sh'ma* does not add new content to Jews' understanding, at least it reminds them of the *mitzvah* of Torah study that establishes the goal and framework of a life of study. Jews who skip

*Kriyat Sh'ma* in order to study something else might forget the **obligation** to study and **the source** of the ideal of studying day and night. In order **to apply** this dispute to the realm of education, you can talk about a case in which a gifted student refuses to do regular homework, demanding an exemption from it as long as he or she is conducting independent research on an individualized, higher-level project.

**In summary, what can we do to experience *Kriyat Sh'ma* the way RaSHBI and *Ahavat Olam* wanted us to?** Perhaps it is desirable to include a new excerpt from Torah literature, Talmud, or midrash, **instead of** the paragraphs of *Sh'ma*? Or appended to it? The purpose of the discussion and the entire lesson has been to take RaSHBI's opinion seriously and see what the conclusions of consistently transforming *Kriyat Sh'ma* into an experience of Torah study might be.

## Lesson D. Torah Study for Laypeople -

### The Second Argument Between Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and his Opposition (Sources

#9-10)

#### Source #9 - Torah Study for the Laypeople:

#### The Second Dispute between Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and his Opposition

TB Menachot 99b

**Rabbi Ami said:** We have learned that even if a person studied no more than one chapter (of Mishna) each morning and one chapter each evening, that person has fulfilled the mitzvah, "Let not this Book of the Torah cease from your lips, recite it day and night" (Joshua 1:8).

**Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai:** Even if a person read no more than *Kriyat Sh'ma* of *Shacharit* and *Arvit*, that person has fulfilled the obligation, "Let not this Book of the Torah cease from your lips, recite it day and night" (Joshua 1:8). However, it is forbidden to make this ruling known to laypeople.

**But Rava said:** It is a mitzvah to make this ruling known to laypeople.

[Disagreeing with both views] **Rabbi Yonatan said:** This verse, "Let not this Book of the Torah cease from your lips, recite it day and night" (Joshua 1:8), is neither an obligation nor a mitzvah, rather it is a blessing. God saw that Yehoshua was very fond of the words of the Torah, as it is written: "[Moshe's] attendant Joshua son of Nun, a youth, would not stir out of the tent [where Moshe was studying Torah]" (Exodus 33:11). So God said to him: "Yehoshua, since you are so fond of these words of Torah - let not this book of the Torah cease from your lips!"

The school of Rabbi Yishmael added: On one hand, the Words of Torah must not be regarded as an obligation [a burden] nor, on the other hand, are you at liberty to exempt yourself from them.

**Rashi** comments on the phrase: "must not be regarded as an obligation" = as in the case of a person in debt, who says "when will I pay off my debt and be rid of it?" Thus people must not say, "We will study one chapter and be done with it," for one is not at liberty to exempt oneself from it.

**Tosafot** comments: We must further explain "must not be as an obligation" = that prevents you from doing anything else besides them alone.

We explain "on the other hand, you are not at liberty to exempt yourself from them" = so that you do not deal with them at all. Rather, the desirable combination is that of Torah study alongside the usual way of the world, i.e. making a living.

We can also explain: "must not be as an obligation" = to study the entire Torah. For we have learned (in Pirkei Avot 2:16), "You are not the one who must complete the task nor are you free to exempt yourself from it."

1. Read the source and note the series of disputes in it. What is the dispute between Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai?
2. What is the dispute between Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and Rava? What does Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai fear? Try explaining their differing opinions regarding human nature. What is your opinion on the matter? Explain. Give an example of a similar dispute from a different area.
3. What is the dispute between Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Yonatan regarding the verse in Joshua 1:8? Why do you think Rabbi Yonatan refuses to see Torah study as a mitzvah?

4. Rabbi Yishmael attempts to mediate between the opinions of Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Yonatan. Explain his attempt. How do Rashi and Tosafot, the French Talmudic commentators of the 12th-13th centuries, explain the words of the Mishna scholar (Tana D'vei Rabbi Yishmael)?
5. To what extent can the institution of *Kriyat Sh'ma* be understood as a compromise in the dispute between Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Yonatan?

### **Source #10 - "Torah is Loved by its Students"**

TB Brachot 63a

**Rabbi Yehuda began his class by honoring the Torah and spoke:**

**"Silence! Hear O Israel! Today you have become the people of the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 27:9).**

**But was the Torah in fact given to Israel on that very day [when Moshe gave this speech at the end of his life]? Why, that day of the speech was the end of the forty years! [not the day of its giving at Sinai at the beginning of a 40 year trek in the desert].**

**Solution: This comparison to the day at Sinai is meant to teach us that the Torah is loved anew by its students every day as if it were on the very day in was given at Mt. Sinai.**

1. The ideal attitude towards the daily reading of *Kriyat Sh'ma* is supposed to be similar to the way we address a novelty: "Every day it (*Kriyat Sh'ma*) should be perceived by you as something new, that has not yet been heard, of which you are very fond indeed" (Aruch HaShulchan, Orach Chayim 61). Why is it so difficult to achieve such an attitude towards *Kriyat Sh'ma*?
2. In the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda, how do we preserve and restore freshness regarding our attitude towards the Torah? Do you think a similar principle could be applied to *Kriyat Sh'ma*, which is also a Torah excerpt? Explain.

In the previous lesson we dealt with the special case of a *Talmid Chacham* such as Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, who studies Torah at all times. We asked: is he obligated to stop his in-depth study in order to recite *Kriyat Sh'ma*, a much more superficial study text?

In this lesson we address *Kriyat Sh'ma* as it relates to a different social class: **laypeople**. In the case of laypeople, it is daily livelihood activities which must be stopped in order to recite *Kriyat Sh'ma*, not complex Mishna or Talmud study. They can hardly find the time for the little Torah study that is *Kriyat Sh'ma*. For the majority of the Jewish people, **the central educational meaning of *Kriyat Sh'ma* is setting a minimal requirement for observing the mitzvah of Torah study by laypeople, who spend most of their time making their living.** The Rabbis and the modern Hebrew language both use "laypeople" ("*Am Ha'aretz*") as a derogatory term, synonymous to "stupid" and "uncivilized." Here we wish to translate the term as a descriptive one with no negative overtones. It refers to the majority of the people who do not have time to devote to in-depth Torah study.

We begin with a midrash **regarding the contradiction between the ideal of nonstop Torah study and the reality in which most people are busy making their living** (from Sifri and Midrash *Shocheh Tov* on Psalms). The ideal of an entire life devoted to Torah study - the life of *Talmidei Chachamim* - is summarized by the verse: **"Let not this Book of Teaching cease from your lips, but recite it day and night"** (Joshua 1). "Day and night"

is reminiscent of the words of the *Sh'ma*: "when you lie down and when you get up" and also of the words of the blessing "*Ahavat Olam*." But this ideal is up against a reality in which there is not enough time to study Torah around the clock while attending to the pressing needs of making a livelihood. The Sifri Midrash categorizes the demands of making a living as both a value and a mitzvah, as God has commanded: "Six days you shall labor and do all your work." (Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai would not see any value in making a living, nor did he exempt craftspeople from Torah study due to economic circumstances. He demanded that this temporary life (*hayei sha'a*) of productivity be sacrificed for the sake of the eternal life (*hayei olam*) of Torah study. (See *The Book of the Legends* p. 192: 219, 221; TY Brachot 81a; TB Shabbat 33-34).

The Midrash offers a solution to this practical problem which is typical in rabbinical literature. A **minimal requirement** of Torah study was established - the recitation of *Kriyat Sh'ma* of *Shacharit* and *Arvit*. But Deuteronomy 6 (*Sh'ma*) reminds us of the maximal ideal: "Recite them" - **all the time**, for endless Torah study is an expression of unlimited love - "with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might." Yet since average people cannot comply with such a far-reaching demand, the Rabbis determined a minimal time: "when you lie down and when you get up." This form of "study" is merely a symbolic act of love for the Torah, while the blessing "*Ahavat Olam*" reminds simple Jews to strive for more than the minimal requirement, towards the ideal of "day and night."

This Midrash is translated into halachic terms in TB Menachot 99. There the question is not what is the **minimal time requirement** for Torah study, rather, what is **the quantity and quality of material to be studied** by every Jew in order to meet the obligation? Rabbi Ami is willing to set a minimum of one Mishna chapter every morning and evening. Surprisingly, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai is willing to set the minimum even lower - reading the *Kriyat Sh'ma*, the three familiar paragraphs from the written Torah. Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai continues his previous line of thought by seeing in *Kriyat Sh'ma* Torah study. Still, it is surprising that he is willing to count the recitation of *Kriyat Sh'ma* as fulfillment of the obligation of the mitzvah of Torah study every day. Apparently, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai was party to the Rabbis' opinion that Torah must be made accessible to the people and their limitations must be considered. The secret to understanding *Kriyat Sh'ma* as Torah study begins, is not with an analysis of the qualitative educational experience of *Kriyat Sh'ma*, but with a recognition of the difficult reality of a nation that does not have much time to devote to study, nor the ability to learn many chapters from the written Torah or the oral Torah. **Counting *Kriyat Sh'ma* as Torah study means compromising the quality of study for the ideal of accessible Torah, tuning into the needs of the nation.**

The dispute between Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and his opposition is mainly an **educational argument**, not a practical one, since it was agreed upon that laypeople fulfill the requirement of study just by reciting *Kriyat Sh'ma*. **Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai** says, this minimal requirement **must not be announced** to the laypeople, while **Rava** says that **it is a mitzvah to announce it** to them. How do we educate a nation currently located at a low educational level, while attempting to achieve an ideal that calls for spiritual development and much self-sacrifice?

**Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai** publicly preaches the importance of maximal study despite his private recognition of the acceptability of the minimal effort as well. **He fears that laypeople act only out of fearful respect and a sense of duty, and that if the demands are lightened they would take advantage of the situation and only do the bare minimum.** Rava, on the other side of the dispute, believes that even laypeople are able to join in on Torah study out of love and joy of learning. But **placing standards that are too high just creates feelings of guilt and frustration and causes people to withdraw from the effort altogether.** Rava finds that laypeople who are aware that they too can fulfill the requirements of the mitzvah of Torah study will be able to understand and justify the demands. Perhaps out of the joy of observing a mitzvah as is required and out of the pleasure of study they will embark on a journey of spiritual development. Rava does not think that establishing *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a minimal requirement of Torah study is simply an alleviation of the requirements; it includes the ideal of Torah study **all the time** "when you stay at home and when you are away." In Rava's opinion, laypeople who read just the short *Kriyat Sh'ma* can participate in the experience of Torah study and see themselves as analogous to *Talmidei Chachamim* who study day and night. Thus he expresses his commitment to the ideal of Torah study. In summary, **Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai** finds *Kriyat Sh'ma* to be an imperfect educational experience that is the result of the unfortunate circumstances of the nation in this world, and it constitutes a compromise towards the lower common denominator. **Rava** finds that *Kriyat Sh'ma* can be seen as an **ideal** of study and spiritual development without creating frustratingly high demands. Each day, Jews remind themselves that beyond the minimum there is a vast and interesting world of Torah, in which there is room for everybody to study according to their individual abilities.

Further to this issue, **Rabbi Yonatan** raises a third possibility regarding the determination of a minimal Torah study requirement. He opposes the approach that sees in Torah study **an obligation. In his opinion Torah study is a blessing entirely derived of its being a labor of love and a willful act of study.** The verse declaring study "day and night" is a blessing, not a mitzvah. Rabbi Yonatan returns the discussion on *Kriyat Sh'ma* as Torah study to the more general question we have begun to discuss: **What is the Jews' attitude towards Torah study? Rabbi Yonatan sees in Torah study a gift or blessing from God, similar to the approach in "Ahavat Olam."**

**Rabbi Yonatan** implements a very bold method, relying on the good will of students and on the power of Torah to arouse enthusiasm among its students. His stand is very optimistic considering the real competition with livelihood concerns that tend to marginalize spiritual time consumption. People must recognize Torah study as a blessing, as a valuable gift, in order to make the effort to set aside time to study each day and night.

**The school of Rabbi Yishmael**, *Tana D'vei Rabbi Yishmael* suggests creating a well-balanced educational atmosphere, including choice and obligation. It **argues that the "words of Torah should not be as an obligation, nor are you permitted to exempt yourself from them."** It is not a matter of determining a minimal

requirement; it is about **creating a certain atmosphere and shaping the inner feelings of the students**. It wants to give the educational experience a voluntary element of studying out of love and joy, without a sense of guilt, above and beyond the stated obligation. On this issue it continues in the path of Rabbi Yonatan. But it is also as careful as Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai regarding the caution required to prevent laypeople from taking advantage of an atmosphere of freedom and avoiding studying altogether.

What did Rabbi Yishmael mean by saying that *Kriyat Sh'ma* was not "an obligation?"

The words of Tana Dvei Rabbi Yishmael are given various interpretations by medieval French scholars. **Rashi** sees in the term "obligation" a kind of financial debt that people wish to pay off and get rid of, and therefore words of Torah must not be seen as an obligation. **Ba'alei HaTosfot** explain "obligation" to mean forbidding anything else. It is similar to parents who forbid their children to watch TV or play outside until they finish their homework or chores. Rabbi Yishmael does not see in Torah study an obligation which forbids working, as Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai understood it.

Ba'alei HaTosfot explained that studying Torah is not an "obligation" in the sense that one must complete it all. They understood that Rabbi Yishmael rejected making an obligation of *Kriyat Sh'ma* because we must not educate people to think that there is an obligation to study everything, because then people could get frustrated. **People must "begin," but they do not have to "complete" everything:** "You are not obligated to complete the task, nor are you at liberty to exempt yourself from it"(Pirkei Avot). This explanation of Ba'alei HaTosfot, given to the words of Tana Dvei Rabbi Yishmael, clarify the opinion of **Rava** who says that it is a mitzvah to tell laypeople that *Kriyat Sh'ma* fulfills the obligation of Torah study day and night. The message here is that Jews must begin studying Torah, and the minimal beginning is *Kriyat Sh'ma*. It is **a beginning** from which people grow and develop spiritually towards the ideal of Torah study "when you stay at home and when you are away."

### **Exercise: A Current Events Discussion on the Obligation of Doing Homework for School**

In order to **apply** the concepts discussed, we recommend having students compare the Rabbinic disputes to similar differences of opinion regarding **democratic education**. Supporters of democratic education (in parallel to Rabbi Yonatan) strive towards a non-coercive atmosphere, in which students study what they want, according to their individual levels and paces. This method is based on inborn curiosity of students and the wealth and interesting discoveries to be found in the study material. On the other hand, supporters of **traditional education** demand that general, minimal, standard requirements be set for all students, with strict supervision accompanying the process. They fear that lazy students or those who are unable to appreciate the true value of study might take advantage of a flexible curriculum. **The traditional approach** is meant to raise the general level of basic skills but as a byproduct

it creates a negative attitude towards education, expressed in the phrase "a duty of which one wishes to rid oneself."

**The open, democratic approach** abandons lazy students; it does not cope with their tendency towards laziness. It does, however, invest twice as much effort than the traditional system in creating attractive, curiosity-arousing study material, and it develops a willful, positive attitude towards the very experience of studying. In summary, a discussion can be conducted around a radical proposal, such as **making all Jewish studies at school voluntary**, while devoting resources and excellent teachers to those fields.

### **Closing Remarks**

We return to the basic question we asked throughout the previous units: **Under which circumstances can the experience of *Kriyat Sh'ma* be transformed into an experience in which "each day (*Kriyat Sh'ma*) will be in one's eyes as something new, which has not been heard before, and of which one is very fond"** (Aruch Hashulchan, Orach Chayim Hilchot *Kriyat Sh'ma*, 61)?

In light of this unit, people will see in *Kriyat Sh'ma* a cherished and ever-renewing experience as long as they learn something new from it each time. The more *Kriyat Sh'ma* becomes a true educational experience, accompanied by innovation each day, the more one becomes fond of it. Rabbi Yehuda expresses this opinion (TB: Brachot 63): "Torah is loved by its **students** each and every day as on the day it was given at Mt. Sinai." The emphasis here is on the educational attitude, not the ceremonial one.

Perhaps if we include in each daily recitation of *Kriyat Sh'ma* a study session of its words, halachot, and history as is done in this unit, then *Kriyat Sh'ma* will indeed be a novel and innovative daily experience. Perhaps a fourth paragraph from the written or oral Torah should be added to *Kriyat Sh'ma*. That additional paragraph could be changed each day according to the interests and needs of the readers. Just as we are commanded in *Shmone Esrei* to add personal petitions and requests each day and not limit it to a "permanent" text, so in *Kriyat Sh'ma* as Torah study additional study portions should be added in each reading so that it "does not become an obligation to you."

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

Introduction - "I believe" (*Ani Ma'amin*)

Sources and guiding questions

### Source guide Lesson A - What is the Essence of Kriyat Sh'ma? Ceremonial Reading or Intentionality of the Heart?

Source #1 - A Silent Reading or an Out Loud One?

Midrash Hagadol for Deuteronomy 6:4

Source #2 - In the Holy Tongue or in Any Language? (TB Brachot 13a)

### Lesson B - Kriyat Sh'ma as a Public Announcement

Source #3 - Rabbi David (14th century Spain), author of the *Aburdraham* commentary on the siddur

Source #4 - The Kedusha of *Yotzer Hameorot* (Ashkenaz)

Source #5 - *Shirat HaYam* in the blessing of "Ga'al Yisrael," Rinat Yisrael siddur (Ashkenaz)

Source #6 - The Ceremony of *Prisat Sh'ma* and *Shirat HaYam* (Tosefta, Sota 6, 2-3).

Source #7 - The Rabbinic Story about our Ancestor Jacob / Yisrael,  
Midrash Sifri (Deuteronomy 31)

Source #8 - "*Baruch Shem Kvod Malchuto Leolam Vaed*"

Maimonides, Sefer Ha'Ahava, Hilchot Kriyat Sh'ma 1,4.

### Lesson C - Kriyat Sh'ma as an Inner Affirmation

Source #9 - Have I burdened you with my kingdom? (Vayikra Rabba on Leviticus 22,27).

Source #10 - The Beit Shamai - Beit Hillel Disputes (TB Brachot 10b)

Source #11 - Comparative Customs between the Land of Israel and Babylonia.

### Lesson D - The Relationship between Ceremony and Intentionality of the Heart

Source #12 - "To Recite Sh'ma Yisrael Out Loud,"

Aruch Hashulchan, Orach Hachayim, chapter 61.

Source #13 - "But that was not the custom," Aruch HaShulchan, Orach Hachayim, chapter 61.

## Unit V. Introduction - *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a Ceremony

### **I Believe (*Ani Ma'amin*)**

**No area is more private or personal than that of beliefs, opinions and values.** Individuals have personal perspectives based on their experiences and preferences. Sometimes people encounter difficulties justifying their beliefs when discussing them with peers. When people try to explain their love for their country or their belief in the need for equality of all people, or their belief in God, they cannot quote statistics or explain the practical benefits involved. Unlike the Middle Ages, most people in the modern world do not believe that their beliefs can be proven logically. Therefore, these matters tend to remain within people's private spheres, and they don't discuss them much - especially not in school. Modern society deals mainly with practical matters that could be argued factually or in terms of their benefit or use. That is indeed one of the blessings of the democratic world: the government does not force opinions upon individuals. People's beliefs remain within their respective free and private domains. Shouldn't the Jewish world of belief also include this important freedom? Perhaps that is the meaning of that *Sh'ma* must be said with intentionality, otherwise it has no significance at all. With inner belief or else it is an empty ritual.

**Nonetheless, despite the blessing of freedom of belief in the personal sphere, which prevents public coercion, a different problem emerges: the entire field of belief is neglected by society.** In the free modern world, belief has stopped serving as a communal subject, and it remains solely in the hands of the individual. In Jewish subject matter, it is often easier for the teacher to discuss knowledge and history, to focus on development of cognitive skills and analysis of tangible results according to scientific methodology, all the while steering clear of issues regarding values and beliefs. There exists an assumption that family or individuals will take care of those aspects. This results in individuals who are not used to expressing and clarifying their beliefs in a communal setting, nor do they benefit from social support or strengthening of their beliefs. Sometimes people are afraid to take a strong stance regarding belief, for fear of seeming silly for making claims which are not grounded scientifically, or the fear that they will be perceived as being coercive towards others.

When can the personal sphere of beliefs be expressed validly? In what way? Can a community's belief be fostered without establishing a certain public belief formula? Doesn't an official "catechism" often transform belief into mere lip service? There are no simple answers to these questions. Let us explore the belief statements implicit in *Sh'ma*, for they both require *Kavannah* - a personal belief originating from the heart, but also a public ritual expression. Perhaps through this model we will be able to strengthen the belief world of the individual.

**Morning and evening, Jews must clear their minds of thoughts and plans in order to look inward and express their inner worlds in the words "Adonai is our God, Adonai is One."** Perhaps a verbal expression seems

of little value without actions, but the opposite is true as well. So many routine activities are based on beliefs and values that people do not really understand. The role of *Kriyat Sh'ma* in this case is to **clarify values**.

An example may illustrate the point. Teenagers go away to camp. Far from their families and friends, they need to express in words, by e-mail for example, their relationships with the people they love. At home things are running as usual, according to the routine, and values are implicit. But in letters, words substitute for actions and the children's awareness of their feelings and beliefs grows. In a similar way, *Kriyat Sh'ma* encourages people to define their relationship with God, briefly and consciously, in words rather than in actions.

***Kriyat Sh'ma* is not only the private "Here is what I believe" statement of an individual. *Kriyat Sh'ma* is also a public announcement of the community as such and of each individual towards the members of the community. Through this declaration Jews testify to their belief and loyalty to God in front of everyone.**

The tradition of scribes in writing the words "*Sh'ma*" and "*Echad*" hints at the social meaning of *Kriyat Sh'ma*. The word "*Sh'ma*" is written in the Torah with a large letter *Ayin*, and the word *Echad* is written with a large *Dalet*. The letters *Ayin Dalet* together form the word "*Eid*," witness. **People who recite *Kriyat Sh'ma* attest to the fact that they accept God as their one and only God.** This testimony does not take place merely inside Jews' hearts rather Jews declare formally and within a social structure that they believe in God. Individual believers publicize their personal opinions, and thus the world of belief exits the closed quarters of each individual's heart and enters the public, social world. **Subjective belief becomes an objective fact when people give their testimony.** It is similar to people who sign a political petition and put on a button or sticker with a slogan, thus transforming what was in their hearts into a social fact which then demands the attention of others. So too a personal "I believe" statement invites, even requires, listeners to address it, though it does not compel them to agree.

The concept of ***Kriyat Sh'ma* as a declaration** could be surprising to students. Usually, an individual recites *Kriyat Sh'ma* silently; it does not even require a minyan of ten to be recited. The form of recitation is appropriate for the personal sphere of belief, between Jews and their Creator. But *Kriyat Sh'ma* was not always recited this way. Mishna sources attest to a ceremony of ***Prisat Sh'ma*** in which the cantor recited "*Sh'ma Yisrael*" and the minyan replied "*Adonai is our God Adonai is One*," or according to a different version "*Baruch Shem Kvod Malchuto LeOlam Vaed*." *Prisat Sh'ma* requires a minyan of ten because it constitutes an appeal to the community to declare its faith as a community. The words "*Sh'ma Yisrael*" themselves identify *Kriyat Sh'ma* as an address towards others that demands attention in preparation for the sounding of the personal or public declaration "*Adonai is our God Adonai is One*." The word "*Kriyah*" ("to read" and "to call out") expresses the public and formal nature of the ceremony of *Kriyat Sh'ma*. (Later on, during the sources and explanations of Unit V. ***Kriyat Sh'ma* as a Ceremony**, we clarify and study in-depth the various approaches to understanding *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a formal public ceremony of declaration).

*Kriyat Sh'ma* is a declaration of faith and loyalty to God, meant to take place as part of a public social framework. It should be seen as **an attempt to bridge the gap between the practical social world and the internal spiritual world**. According to this concept of *Kriyat Sh'ma*, faith requires public testimony. But the emphasis is not on forcing individuals to confess to this social truth. On the contrary, individuals who believe and are able to recite "*Sh'ma Yisrael*" with intentionality of the heart are in fact **testifying** in front of their friends. As individuals, they affect the community with their declarations, but they do not surrender to pressure. The power of *Kriyat Sh'ma* is not in an obligation to recite specific words, it is in the **opportunity** given to individuals to express their personal beliefs and strengthen their friends, creating a social reality which reflects the world of the individual person of faith.

It is like a Zionist family that decides to make *aliya*. They invite their friends to a going away party and publicly declare that they believe in Zionism and wish to realize their belief "with all their heart and all their soul" by picking up and moving to Israel. Without forcing anyone to do anything, their very statement might serve to encourage their friends to clarify their own values and possibly follow in their footsteps. This is **one of the roles of *Kriyat Sh'ma* in a minyan: to create a framework which encourages public expression of personal beliefs, to strengthen the belief of a community in its basic values.**

In summary, when Jews shout "*Sh'ma Yisrael*," their eyes shut tight, they passionately testify in words their personal belief in a formal social framework. *Kriyat Sh'ma* also serves to strengthen their personal belief by verbal expression. In addition, the belief of the members of the community is strengthened by hearing personal testimony about an internal reality that does not routinely receive the spotlight.

## Unit V. *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a Ceremony: Guide to the Sources

### Unit Goals

The *Sh'ma* is read in a special way according to ceremonial rules. During the Talmudic period, the ceremony of *Kriyat Sh'ma*, known as ***Prisat Sh'ma***, was much more elaborate and required a minyan. Today, the ceremony has been reduced, but still remains festive. Some read it while covering their eyes, singing the first verse loudly and lengthening the word "*Echad*," and then whispering the phrase "*Baruch Shem Kvod Malchuto Leolam Vaed*." Sometimes the first paragraph is sung with the Torah reading melody (*trope* or *ta'amei hamikra*). Reform congregations always rise to recite it together. The "reading" of *Sh'ma* still constitutes an oral performance, not just a simple "davening" like most prayers.

Our goal in this unit is to reconstruct some of the ceremony of reading the paragraphs of *Sh'ma* as they used to be read during the period of the Mishna scholars (*Tana'im*), and to explore its meaning. ***Kriyat Sh'ma* is a formal public declaration regarding the belief and personal testimony of Jews towards God.** When analyzing the text, we will note **the external aspects of the reading: who says what to whom and in what way?** We will appraise the phenomenon of **ceremonial reading as a declaration** and contrast it to **in-depth study and reading as an expression of internal intentionality.**

The goals of this unit are:

- (A) **To differentiate between two approaches towards *Kriyat Sh'ma*** - one that follows certain external aspects of its recitation, and the other which emphasizes reading for the sake of understanding and inner *kavanah*.
- (B) **To appreciate** the special meaning of a **ceremonial, public declaration.**
- (C) **To identify who declares *Kriyat Sh'ma* to whom** according to various commentaries in order to explore the meaning of **the public setting** of *Kriyat Sh'ma*.
- (D) To determine to what extent the details of the **ceremonial reading add or detract from personal intentionality of the heart** on the part of a person reciting *Kriyat Sh'ma*.

## Introduction - The Problem of the Value of Ceremony Versus *Avodah She'Balev*

Usually, when defining prayer, one assumes that it is “worship of the heart” - *Avodah She'Balev*, so its natural form should be individual, free expression of emotions and thoughts. In fact, an important part of prayer and *Kriyat Sh'ma*, is their regular, public ceremonial form in which a minyan leader plays a key role. Sometimes concern for the externals of public ceremony is seen by students as flawed, of lesser worth than “true” personal prayer. This popular opinion (See Maimonides, *Hilchot Tefillah*, chapter 1) holds that originally Jewish prayer involved each person pouring out one's heart privately before God, without adhering to any permanent format. It was only much later that a process of public institutionalization evolved. The gap between the ideal definition of prayer - as *Avodah She'balev*, and reality - fixed public prayer - creates many difficulties for a person wishing to deepen the experience of prayer. But if we change the starting point of prayer study and assume, for the sake of argument, that *Avodah She'balev* – the internal world of prayer - does not exhaust its essence, then we can evaluate more positively the public ceremony of prayer.

In this unit we address this difficulty by examining *Kriyat Sh'ma*, **not as a personal prayer in which intentionality of the heart is the main part, but rather as a public ceremony in which the public and externalized statement determines the meaning of the prayer.** The formal way of reciting *Sh'ma* may not be familiar to the students initially, but by focusing on it we will show them how the medium can be the message.

Words may be important because of their power to perform something, rather than their literal meaning. For example, during the Jewish marriage ceremony, traditionally the groom recites to his bride, "*Harei At Mekudeshet Li* – “you are hereby sanctified to me in marriage.” Thus he performs the act of engagement and creates a legal bond. The words themselves are not of particular sentimental or personal content, but the public scene and the ceremonial format, including word-by-word repetition of the *Kiddushin* ceremony and giving the rings, give the phrase great objective significance. In egalitarian contexts women have insisted that they too recite these or similar words to show their active role in “performing” the wedding.

Regarding *Kriyat Sh'ma*, **the Rabbis disputed over whether or not to give the experience of *Kriyat Sh'ma* a public ceremonial standing.** We will present that dispute and let each person choose sides. (While in Unit V we will focus on the ceremonial side, in Units VI-VIII we will study the personal meaning of *Kriyat Sh'ma* as an expression of intentionality of the heart.)

## Unit V. An Overview of the Lessons

### Lesson A - What is the Essence of *Kriyat Sh'ma*? Ceremonial Reading or Intentionality of the Heart?

The first lesson addresses a difficult question: What could be the worth of a formal word-mumbling ceremony, in which no attention is paid to an individual's intentionality of heart? What is the relevance of a ceremony directed outward, emphasizing externality in a realm so obviously falling within *Avodah She'balev*?

In this lesson we explain **the liturgical context** of prayers, providing simple examples of the ceremonial reading of texts. Then we will study two disputes on the halachic question - "How should *Kriyat Sh'ma* be read?" **The first dispute concerns the meaning of the word "*Sh'ma*":** do the paragraphs of *Sh'ma* have to be read out loud in order **to make them audible** to one's ears or does a silent reading with understanding ("*Hasket U'Sh'ma*") suffice? **The second dispute** concerns the language of reading: Must one read only in the **Holy Tongue** even when the reader does not understand Hebrew? Students can offer opinions regarding the two disputes. After distinguishing a **ceremonial reading** versus a **reading for the purpose of understanding**, we will attempt to clarify the question "what special meaning characterizes reading out loud?"

### Lesson B - *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a Public Announcement

We introduce the approach of **public declaration** as a paradigm for understanding the ceremonial reading of *Sh'ma*. Each morning, Jews repeat the words of *Sh'ma*, not in order to learn something from them and not merely to meditate, but rather to reaffirm again publicly, together with other community members, that they are loyal to God. Even without understanding each word, the meaning of the ceremony is clear to the participants.

This declaration takes various shapes according to the different rabbinic sources. In each commentary, the main variable is the answer to the question - "who said to whom?" In this unit we offer five different views from which the teacher may choose, depending on constraints of time and attention span.

**Aburraham:** *Kriyat Sh'ma* is the giving of testimony before one another, regarding one's belief in God.

**The *Kedushah* within the blessing of "*Yotzer HaMeorot*" in *Shacharit*:**

*Kriyat Sh'ma* is similar to the angels' acceptance of *Ol Malchut Shamayim* from one another.

***Prisat Sh'ma*:** *Kriyat Sh'ma* is read, alternating verse by verse, as a sort of **choir** praising the Sovereign of sovereigns. Reading the paragraphs audibly **before** God constitutes **song and worship** just as in the Heavenly Temple.

**The Rabbinic story about our ancestor Jacob/Yisrael:** *Kriyat Sh'ma* is a **declaration of loyalty to the belief of our Ancestor Jacob** ("Hear, Israel our Grandfather"). Each new generation pledges allegiance to the beliefs of the previous generations. The significance of reciting *Kriyat Sh'ma* is similar to making a **promise** given to a dying parent or grandparent upon the deathbed. It guarantees continuity of loyalty to the God of Israel and tradition. *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a "monarchical decree" (*prosdegma*) -even without ceremony.

### **Lesson C - Kriyat Sh'ma as an Inner Affirmation**

Today it is not customary to emphasize the full ceremonial reading of *Kriyat Sh'ma*, and there is in fact no difference between public and individual readings (except for the utterance of the phrase "*El Melech Ne'eman*"). This contemporary custom reflects a different approach to *Kriyat Sh'ma*, emphasizing individual intentionality of the heart more than the public ceremonial aspect. The "declaration" is now aimed inward toward our own heart. .

In summary, we hope that the students will appreciate the opposing emphases on ceremony and intentionality and ask themselves the following questions: What is their attitude to the ceremony of *Kriyat Sh'ma*? Must the ceremonial emphasis impair intentionality of the heart? To what extent does ceremony add to intentionality? This unit teaches contemporary halachot of *Kriyat Sh'ma* taken from the *Shulchan Aruch* . It also introduces the following units dealing with the *kavanah* required in *Kriyat Sh'ma*.

## Lesson A. What is the Essence of *Kriyat Sh'ma*?

### Ceremonial Reading or Intentionality of the Heart? (Sources 1-2)

In this lesson we differentiate between two approaches to *Kriyat Sh'ma*: *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a ceremony of making things audible versus reading for the sake of understanding in one's heart.

These two approaches are irreconcilable but they are not necessarily irreconcilable, despite the fact that they are both of great value. When a person reads a book in order to understand what is written, it can be read out loud or silently, quickly or slowly, standing or lying down, all in accordance with one's reading habits. But when one wishes to read to others, the form of presentation must be considered. All must be able to hear, no word can be skipped over, the special scene must be respected. Due to the emphasis on exterior appearance, the reader might not have time to ponder the meaning of each word, because the reader would be more focused on the form of reading and on precise pronunciation. With regard to prayer, which is a matter of the heart, between God and the individual, *Avodah She'balev*, why, the student might ask, require external ceremony? How can we understand a halachic stance requiring that *Kriyat Sh'ma* be read in Hebrew *even by those who don't understand it*. (This is a very important minority opinion; according to the majority, *Kriyat Sh'ma* can be read in any language.)

Before we prefer one approach to *Kriyat Sh'ma* (or prayer, or religion) over another, we should try to understand and appreciate **the meaning of ceremony**. *Kriyat Sh'ma* can be compared to the rituals of standing, taking steps forward and backward and bowing at the beginning and end of *Shmoneh Esrei*, as well as to standing with feet together and elevating the heels three times during the "*Kedushah*."

In everyday life, *Kriyat Sh'ma* can be compared to occasions requiring formal speech. Ceremonial reading takes place during theatrical performances, when reading a book to children, when declaring the independence of a state, or when reading a legal verdict. **In many everyday situations, people serve as actors implementing predetermined ceremonial gestures.** When guests enter their hosts' homes, they know just how loud to knock on the door so as to be polite, even if it is noisy inside. They also know to stand in the doorway and wait until invited in by the hosts by verbal and non-verbal communication. They exchange pleasantries such as, "How are you?" (even without giving anything more than perfunctory answers like "fine") and handshakes with a modulated strength and length. People who ignore these socially accepted ceremonies seem ignorant or worse, impolite boors. If we are perceptive and sensitive with regard to how meetings and communication take place in everyday life, we will be able to appraise and analyze the formal ceremony of *Kriyat Sh'ma*.

**The halachic disputes regarding how to read the paragraphs of *Kriyat Sh'ma*** provide an opportunity to understand its essence. The differences of opinion reflect **two approaches to *Kriyat Sh'ma***: *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a

ceremonial reading versus *Kriyat Sh'ma* for the purpose of understanding and directing the intentionality of the heart. In both disputes, the explanation of the word "*Sh'ma*" is the key to the ideational approach.

### **Source #1 - A Silent Reading or an Out Loud One?**

Midrash *Hagadol* for Deuteronomy 6:4

***Sh'ma Yisrael*. Rabbi Yehuda says in the name of Rabbi Elazar Ben Azaria: One who recites *Kriyat Sh'ma* should read in such a way that it is heard by one's ears, as is written: "*Sh'ma Yisrael*," make audible to your ears that which you let out of your mouth.**

**Rabbi Meir says one is not required to read it aloud, since it says: "Take to *heart*... that which I charge you this day" (Deuteronomy 6:6). These words require only the intentionality of the heart.**

**A different explanation: *Sh'ma Yisrael*.**

**Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai says: One who reads *Kriyat Sh'ma* must focus the intentionality of one's heart, as is written here "*Sh'ma Yisrael*" (Deuteronomy 6:4), and later on it is written: "*Hasket Sh'ma Yisrael*" "Understand, Hear O Israel" (Deuteronomy 27:9) - just as there it requires understanding, so too here it requires understanding.**

1. What is the dispute between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Meir? How do their verses strengthen their claims?
2. With whom does Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai agree?
3. Try to explain Rabbi Eliezer Ben Azaria's approach.

### **Source #2 - In the Holy Tongue or in any Language?**

TB Brachot 13a

**Our Rabbis taught: *Kriyat Sh'ma* must be recited as it is written, thus said Rabbi [Yehuda HaNasi].  
But other HaChamim say: In any language.**

**What is Rabbi's reasoning? The verse [in *Sh'ma*] says "*VeHayu* - and they will *be* " - literally they will "be" as they "were" pronounced.**

**And what is the reasoning of other scholars? The verse said "*Sh'ma*"[meaning understand] - in any language that you hear (understand).**

**But Rabbi also must address the legal significance of the word "*Sh'ma*." That he interprets to mean, make audible (*Sh'ma*) to your ears that which you let out of your mouth.**

**And other scholars follow the view mentioned above that "If one did not make *Sh'ma* audible to one's ears, one still fulfilled the obligation."**

1. Imagine you are visiting Italy. You don't speak the language. They are reading *Kriyat Sh'ma* in Italian. How would you feel? Would you be critical of the synagogue's rabbi?
2. What is the dispute between Rabbi (Yehuda Hanassi) and scholars? What is the connection between the dispute and the case described in the previous question?
3. What is the connection between the disputes in sources #1 and #2?
4. What are the two meanings of the words "*Sh'ma Yisrael*" in these sources?
5. Rabbi claims that one must recite *Kriyat Sh'ma* only in Hebrew and out loud, even if that person does not understand Hebrew. What could be the reasons for this opinion? What concept of *Kriyat Sh'ma* underlies these *halachic* opinions?

### **Appendix to Source #2 - A Story about *Kriyat Sh'ma* in a Foreign Language**

TYerushalmi Sotah 7a, according to the commentary of *Hakorban Edah*

**Rabbi says: I say *Kriyat Sh'ma* must not be said in any other language but the Holy Tongue. For what reason? It says in *Kriyat Sh'ma* "Take to heart *these* instructions" (Deuteronomy 6) - [exactly as they were pronounced in the Torah].**

**Rabbi Levi Bar Chayta went to Caesaria (or Katzrin). There he heard the the people reading in Greek, and he wanted to stop them, so that they would not read in any language other than the Holy Tongue.**

**Rabbi Yossi heard about this and was angry at him. He said: I say, 'Do you mean [to be so strict about the form of the *Sh'ma*] that one who does not know how to read Hebrew letters should not read *Sh'ma* at all? Rather, one should fulfill one's obligation [for *Sh'ma*] in any language one knows.'**

(1) **In the first dispute** (*Midrash HaGadol* on Deuteronomy 6) - (Source #1), Rabbi Elazar Ben Azaria disagrees with Rabbi Meir. **Rabbi Elazar Ben Azaria** represents the ceremonial school, and therefore he demands that *Kriyat Sh'ma* be read out loud in order to make the words audible ("Hear, O Israel") to the reader or to the public. **Rabbi Meir** stands in opposition to him, emphasizing the exclusive importance of understanding the paragraphs of *Sh'ma* according to the verse "take to heart." Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai too supports this opinion and strengthens his claim with the verse "Understand! Hear, O Israel."

(2) **In the second dispute** (TB Brachot 13) - (Source #2 and appendix), **Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi** represents the ceremonial school by demanding that *Kriyat Sh'ma* be read in the Hebrew, the Holy Tongue. It is important to him to preserve the original form of God's words given in Hebrew. In Israel today, formal declarations are worded with festive and sometimes semi-biblical words, and not with everyday lingo. Similarly, in formal declarations in America the wording is in more formal English. The Gemara identifies Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi's approach with the

opinion of Rabbi Elazar Ben Azaria regarding making the words audible. In opposition to this approach, **the Rabbis** continue in the path of Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and permit reading in any language that people "hear" or understand.

**The more the intentionality of the heart and the intellectual understanding are emphasized, the more the ceremonial aspect is neglected.**

Consider this parallel case. Should a teacher asking a young student to read out loud from a Passover *Haggadah* in Hebrew correct each mistake made in the pronunciation of the Hebrew words, even it breaks the reader's train of thought? Or is the main thing to get onto a discussion of its meaning? Should the leader of a seder correct mispronunciations of the Haggadah ?

When learning the disputes at their simple textual level (*p'shat*) the students should not quote the contemporary halachic determination right away. We recommend guiding the discussion towards an understanding of the ideational approach underlying the dispute. Presumably, the students will be inclined to justify the stand favoring understanding over ceremony, and then they should be urged to speculate: **What is the rationale underlying the ceremonial school's approach?** Why read aloud in Hebrew? The rest of the unit will provide assistance in answering these questions.

## Lesson B - *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a Public Announcement

What is the meaning of the halachic approach that requires *Kriyat Sh'ma* to be read out loud and in Hebrew even without the reader understanding it?

*Kriyat Sh'ma* is a formal public reading, designed **to make the words audible to the others that are addressed**. *Kriyat Sh'ma* carries an important message to the public, and it determines the personal stance of the public speaker at the same time. A silent promise made in the heart is not the same as a ceremonial, spoken promise accompanied by a signature or an oath. **The public and ceremonial aspects commit the reader** to the written words. Silent reading and intellectual understanding of the words of *Sh'ma* do not express one's willingness to take a stand on the issue. It is reasonable to assume that Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi and Rabbi Elazar Ben Azaria saw in *Kriyat Sh'ma* such a kind of **public declaration of commitment**.

Let us explore several commentaries on *Kriyat Sh'ma*. Each each of which addresses the question, "**Who says 'Sh'ma Yisrael' to whom?**" The answers express very **different meanings** within the school we have named "the ceremonial school of understanding *Kriyat Sh'ma*." In each source we must first clarify the ceremonial form described and the comparison between *Kriyat Sh'ma* and other ceremonies, and then we will analyze the ideational meaning of the various forms. We recommend trying to read *Kriyat Sh'ma* according to each source's instructions, as a kind of theatrical production before analyzing the ideas.

### Source #3 - *Kriyat Sh'ma* as Testimony

Rabbi David (14th century Spain), author of the *Abudraham* commentary on the siddur:

**It was customary to recite it out loud to arouse *Kavannah* (intentionality) for the first verse, which is the main part requiring intentionality.**

**This form of recitation is also a form of giving testimony, as if people were to say to one another: "Sh'ma / Listen," I believe that *Adonai* our God is singular in God's world. That is why you will find a large *Ayin* in *Sh'ma* and a large *Dalet* in *Ehad*; together they make the sign *Eid*, hinting at "*Eidut* - testimony." Another explanation:**

***Sh-M-A* is an acronym from the verse (Isaiah 40:26) "*S'-ou M-arom A-ineichem*" ("Lift high your eyes and see"). To whom? *Sh-dai M-elech Ai-lyon* - God, the Divine Sovereign. When? During the prayers of *Sh-acharit*, *M-incha* and *A-rvit*. And if you do so, you accept an *Ol M-alchut Sh-mayim*, the yoke of Divine Sovereignty upon you, which are the letters of "*Sh-M-A* in reversed order.**

1. In the opinion of Rabbi David, *Kriyat Sh'ma* is **akin to testimony**. What hints does he provide for the notion of testimony in *Kriyat Sh'ma*?
2. What does "*Eidut*" (testimony) mean? Before whom do we testify and on what matter?
  3. Can the words of Rabbi David on testimony help explain the requirement of Rabbi Elazar Ben Azaria (Source #1) that *Kriyat Sh'ma* be read out loud, or the requirement of Rabbi (Source #2) that it only be recited formally in the Holy Tongue?

Rabbi David, *Abudraham*, in "Commentary on the Blessings and Prayers," written in the 14th-century Spain, describes a minimal ceremony of reciting the first verse - "*Sh'ma Yisrael*" – out loud, then he compares it to giving **testimony** in court. Here we can describe the accepted ceremony in western courts today (standing up, raising a hand or placing it upon a Bible, and taking **an oath** of fixed wording, including God's name). **The testimony** is given by the reader of *Sh'ma* to fellow worshippers in the synagogue; "I believe that Adonai, our God, is the only God in the world." Therefore, the meaning of the ceremony of *Kriyat Sh'ma* is to turn a simple recitation of words into a reaffirmation by means of the reader's personal testimony. Furthermore, the reader calls for others to recognize the stance taken and to agree with it. ***Kriyat Sh'ma* educates Jews to take a public stance on basic truths.** Truth requires supporters; it is not enough to believe within one's heart alone. There is a need for people to declare their faith in front of their friends.

#### **Source #4 - The First Blessing Before *Kriyat Sh'ma* with the Kedusha of "*Yotzer HaMeorot*"** (see siddur with *Titbarach Tzureinu...Baruch Kvod Adonai Mimkomo*)

1. In the opinion of Rabbi David (Source #3) *Kriyat Sh'ma* involves giving public testimony regarding individual acceptance of the sovereignty of God, in front of one's fellow prayer participants. In the blessing of "*Yotzer HaMeorot*" there is a similar description of acceptance of *Ol Malchut Shamayim*, when each angel addresses its neighbor. Try to describe the dialogue between the angels here.
2. Try finding parallels between reciting *Kriyat Sh'ma* in a minyan and the angels' "vowing one to another their loyalty oath to God's Sovereignty."
3. In your opinion, is the individual's experience of *Kriyat Sh'ma* significantly different from *Kriyat Sh'ma* in a minyan? Explain.

In many Midrashim (such as Midrash D'varim Rabba on the *Sh'ma*) *Kriyat Sh'ma* is recited by the angels. Sometimes Israel competes with the angels at saying it and sometimes we join them in this cosmic coronation.. The midrashim describe the **angels accepting *Ol Malchut Shamayim* one from another** in the blessing "*Yotzer HaMeorot*" and in the *Kedusha*. The angels stand and sing before the Sovereign of sovereigns, but before bursting into songs of praise they reaffirm the fact that they are indeed subject to God's sovereignty. They pledge their oath

to the Sovereign **by means of** their friends, making the act of accepting *Ol Malchut Shamayim* both an individual act and a communal act: "One to another they vow loyalty to God's sovereignty."

The ceremony of *Kriyat Sh'ma* can be explained in light of the content of this blessing. We can compare human *Kriyat Sh'ma* with the acceptance of *Ol Malchut Shamayim* by the angels. The ceremony includes **reading to one another** in order to accept *Ol Malchut Shamayim*. After the ceremony God is praised, as befits subjects to praise their ruler ("*Aleinu LeShabeach*" - "Let us praise God who rules over all the world"). The atmosphere throughout the angels' *Kriyat Sh'ma* is one of a Heavenly Temple. The Temple is packed to capacity with a very large crowd awaiting the arrival of the Ruler in the anticipation of an orchestra awaiting the opening of a concert. The excitement passes from one to another, they hurry each other on to make sure all are prepared. The public stance strengthens each individual. This kind of reading is not at all like the silent reading of an individual at home.

### **What is the Significance of the Comparison to the Angels' Choir?**

**Firstly**, Jews who are about to recite *Kriyat Sh'ma* must first prepare and purify themselves so that they perceive themselves as angels.

**Secondly**, people need to coordinate their recitation of *Kriyat Sh'ma* with their fellow prayer participants in order to recite it together, at once, clearly. Coordination among members of the minyan expresses the unity of the community that receives the sovereignty of God over them all as if they were one person. Each person assists the other in accepting *Ol Malchut Shamayim*. In a synagogue, when one person encounters difficulty in achieving the adequate depth of intentionality, the community in its singing can often elevate that person by virtue of its combined power.

**Third, acceptance of *Ol Malchut Shamayim* is not just a matter of an individual's belief in the heart, it is the result of a community's joint commitment, each strengthening the other's Judaism.**

**Fourth**, the content of *Kriyat Sh'ma*, according to this description, is not giving **testimony** regarding God's location in the world, it is **a personal acceptance of God's authority over us**. Perhaps instead of comparing *Kriyat Sh'ma* to testimony or to a legal oath, we should compare it to **a pledge of allegiance** in the army or the **swearing in** of a president at the beginning of a new term.

In the following unit we will address accepting *Ol Malchut Shamayim* as an individual act preformed in the heart with great intention and concentration. But here we are talking about public acceptance of *Ol Malchut Shamayim*, in which each individual in the community helps others and is helped by them to accept the authority of God.

## "Prisat Sh'ma (Sources #5-#6):

### Source #5 - Shirat HaYam in the Blessing of Ga'al Yisrael after Kriyat Shma

Siddur: *Al Zot Shibchu...Leolam Vaed*)

1. In the blessing following *Kriyat Sh'ma* an additional ceremony of accepting Divine Sovereignty is described. Which is it? By whom is it accepted?
2. In both this source and the previous one the word *Kulam* - "all of them together" is repeated again and again when they sing in chorus acclaiming your sovereignty." What does this collective aspect add to the ceremony of God's coronation?

### Source #6 - The Ceremony of Prisat Sh'ma and Shirat HaYam

Tosefta, Sotah 6: 2-3

**Rabbi Akiva taught:** At the time that the Jewish people came up from the sea, the Holy Spirit was upon them, and they sang as a child reads *Hallel* in school, each verse repeated as a group after the teacher.

**Moshe said:** "*Ashira LaAdonai* - I will sing to the Lord," and the Children of Israel said: "*Ashira LaAdonai* - I will sing to the Lord." Moshe said: "The Lord is my strength, my song, my deliverance," and the Children of Israel said: "The Lord is my strength, my song, my deliverance."

**Rabbi Eliezer son of Rabbi Yossi Haglili said:** As an adult who reads *Hallel* in the synagogue, where the congregation repeats the refrain after each section recited by the cantor.

**Moshe said:** "*Ashira LaAdonai* - I will sing to the Lord," and the Children of Israel said: "*Ashira LaAdonai* - I will sing to the Lord."

**Moshe said:** "The Lord is my strength, my song, my deliverance," and the Children of Israel said: "*Ashira LaAdonai* - I will sing to the Lord."

**Moshe said:** "The Lord, triumphant in battle," and the Children of Israel said: "*Ashira LaAdonai* - I will sing to the Lord."

**Rabbi Nechemia says:** As people who read the *Sh'ma*, as it is written "*VaYomeru Leimor* -They said it so that it would be recited." This teaches us that Moshe began, and the Children of Israel inserted after him and finished. Moshe said: "Then Moses sang," and the Children of Israel said "*Ashira LaAdonai* - I will sing to the Lord."

**Moshe said** "The Lord is my strength," and the Children of Israel said "The Lord is my God, who I glorify."

**Moshe said "The Lord triumphant in battle" and the Children of Israel said "Adonai is God's name."**

1. Rabbi Akiva, Rabbi Eliezer, and Rabbi Nechemia provide three different answers. What is the question to which they are all referring?
2. According to the testimony of Rabbi Nechemia, how was *Kriyat Sh'ma* customarily read in the days of the Mishna? (It is known as *Prisat* [the Slicing of] *Sh'ma*, because the verses of *Sh'ma* are sliced like pieces of bread).
3. What can be learned about the perception of *Kriyat Sh'ma* from its public form of recitation and from comparing it to *Shirat HaYam*?

(1) Earlier, we compared *Kriyat Sh'ma* to the *Kedusha* of the angels who receive *Ol Malchut Shamayim* from one another as is described in the blessing "*Yotzer HaMeorot*" prior to *Kriyat Sh'ma*. We now compare it to **the crowning of God by the Jewish People in *Shirat HaYam*** during the parting of the Red Sea, as it is described in the blessing "*Ga'al Yisrael*" after *Kriyat Sh'ma*. The intention of these blessings is to transform the daily repetition of *Sh'ma* into a formal recitation accepting *Ol Malchut Shamayim*, something like the heavenly scene of angels, described in the books of Ezekiel and Isaiah, and also like the historical scene of the Jewish people at the parting of the Red Sea.

In both situations, **the dramatic effect** of the reading is the result both of the public scene and the royal appearance. God appears in all the Divine glory in the cosmic skies every morning and God appeared one time on earth in the same glory at the Red Sea at that historical event.

**The comparison between *Kriyat Sh'ma* and *Shirat HaYam*** is not just hinted at, it is explicitly mentioned in a Tosefta. This source reveals, casually, the ancient custom of *Prisat Sh'ma*. *Prisat Sh'ma* is a special ceremonial recitation of *Kriyat Sh'ma*, alternating verses between the cantor and the congregation. It requires a minyan of ten just as the *Kedusha* does. According to the description in Tosefta, the cantor read the beginning of the verse "*Sh'ma Yisrael*" and the congregation continued, completing the verse with "*Adonai is our God, Adonai is One.*" (The meaning of the word "*Prisa*" is "to halve", "to slice" as one would do with a loaf of bread. The cantor divides the verse "*Sh'ma Yisrael*" into slices.) In order to demonstrate the drama of this reading, you can stage the three ways of reciting *Shirat HaYam*. In each such prayer or blessing there is **an address** to the audience **and a reply** from them. The main content of these prayers is praise to God.

**(2) What is the significance of *Prisat Sh'ma*?**

**First, *Kriyat Sh'ma* is best as a public one.** In light of this determination, the need to set a unitary format (language) and to recite it audibly becomes clear. *Prisat Sh'ma* is **a ceremony that expresses the attitude of the entire nation to its ruler.**

**Second**, *Kriyat Sh'ma* is not a study portion, it is poetry, **a song of praise to God**. In this poetry, just as in reciting Greek poetry and performing Greek plays with choirs, there is a special style of reading and counter-reading (antiphony).

**Third**, *Prisat Sh'ma* as public dialogue recaptures some of the drama of "*Sh'ma Yisrael*" when first pronounced in the speeches by Moshe addressing the nation. Here the role of Moshe is transferred to the cantor, who calls to the audience, and the congregation represents the Jewish people, who gives its approval and consent.

**Fourth**, *Kriyat Sh'ma* as it is described here comes close to the **public worship** of the Temple that included the songs of the *Levi'im*, and it moves away from the definition of worship of the heart, *Avodah She'Balev*.

(3) The concept of **crowning God each day** by means of *Shirat HaYam* appears explicitly in the siddur - not in *Kriyat Sh'ma* - in the beginning of *Psukei D'Zimra*, in the blessing "*Baruch She'Amar*":

"Merciful God...acclaimed by your people...with the songs of David we will exalt and glorify You with hymns...**we proclaim you Ruler**...Praised are you, **Ruler** extolled with hymns of praise."

As a part of *Psukei D'Zimra*, *Shirat HaYam* is recited each morning. In the same way, *Prisat Sh'ma* makes clear the meaning of *Kriyat Sh'ma* as coronation accompanied by songs of praise, similar to that of *Shirat HaYam* and *Psukei D'Zimra*. But *Psukei D'Zimra* are recited by the individual, and *Prisat Sh'ma* is a public ceremonial reading that takes place only in the presence of a minyan.

### Note to the Educator

**Students may have a problem** with an explanation that sees in *Kriyat Sh'ma* "poetry, songs of praise, and crowning." Their current experience with *Kriyat Sh'ma* does not reflect a dialogue-style song, and from textual analysis of the paragraphs there is no hint of praise or crowning. Teachers should acknowledge this difficulty and try to deduce inferences such as these:

- (1) The experience of *Kriyat Sh'ma* used to be very different from the way it is recited today. It is worth thinking about the differences and asking whether it would be desirable to change the format and the essence of the reading today, too. There seems to be no halachic objection to such a move.
- (2) The ceremonial form and context of the reading could change its meaning even without changing the words. As an educational exercise, dramatically read the directions of preparation off the side of a package of instant soup. Read them as a dramatic dialogue and try to **feel how the experience of public reading can transform the content**. In any case, it is important to create a theatrical performance of *Prisat Sh'ma* prior to analyzing it.

## The Rabbinic Story about our Ancestor Jacob / Yisrael - (Sources #7-#8)

(Maimonides, *Hilchot Kriyat Sh'ma*, based on an ancient midrash appearing in TB Pesachim 56 and in Midrash D'varim Rabba) -

### Source #7 The Rabbinic Story about our Ancestor Jacob / Yisrael

Midrash Sifri Deuteronomy (#31)

**"Hear O Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is One" - Why does it say "Israel"? Because it says : "Speak to the children of Israel." It does not say: "speak to the children of Abraham", nor "speak to the children of Isaac," rather it says "Speak to the children of Israel."**

**Our ancestor Jacob (also known as Israel) was privileged to speak thus to his children [or perhaps the text means: Israel was privileged to hear the recitation of *Sh'ma* from his children]. For Israel was worried all his life and used to say: "Woe is me, I fear that 'reject' offspring will come from me as they came from my ancestors." [Abraham had produced Ishmael and Isaac had produced Esav, who each abandoned the faith in the one God. So now as an aging father in pagan Egypt whose children would remain there] he warned each of his children. Then he called them together and questioned them: "Do any of you have a doubt regarding who created the world?"**

**They answered "Hear O Israel, our father. Just as there is no doubt in your heart, so there is no doubt in our heart regarding who created the world, Adonai is our God, Adonai is One."**

1. How does the author of the midrash move from the verse "*Sh'ma Yisrael*" to the story of Jacob's words to his children?
2. How does Jacob feel about his children living in Egypt? What does he do about it? Do your parents have similar worries? How do you feel about the strong language of the midrash - *psolet* - "reject offspring"?
3. According to the midrash, the words "*Sh'ma Yisrael*" are an answer. To whom? To what question? What do Jacob's children want to convey to him on his deathbed?
4. According to this midrash, what is the **content** of "*Sh'ma Yisrael*"?
5. According to this midrash, why is it important to recite *Kriyat Sh'ma* outloud?
6. Why do you think the author of the midrash wishes to compare everyday *Kriyat Sh'ma* to the dramatic scene of Jacob's deathbed?

## Source #8 - "Baruch Shem K'vod Malchuto Leolam Va'ed"

Maimonides, Sefer Ha'Ahava, Hilchot *Kriyat Sh'ma* 1:4.

When reading *Kriyat Sh'ma*, upon finishing the first verse one whispers: "*Baruch Shem Kvod Malchuto Leolam Vaed*," and returns to the regular reading tone from "*You shall love the Lord your God*" until the end of the *Sh'ma*. Why is it read so?

According to our tradition, when our ancestor Jacob gathered his children around his deathbed in Egypt, he commanded them and urged them to recognize the uniqueness (*Yichud*) of God and the path of God that was walked by Abraham and Isaac his father.

He asked them: "My sons! Perhaps there is something disqualifying/objectionable in you? Does anyone not stand with me in recognizing the uniqueness of God?"

[Jacob was doing something] like Moshe [did at the ceremony of renewing the covenant with God not long before his death]: "Perchance there is among you some man or woman...whose heart is even now turning away from the Lord our God,"(Deuteronomy 29:17).

All [Jacob's sons] answered and said: "Hear O Israel, *Adonai* is our God, *Adonai* is One."

In other words, *Sh'ma*, hear from us, our father Israel, *Adonai* is our God, *Adonai* is One. The old man replied: "*Baruch Shem Kvod Malchuto Leolam Vaed* - Blessed is the name and the glory of the Kingdom of God forever more." Therefore it is the custom of all of Israel to recite the same words of praise that old Israel used after hearing the verse *Sh'ma*.

1. Maimonides quotes the midrash about our ancestor Jacob in order to explain a *halacha* regarding *Kriyat Sh'ma*. What is the *halacha*?
2. What is the meaning of the comparison between the question of our ancestor Jacob and the question of Moshe? (See the context of Deuteronomy 29:17, where the scene of signing a covenant is described).
3. Reread Source #1. In this source there is a dispute over how to recite *Kriyat Sh'ma* - reading it out loud as a public declaration **or** reading it with inwardly-directed *kavannah*. In light of the Midrash, what is preferable? Explain your answer.
4. In this unit we have emphasized that *Kriyat Sh'ma* has an aspect of public declaration addressed to someone. Reread Sources #3-7 and prepare a **table** presenting what is being declared and to whom. Which view is your favorite? Why?
5. Compare Jacob's demand for loyalty to the past to Arnold Eisen's contemporary view:  
"The first question facing many contemporary American Jews is not *what they believe* but *where they will stand* in relation to the Jewish past. They know Judaism is a commitment, not a creed, ...a live relation with the aspects of our inheritance that speak with "inner power." Some Jews feel

addressed in politics or the arts. Others hear it in prayer or study. Still others...through ritual observance or projects in social justice” (*Taking Hold of Torah* by A.Eisen, p. 28).

One of the most surprising things about *Kriyat Sh'ma* to this very day, is the silent or whispered recitation of the words "**Baruch Shem K'vod Malchuto L'Olam Vaed**" in the midst of continuous verses from the Torah. The utterance of this sentence belongs to a special ceremony of *Kriyat Sh'ma*. According to the customs of the Second Temple, we can hypothesize that after the priests pronounced God's holiest Tetragrammaton Y-H-W-H name in the verse *Sh'ma Yisrael*, the congregation used to answer "*Baruch Shem K'vod Malchuto*," and probably bowed down, as described in the Seder Avodah in the Yom Kippur Mahsor, when people heard the High Priest pronounce God's name on Yom Kippur. Whether or not this hypothesis is correct, the custom itself resulted in a most interesting Midrash that also explains *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a kind of dialogue, including a public declaration. Maimonides thought highly enough of this Midrash to insert it into the first chapter of his book of Halachot on *Kriyat Sh'ma* and prayer.

The Midrash says: Our father Jacob (also known as Israel) **was fearful all his life** that his children would abandon monotheism. So in pagan Egypt just before he died, Jacob warned each of his children of the danger of assimilation and then called them together and said to them, "Do any of you have a doubt regarding who created the world?" They answered "**Hear, Israel our father**. Just as there is no doubt in your heart, so there is no doubt in our heart regarding who created the world, *Adonai* is our God, *Adonai* is One." (Sifrei Dvarim #31)

This Midrash is a midrash aggadah, not a midrash halacha, and it is not meant to clarify the *p'shat* of the Torah verse. In the Torah there is no difficulty in understanding the words "*Sh'ma Yisrael*." There they mean: "Hear/Listen People of Israel." It is part of Moshe's speech to the Jewish people. The author of the Midrash knows that this portion was chosen to be read in *Kriyat Sh'ma* and therefore was faced with three problems:

- (a) What should the reader of *Kriyat Sh'ma* mean by the words "*Sh'ma Yisrael*?" After all, the Biblical context is Moshe speaking to the people, but the liturgical context is the people reciting it. To whom should they direct this statement?
- (b) Why is does this sentence use a rhetorical phrase to draw attention rather than a commanding word as in the rest of the first paragraph?

The Midrash cannot be understood according to its simple verbal meaning. Our Ancestor Jacob was not familiar with *Kriyat Sh'ma*, nor were his sons. The author of the Midrash may have intended to compare Jacob to "Grandfather Israel" and his twelve sons to the congregation of Israel, reading *Kriyat Sh'ma* in every generation. The parallel midrash in Bereshit Rabbah adds the following (paragraph 98, 3):

**That is what Israel recites each morning and evening: "Sh'ma, Yisrael, our Ancestor from the Cave of Machpela, the same thing you have commanded us is still our custom - Adonai is our God, Adonai is One."**

The author of the midrash understands *Kriyat Sh'ma* as the reader testifying to one's loyalty to the belief of the Jewish people. The essence of *Kriyat Sh'ma* is **a pledge of allegiance** meant for the ears of others. The central experience is to declare that we do not depart from the tradition of our ancestors; we follow in their path. *Kriyat Sh'ma* is a ceremony meant to identify the reader publicly as a member of the monotheists who proclaim God's unity and sovereignty.

The **public recitation of *Kriyat Sh'ma*** in ancient times, when *Prisat Sh'ma* was customary (Megillah 84, 46), expresses this dramatic ceremonial experience. The reading was conducted antiphonally; the cantor read a sentence (or part of one) and the congregation replied, completing it. Thus an entire congregation declares as one, out loud, who its God is.

**Individuals reading *Kriyat Sh'ma* privately** also have to create for themselves in their imagination such a dramatic context, hence the blessings around *Kriyat Sh'ma* recall the angelic coronation and the songs of the Red Sea. The individual must read out loud so as to hear his or her own statement declaring that *Adonai* is our God, *Adonai* is One.

The Midrash Aggadah creates another imaginative drama reenacted daily. It tells of Jacob, known as Israel, who is about to die, and who fears his children will not continue in his way of worshipping God. Perhaps, considering the idol-worshipping atmosphere in Egypt, he feared their belief would be harmed. In order to put his mind at ease, his sons, the children of Israel, **declared** that their faith was strong. This explanation is somewhat similar to the explanation of *Abudarham* who saw in "*Sh'ma Yisrael*" testimony given about one's inner faith. But there the testimony is addressed towards the fellow congregation member, and here it is directed towards Grandfather Israel, and for the reader towards the generations that came before the reader. **The ideational content of *Sh'ma Yisrael* is a metaphysical faith but its form is that of a declaration of loyalty to the ancestors of the nation regarding our will to continue in their ways. The dramatic context of *Kriyat Sh'ma* is that of a pledge of allegiance to a dying parent on the deathbed, and this scene reinforces the promise made.**

**What is the meaning of *Kriyat Sh'ma* according to the Aggadah?**

**Firstly,** *Kriyat Sh'ma* is a declaration about the purity of faith. **Faith must be declared** publicly to rule out the possibility that the children question this faith. It is not enough to read the words each day, but we also have to make sure the reader believes them. *Kriyat Sh'ma* is part of the education from one generation to the next.

**Second,** *Kriyat Sh'ma* is **a pledge of allegiance**, not to God, but to our ancestors. Here we can begin a discussion regarding Jews' attitudes towards God and Judaism at large.

Sometimes a **relationship which is mediated through a parent is a stronger source of tradition than directly addressing God. The belief of Abraham** in God, as the Rabbis understood it, is belief as the fruit of a free intellectual search that resulted in a mutiny against the idolatry of his father, Terach (See Maimonides, *Hilchot Avodah Zara*, chapter 1). But **the faith of the children of Jacob**, who did not know God directly through personal revelation, is based on their personal and family loyalty to Jacob. That is the case with many Jews - even those who are not great believers - they cherish "tradition," and the verse "*Sh'ma Yisrael*" in particular, due to the respect they have for the heritage they received from their ancestors. ***Kriyat Sh'ma* is an affirmation of loyalty to the tradition of ancestors, performed in a public scene by means of a daily declaration.** The example set by the parent is compelling, especially when the children swear something to the parent before death. There is no treason greater than the hypocritical promise made to a dying person who seeks continuity. In class, the Midrash on Jacob can be acted out for dramatic effect in the form of a bibliodrama.

### **For Further Enrichment: Writing an Ethical Will**

The Jewish custom of writing **an ethical will** is worthy of research. Like Jacob and his children and Moshe and the tribes, according to this custom a person leaves one's children not only directions regarding how to divide the material property, but also **advice** from one's life experience and **requests** that the children remain loyal to the principles that are the moral legacy of one's life.

In fact, the entire book of Deuteronomy, presented as the speech of Moses to the new generation before his death, is in the form of an ethical will. In the Torah, there are literary and contextual parallels between the words of Moshe in Deuteronomy that end in blessings to each tribe, and the words of Jacob at the end of Genesis, also accompanied by blessings to the tribes.

The students can be asked to write an ethical will to "their children" in which they will attempt to define what the most important **Jewish** elements are, that they would like their offspring to keep. They can also interview parents and grandparents and write up the responses in the form of an ethical will.

### **In Summary**

To conclude the four explanations of *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a ceremony and summarize them, create a **table** listing: The Source come from / Who said to Whom? / "*Sh'ma Yisrael*" means... /the main idea of ceremony is.

## Lesson C - *Kriyat Sh'ma* as an Inner Affirmation (Sources #9-#11)

Up until this point we have emphasized the importance of the ceremony as a public event surrounding *Kriyat Sh'ma*. These elements transform a simple reading into an explicit commitment, giving testimony, taking a stand, crowning a ruler, and pledging allegiance. **But the halachic decision has ruled against excessive ceremony.** There is no mitzvah to read *Kriyat Sh'ma* in Hebrew, but rather, as the Rabbis said, "one reads in any language one hears (=knows, understands)." We must understand this school that limits ceremony.

In order to highlight the dispute regarding ceremony, and in order present a fifth opinion that sees in *Kriyat Sh'ma* a declaration of a different kind, we bring a famous Midrash (appearing in **Vayikra Rabba**, quoted as a halacha in the Shulchan Aruch) and we compare it to a **dispute between Beit Hillel and Beit Shamai** (TB Berachot).

### (A) *Prosdegma* - The Royal Decree

#### Source #9 - Have I Burdened You with My Kingdom?

Vayikra Rabba on Leviticus 22:27.

[God asked:] "What hardship have I caused you?" (Micha 6:3) [Have I burdened you with My Kingdom?]

**Rabbi Yitzchak said: This is a parable. It is like a ruler who sent a royal decree to the country. What did the people do? They stood up on their feet, removed their hats, and read it with awe and fear, with tremor and shuddering.**

**So God said to Israel: *Kriyat Sh'ma* is my royal decree, but I have not burdened you. I have not told you to read it standing up on your feet, nor did I tell you to remove your head covering, rather recite it "when you sit at home and while you go on your way." (Deuteronomy 6:7).**

1. What is the parable and to what is it being compared? Create a table comparing **all** the elements of the parable and *Kriyat Sh'ma*.
2. If *Kriyat Sh'ma* is like a royal decree, then what is its content and to whom is it addressed?
3. Which demands from the people did God forgo in comparison, unlike a flesh and blood ruler would have? Why did God do so? In other words, why didn't *halacha* according to this midrash require behavior appropriate for a ruler's decree?

How does the verse from *Sh'ma* serve as proof for the Midrash's leniency?

How do the following halachic sources in the appendix contradict the midrash? Why do you think they changed the ancient practice of *Kriyat Sh'ma* as reported in the midrash? Note the variations in this version of the

midrash - especially the extra sentence at the end. It may be a later emendation. Do you prefer the halacha of the first or the second version of the midrash? Explain.

**Appendix :** Aruch Hashulchan Orach Hayim, Hilchot *Kriyat Sh'ma* 61:

**One must recite *Kriyat Sh'ma* with intention, respect, fear, tremor, and shuddering. When a flesh and blood ruler sends a royal decree to the country, the words are read and heard with fear and respect, hence all the more so (*Kal Vachomer*) before the Ruler of rulers, God.**

**Rabbi Akiva wrote: At all times that a person reads *Kriyat Sh'ma* one must compare it to a newly issued royal decree (*prosdegma*). A *prosdegma* is an official letter from the ruler to the subjects of his country. *Kriyat Sh'ma* is God's decree, and so it is written in the Midrash *Vayikra Rabba, Parashat Emor*):**

**Rabbi Brachya said - a flesh and blood ruler sends a decree to the country. What do they do? All the people of the country stand up on their feet, remove their head coverings and read it with fear, respect, tremor, and shuddering.**

**But God tells Israel: Read *Kriyat Sh'ma*, my decree, yet I have not burdened you and required its reading while standing or bareheaded, rather it is read "when you are on your way [that is walking with head covered on the road, and not standing at attention bare-headed before a king]." Nevertheless it must be read with fear, respect, tremor, and shuddering.**

In *Vayikra Rabba* (Source #9), there is an attempt **to differentiate between the demands of a Roman emperor and the demands of the Sovereign of sovereigns**. The Roman emperor sends a monarchical decree. In each city one of the local people - perhaps the local representative of the ruler - reads the decree. Regardless of the document's content, every citizen must treat the reading respectfully, since it includes words of the emperor. The attitude towards the words expresses **an acceptance of his ruling, and therefore the emperor demands that all stand, remove their hats, and read the decree fearfully, as if the emperor himself were standing before them**. The series of phrases "with fear, respect, shuddering, and tremor" is an accepted description in rabbinical literature for the feeling of the Jewish people standing under Mt. Sinai, hearing the declaration of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19:16-19; 20:15).

But according to this Midrash, God demands less glory than the Roman emperor. The people of Israel - God's subjects - hear the Divine Decree each day when they **read the words of God** - the three paragraphs from the

Torah. However, they do not have to stand or remove their hats as a symbol of respect (Note that this source implies that Jews in the Hellenist age in Eretz Yisrael probably did not wear a head covering for *Kriyat Sh'ma*.) It is not clear whether the Midrash requires reading with fear and tremor even without a ceremony (Ba'al Haturim thinks that we must indeed feel fear and respect). It is clear that **there is no demand to show an attitude of accepting sovereignty externally**. In fact, one more or less continues what one is doing - sitting, walking - while reciting the *Sh'ma*. According to this view, it was not the case that one went to a synagogue to recite the daily *Sh'ma* unless one was doing *Prisat Sh'ma*.

### **What is the meaning of the Divine Decree?**

**First**, the Midrash explains that the words "*Sh'ma Yisrael*" are not said by one person to another, nor are they words of praise to God. **The *Sh'ma* is the words of God - a public declaration of the Divine monarchical decree**. Even though the Ruler is not present, the written words of the Divine decree must be read and treated with the utmost respect.

**Second, God does not wish to burden the subjects for no reason**, halt their work, and hold special gatherings morning and evening to make the Divine words heard. Out of compassion, God does not demand the preparations it takes to organize a formal reading. God is satisfied with the message being conveyed without ceremony, as is written, "*Recite them when you stay at home and when you are on your way.*"

**Third**, despite the absence of external ceremony, the Midrash nonetheless explains *Kriyat Sh'ma* as a **declaration, but one that a person addresses to oneself**, in which one expresses acceptance of *Ol Malchut Shamayim* as a personal, internal act only.

### **(B) Hillel and Shamai's Dispute (Source #10 and #11)**

#### **Source #10 - The Beit Shamai - Beit Hillel Disputes**

TB Brachot 10b

**Mishna:**

**Beit Shamai says: In the evening one leans sideways and reads *Sh'ma*, and in the morning one stands up, as is written "when you lie down and when you get up."**

**But Beit Hillel says: Every person reads as one is accustomed to reading, as it is written: "and when you are on your way."**

**If so, why was it written "when you lie down and when you get up?"**

**At the hour that people lie down and the hour that people stand up.**

1. This Mishna deals with the behavior of a person reading *Kriyat Sh'ma*. Explain the dispute between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai regarding the *halachic* significance of the *Sh'ma*'s phrase "when you lie down and when you get up."
2. Beit Hillel determined that *Kriyat Sh'ma* must be read in a physical position according to what each person wishes and finds most comfortable - "every person reads as one is accustomed to reading." What is the source of authority for this determination?
3. What ideational considerations do you think underlie the opinion of Beit Hillel? Compare their opinion to that of the author of the Midrash in the previous source.

### **Source #11 - Comparative Customs in the Land of Israel and in Babylon**

**The people of the Land of Israel stand during *Kriyat Sh'ma* and the people of Babylon sit.**

1. What is the relationship between the dispute in the previous Mishna (Source #10) and the Comparative Customs in this source (that apparently reflect customs of the *Geonim* period)?
2. The *halacha* was determined back in the time of the Mishna, in favor of Beit Hillel for *Kriyat Sh'ma*. Does the behavior of the people of Israel in those times contradict the *halacha*? Does it contradict the spirit of the *halacha*?
3. Why do you think the people of Israel used to stand for *Kriyat Sh'ma*, despite the fact that they were permitted to sit and be more comfortable?
4. Do you think it is desirable to stand during *Kriyat Sh'ma*? Explain.

The Beit Hillel-Beit Shammai dispute shows that the Midrash in Vayikra Rabbah sides with Hillel against Beit Shammai. **Beit Shammai turned *Kriyat Sh'ma* into a ritualized body language in which one stands in the morning and leans at night. But the halacha is according to Beit Hillel, in line with the Midrash.**

Don't let the accepted halachic position prejudice the discussion **whether it is desirable to minimize ceremony as much as possible so as not to burden the people who are praying.** Even if Beit Hillel and the author of the Midrash are willing to skip the ceremony, perhaps above and beyond the requirements it would be appropriate to stand during *Kriyat Sh'ma*? (In the Land of Israel it was in fact customary during the Talmudic period to stand during *Kriyat Sh'ma* [source #11].) Shouldn't the Sovereign of sovereigns be treated with the same deference as the Roman emperor? Isn't it important to demand respect for the commander-in-chief or for the flag when raised or lowered, morning and evening, just at the times that *Sh'ma* is recited? Shouldn't we call people to attention for an important announcement like *Sh'ma*? In the discussion you can anticipate opinions for and against such a ceremony. It is important to enable expression of the opinion supporting intentionality of the heart. That approach sees prayer as a personal expression, not a public matter. This discussion paves the way for the future units that deal with intentionality of the heart in *Kriyat Sh'ma*.

## Lesson D: The Relationship between Ceremony and Intentionality of the Heart (Sources #12-#13)

### Source #12 - "To Recite *Sh'ma Yisrael* Outloud"

Aruch Hashulchan, Orach Hachayim, chapter 61.

The custom in all Jewish Diaspora communities is to recite "*Sh'ma Yisrael*" out loud, to arouse intention and to recite it with excitement. It is customary to place one's hands over one's face when reading the verse "*Sh'ma Yisrael*," in order to prevent distraction caused by looking at something else.

### Source #13 - "But That Was Not the Custom"

Aruch Hashulchan, Orach Hachayim, chapter 61.

*Kriyat Sh'ma* should be recited with the appropriate musical notes [*ta'amei hamikra*], just as one reads Torah.

However, that was not the custom in these countries (Ashkenaz).

It appears to me that the reason is that many people, when reading with the notes, become confused and will not understand the meaning of the words; the tune could confuse someone who is not familiar with it, and then the *kavanah* is lost.

1. According to the nineteenth century Aruch Hashulchan (sources #12-13), what are the three ceremonies customary during *Kriyat Sh'ma*? From your personal experience, how do these customs affect the experience of *Kriyat Sh'ma*?
2. Why does the Aruch HaShuchan think we no longer sing *Sh'ma* according to the Biblical musical notes? What is the benefit and the loss from dropping this custom? Have you heard *Sh'ma* recited according to the Torah notes?

In these sources we study two halachot customary today, that show that **ceremony in *Kriyat Sh'ma*** is still a matter of interest and live discussion. In both halachot, the perception of *Kriyat Sh'ma* prefers personal intentionality of the heart to the public declaration. Yet in both there are ceremonial elements meant to deepen the reader's personal intentionality.

**Aruch Hashulchan (source #12)** was written by Rabbi Yechiel Epstein at the beginning of the 20th century. He brings all the halachot of the **Shulchan Aruch** of Yosef Karo together with additions and many explanations from the sources. In the halachot of *Kriyat Sh'ma* he adds **customs** that have evolved in *Kriyat Sh'ma*. The first halacha includes the following customs:

(1) **A raised voice when reciting "Sh'ma Yisrael;"** (2) **Covering the eyes.**

But the explanation that was given about them is not symbolic, but practical. The outloud reading is not explained here as reading **externally**, rather as an attempt to prevent external distractions, and increase internal concentration in the heart.

In the second halacha (**source #13**), a custom is described in which all the paragraphs of *Sh'ma* must be read festively according to the **Torah-reading melody**. (In order to demonstrate this halacha, we recommend reading *Kriyat Sh'ma* with the Torah *trope*.) But this custom was abandoned in Ashkenaz. The author of the Aruch HaShulchan explains its cancelation for the same reason as in the previous halacha. He thinks that **any ceremonial custom should be cancelled if it impairs intentionality of the heart**. Here is our bridge to the next three units concentrating on *Kavannah*.

## Unit IV - Sources and Guideline Questions on *Kriyat Sh'ma* as Torah Study

### Source #1- *Kriyat Sh'ma* according to Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai

(Land of Israel, 2nd century C.E. during and after the Bar Kochba Revolt) TB Brachot 14b

**Rabbi Yehoshua son of Korcha said: why is the *Sh'ma* recited first among the three paragraphs of *Kriyat Sh'ma*? ...**

**Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai says: logically speaking, *Sh'ma* should come before *Vehaya Im Shamo* since the former teaches the mitzvah of learning and the latter teaches the mitzvah of teaching. *Vehaya Im Shamo* comes before *Vayomer* since the former teaches about learning and teaching and the latter about acting on what was learned.**

1. Rabbi Yehoshua son of Korcha tried to understand the essence of *Kriyat Sh'ma* according to the **logic** underlying the order of its paragraphs. How did Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai explain the order of paragraphs? What is the logic ("according to the law") underlying this order? Offer an alternative explanation to the paragraphs or an additional logic to the order.
2. Where is learning mentioned in *Sh'ma* and where is teaching mentioned in *Vehaya Im Shamo*?
3. Rabbi Yehoshua son of Korcha claims elsewhere, that the paragraph *Sh'ma* comes first because it represents the acceptance of the yoke of God's kingdom (*Kabbalat Ol Malchut Shamayim*).
4. What is the difference between Rabbi Yehoshua's emphasis and that of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai's in understanding the essence of *Kriyat Sh'ma*?

### Source #2 The Blessing "*Ahavat Olam*" before *Kriyat Sh'ma* of Arvit

1. The blessings before and after *Kriyat Sh'ma* guide the reader's perception of *Kriyat Sh'ma*, thus clarifying its essence. Identify the words and ideas connecting the *Ahavat Olam* blessing with the paragraph of *Sh'ma*.
2. Mark the words of the bracha referring to emotional attitudes. In light of this blessing, what are the ideal feelings generated by Torah study? Do you ever feel that way about any sort of learning? What is your attitude to studying in general?
3. According to this bracha, is the gift of the Torah understood as the acceptance of the **burden** of God's kingdom and the **yoke** of mitzvot? Explain.

### **Source #3 - The Blessings of the Torah**

(for further enrichment) TB Brachot 11

**Rabbi Yehuda quoted Shmuel: If one arises early to study prior to reading *Kriyat Sh'ma* [and its blessings] one must recite a blessing [for learning Torah]. After reading *Kriyat Sh'ma* one is no longer obligated to recite such a blessing, since having recited "*Ahava Rabba*" one has already fulfilled this obligation [to recite a bracha for studying Torah].**

**Which blessing should be recited [If one arises early to study prior to reading *Kriyat Sh'ma*]?**

**Rabbi Yehuda quoted Shmuel: "Who has sanctified us with God's mitzvot and commanded us to deal with matters of Torah" [*la-asok b'divrei Torah*].**

**Rabbi Yochanan says that one concludes this bracha as follows: "Who teaches Torah to the people of Israel [*Ha'arev na...Hamelamed Torah l'amo yisrael*].**

**Rav Hammuna said: "Who has chosen us from all the nations and has given us God's Torah. Blessed are You God, giver of the Torah" [*Notein HaTorah*].**

**Rav Hammuna said: This is the greatest of all blessings, therefore let us recite it in all these formulae.**

1. According to the halacha, Jews must recite a blessing prior to studying Torah. Since *Kriyat Sh'ma* is also considered Torah study, the blessings "*Ahava Rabba*" in *Shacharit* and "*Ahavat Olam*" in *Arvit* were established to be read as blessings over Torah study before the *Sh'ma*. Of what special case not covered by the usual halacha is Shmuel speaking in the Talmudic passage above?
2. The Rabbis disputed over which blessing should be recited over studying. Where do these blessings appear in the siddur? Why are they located there?
3. If you had to choose one blessing out of the three offered in the dispute, which would it be? What are your reasons?

### **Source #4 - What Counts as "Torah" requiring a Blessing over Talmud Torah?**

TB Brachot 11

**Rabbi Huna said: For Torah [or Tanakh] - one must recite a blessing, but for midrash - one is not obligated. Rabbi Eliezer said: for Torah and midrash - one must recite a blessing, but for Mishna - one is not obligated.**

**Rabbi Yochanan said: For Mishna too one must recite a blessing (but not for Talmud).**

**Rava said: Even for Talmud one must recite a blessing.**

1. Present the Gemara's opinions in the form of a table.

2. How can we understand the opinion of Rava, that even the words of scholars in the Talmud are considered "Torah" given by God and require a bracha?
3. What are the differences between the experiences of studying the Torah portion of the week (*Parashat Hashavua*), studying a Talmudic dispute, and hearing a Rabbinic aggadah? Which of them does the experience of *Kriyat Sh'ma* resemble, if any? Explain.
4. In your opinion, is *Kriyat Sh'ma* an experience of study?

**Source #5 - The First Dispute between Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and his Opposition:  
"Torah Study is Equal to them All," said Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai**

TY Brachot 1:2

**Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai:** People like us who deal in Torah study do not stop even for *Kriyat Sh'ma*.

**Question:** But doesn't Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai acknowledge the principle regarding "one who learns the Law but does not intend to observe it - that it would have been better had that one never been created"?

**Rabbi Yochanan said:** About one who learns Torah without any intention of carrying it out, we say it would have been better if that one had never come out into this world from his mother's womb.

**Answer:** Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai's reasoning is that this is study and that is study and one does not cancel study for the sake of study.

**Question:** But reading *Kriyat Sh'ma* at its designated time is more beloved than words of Torah!

[Rabbi Meni said: One who reads *Kriyat Sh'ma* at its designated time is greater than one studying Torah - TB Brachot 10b.]

**Answer - Rabbi Yudan said:** Since Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai is so well versed in the words of Torah, for him *Kriyat Sh'ma* is not more beloved in his opinion than other words of Torah [That is, he is not more familiar and therefore more fond of *Shma* than other sections he has studied]...

**Furthermore,** Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai said: One who studies Torah or Tanakh is and isn't really studying [as compared to the more serious study of the Oral tradition - Mishna. Therefore, for Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, who is studying Mishna, there is no need to stop studying Mishna in order to recite *Kriyat Sh'ma*, even when its designated time arrives.

1. Read the claim of the Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. In his opinion, *Talmidei Chachamim* who study Mishna all the time do not have to stop their studies in order to recite *Kriyat Sh'ma*. Every day, the entire nation must recite *Kriyat Sh'ma*, but the scholars of the Oral Tradition are completely exempt from reciting *Kriyat Sh'ma*. What is surprising about this opinion? What further questions need to be addressed on this matter? Does this opinion seem reasonable to you? Explain.
2. The rest of the excerpt quotes a give-and-take with Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai in which his opinion is attacked and he attempts to defend and explain it. In light of the discussion, what is Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai's concept of the essence of *Kriyat Sh'ma*?
3. Why does he perceive himself as exempt from *Kriyat Sh'ma*?

## Source #6 - *Kriyat Sh'ma* - a Mitzvah from the Torah or from the Rabbis?

TB Brachot 21a

**Rabbi Yehuda said:** If one thinks that he has read *Kriyat Sh'ma* but is not sure - one does not need to repeat it. If in doubt whether or not the blessing after *Kriyat Sh'ma* - "*Emet Veyatziv*" - was read, then one repeats it.

What is the reason for this distinction? *Kriyat Sh'ma* is enacted by the Rabbis (*M'Drabanan*), while "*Emet Veyatziv*" is from the Torah (*M'Deoreita*).

[In Rabbi Yehuda's opinion, *Kriyat Sh'ma* is enacted by the Rabbis and it is our custom to follow the principle - "when in doubt about mitzvot enacted by the Rabbis, we go by the more lenient verdict. In the case of the blessing *Emet Veyatziv*, the essence of which is mentioning the Exodus from Egypt, it expresses a mitzvah from the Torah - to recall daily the Exodus - so when in doubt we repeat it.]

**Rabbi Yosef poses a further difficulty:** It is explicitly written "*V'shinatem* - Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up." [Isn't this a mitzvah from the Torah to recite *Shma*?]

**Abayei answered him by saying:** This verse obligates one to recite "them" (=words of Torah) morning and evening. [However it is not referring to these specific selections called *Kriyat Sh'ma* but to any selections from the Torah; there is only a general obligation to study words of the Torah day and night learned from this verse. It is only the Rabbis who established as mitzvah *D'rabbanan* that these specific paragraphs were to be used to fulfill this daily obligation].

1. Rabbi Yehuda claims that *Kriyat Sh'ma* - reading the well known three paragraphs - is a mitzvah determined by the Rabbis. What difficulty does Rabbi Yosef pose regarding that opinion?
2. In Abbayei's opinion, the Rabbis determined those three paragraphs, but the mitzvah from the Torah of "Impress them...when you lie down and when you get up" refers to the obligation to study Torah every day and not to a specific reading.
3. What is the relation between the opinion of Abbayei and the opinion of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai in Source #5?

## Source #7 - "*Let not this Book of the Torah Cease from Your Lips, Recite it Day and Night*" (Joshua 1:8)

Midrash, Dvarim Rabba, "*VaEtchanan*"

Why did God give *Kriyat Sh'ma* to Israel? So that they might be able to observe the mitzvah: "*Let not this Book of the Torah cease from your lips*" (Joshua 1:8).

## Source #8 - "*Day and Night*"

*Shocheh Tov* Midrash on Psalms 1

"The Torah of Adonai is a Divine delight" (Psalm 1).

**Rabbi Eliezer says:** The people of Israel said to God:

Master of the Universe, we would like to immerse ourselves to the point of exhaustion solely in Torah study, day and night, but we do not have the time.

God said to them: Observe the mitzvah of tefilin and I will count it as if you immerse yourselves till exhaustion in Torah day and night.

**Rabbi Yehoshua said:** What Rabbi Eliezer said does not include nights since the mitzvah of Tefilin takes place only during the day.

**Rabbi Eliezer answered him by saying:** And why is this different then observing "and you shall speak of God's Torah day and night?"

**Rabbi Yehoshua answered:** That refers to *Kriyat Sh'ma*, that if a person reads it at *Shacharit* and *Arvit*, God counts it as if that person had studied Torah to the point of exhaustion, day and night.

1. Read the full verse from Joshua 1:8 mentioned in Source #7. What does that verse require Jews to do as far as how they should spend their time? How is this demand defined in the Dvarim Rabbah commentary?
2. Read the midrash on Psalms in Source #8. What is the problem of the Jewish people? How is this problem connected to the verse "The Torah of Adonai is God's delight "(Psalms 1)?
3. What are the solutions of Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua?
4. In light of Rabbi Yehoshua's words, express your opinion on the following statement:  
"The obligation of *Kriyat Sh'ma* is a mitzvah for the working class, not for Torah students or *Talmidei Chachamim*."

### **Source #9 - Torah Study for the Laypeople:**

#### **The Second Dispute between Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and his Opposition**

TB Menachot 99b

**Rabbi Ami said:** We have learned that even if a person studied no more than one chapter (of Mishna) each morning and one chapter each evening, that person has fulfilled the mitzvah, "Let not this Book of the Torah cease from your lips, recite it day and night" (Joshua 1:8).

**Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai:** Even if a person read no more than *Kriyat Sh'ma* of *Shacharit* and *Arvit*, that person has fulfilled the obligation, "Let not this Book of the Torah cease from your lips, recite it day and night" (Joshua 1:8).  
However, it is forbidden to make this ruling known to laypeople.

**But Rava said:** It is a mitzvah to make this ruling known to laypeople.

[Disagreeing with both views] **Rabbi Yonatan said:** This verse, "Let not this Book of the Torah cease from your lips, recite it day and night" (Joshua 1:8), is neither an obligation nor a mitzvah, rather it is a blessing. God saw that Yehoshua was very fond of the words of the Torah, as it is written: "[Moshe's] attendant Joshua son of Nun, a youth, would not stir out of the tent [where Moshe was studying Torah]" (Exodus 33:11). So God said to him: "Yehoshua, since you are so fond of these words of Torah - let not this book of the Torah cease from your lips!"

The school of Rabbi Yishmael added : On one hand, the Words of Torah must not be regarded as an obligation [a burden] nor, on the other hand, are you at liberty to exempt yourself from them.

**Rashi** comments on the phrase: "must not be regraded as an obligation" = as in the case of a person in debt, who says "when will I pay off my debt and be rid of it?" Thus people must not say, "We will study one chapter and be done with it," for one is not at liberty to exempt oneself from it.

**Tosafot** comments: We must further explain "must not be as an obligation" = that prevents you from doing anything else besides them alone.

We explain "on the other hand, you are not at liberty to exempt yourself from them" = so that you do not deal with them at all. Rather, the desirable combination is that of Torah study alongside the usual way of the world, i.e. making a living.

We can also explain: "must not be as an obligation" = to study the entire Torah. For we have learned (in Pirkei Avot 2:16), "You are not the one who must complete the task nor are you free to exempt yourself from it."

1. Read the source and note the series of disputes in it. What is the dispute between Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai?
2. What is the dispute between Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and Rava? What does Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai fear? Try explaining their differing opinions regarding human nature. What is your opinion on the matter? Explain. Give an example of a similar dispute from a different area.
3. What is the dispute between Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Yonatan regarding the verse in Joshua 1:8? Why do you think Rabbi Yonatan refuses to see Torah study as a mitzvah?
4. Rabbi Yishmael attempts to mediate between the opinions of Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Yonatan. Explain his attempt. How do Rashi and Tosafot, the French Talmudic commentators of the 12th-13th centuries, explain the words of the Mishna scholar (Tana D'vei Rabbi Yishmael)?
5. To what extent can the institution of *Kriyat Sh'ma* be understood as a compromise in the dispute between Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Yonatan?

### **Source #10 - "Torah is Loved by its Students"**

TB Brachot 63a

**Rabbi Yehuda began his class by honoring the Torah and spoke:**

**"Silence! Hear O Israel! Today you have become the people of the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 27:9).**

**But was the Torah in fact given to Israel on that very day [when Moshe gave this speech at the end of his life]? Why, that day of the speech was the end of the forty years! [not the day of its giving at Sinai at the beginning of a 40 year trek in the desert].**

**Solution: This comparison to the day at Sinai is meant to teach us that the Torah is loved anew by its students every day as if it were on the very day in was given at Mt. Sinai.**

1. The ideal attitude towards the daily reading of *Kriyat Sh'ma* is supposed to be similar to the way we address a novelty: "Every day it (*Kriyat Sh'ma*) should be perceived by you as something new, that has not yet been heard, of which you are very fond indeed" (Aruch HaShulchan, Orach Chayim 61). Why is it so difficult to achieve such an attitude towards *Kriyat Sh'ma*?
2. In the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda, how do we preserve and restore freshness regarding our attitude towards the Torah? Do you think a similar principle could be applied to *Kriyat Sh'ma*, which is also a Torah excerpt? Explain.

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

### Source #1 - A Silent Reading or an Out Loud One?

Midrash *Hagadol* for Deuteronomy 6:4

***Sh'ma Yisrael.*** Rabbi Yehuda says in the name of Rabbi Elazar Ben Azaria: One who recites *Kriyat Sh'ma* should read in such a way that it is heard by one's ears, as is written: "*Sh'ma Yisrael*," make audible to your ears that which you let out of your mouth.

Rabbi Meir says one is not required to read it aloud, since it says: "Take to *heart*... that which I charge you this day" (Deuteronomy 6:6). These words require only the intentionality of the heart.

A different explanation: *Sh'ma Yisrael.*

Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai says: One who reads *Kriyat Sh'ma* must focus the intentionality of one's heart, as is written here "*Sh'ma Yisrael*" (Deuteronomy 6:4), and later on it is written: "*Hasket Sh'ma Yisrael*" "Understand, Hear O Israel" (Deuteronomy 27:9) - just as there it requires understanding, so too here it requires understanding.

1. What is the dispute between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Meir? How do their verses strengthen their claims?
2. With whom does Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai agree?
3. Try to explain Rabbi Eliezer Ben Azaria's approach.

### Source #2 - In the Holy Tongue or in any Language?

TB: Brachot 13a

**Our Rabbis taught:** *Kriyat Sh'ma* must be recited as it is written, thus said Rabbi [Yehuda HaNasi].  
**But other HaChamim say:** In any language.

What is Rabbi's reasoning? The verse [in *Sh'ma*] says "*VeHayu* - and they will be " - literally they will "be" as they "were" pronounced.

And what is the reasoning of other scholars? The verse said "*Sh'ma*"[meaning understand] - in any language that you hear (understand).

But Rabbi also must address the legal significance of the word "*Sh'ma*." That he interprets to mean, make audible (*Sh'ma*) to your ears that which you let out of your mouth.

And other scholars follow the view mentioned above that "If one did not make *Sh'ma* audible to one's ears, one still fulfilled the obligation."

1. Imagine you are visiting Italy. You don't speak the language. They are reading *Kriyat Sh'ma* in Italian. How would you feel? Would you be critical of the synagogue's rabbi?
2. What is the dispute between Rabbi (Yehuda Hanassi) and scholars? What is the connection between the dispute and the case described in the previous question?
3. What is the connection between the disputes in sources #1 and #2?
4. What are the two meanings of the words "*Sh'ma Yisrael*" in these sources?
5. Rabbi claims that one must recite *Kriyat Sh'ma* only in Hebrew and out loud, even if that person does not understand Hebrew. What could be the reasons for this opinion? What concept of *Kriyat Sh'ma* underlies these *halachic* opinions?

### **Appendix to Source #2 - A Story about *Kriyat Sh'ma* in a Foreign Language**

TYerushalmi Sotah 7a, according to the commentary of *Hakorban Edah*

**Rabbi says: I say *Kriyat Sh'ma* must not be said in any other language but the Holy Tongue. For what reason? It says in *Kriyat Sh'ma* "Take to heart *these* instructions" (Deuteronomy 6) - [exactly as they were pronounced in the Torah].**

**Rabbi Levi Bar Chayta went to Caesaria (or Katzrin). There he heard the the people reading in Greek, and he wanted to stop them, so that they would not read in any language other than the Holy Tongue.**

**Rabbi Yossi heard about this and was angry at him. He said: I say, 'Do you mean [to be so strict about the form of the *Sh'ma*] that one who does not know how to read Hebrew letters should not read *Sh'ma* at all? Rather, one should fulfill one's obligation [for *Sh'ma*] in any language one knows.'**

### **Source #3 - *Kriyat Sh'ma* as Testimony**

Rabbi David (14th century Spain), author of the *Abudraham* commentary on the siddur:

**It was customary to recite it out loud to arouse *Kavannah* (intentionality) for the first verse, which is the main part requiring intentionality.**

**This form of recitation is also a form of giving testimony, as if people were to say to one another: "*Sh'ma* / Listen," I believe that *Adonai* our God is singular in God's world. That is why you will find a large *Ayin* in *Sh'ma* and a large *Dalet* in *Ehad*; together they make the sign *Eid*, hinting at "*Eidut* - testimony." Another explanation:**

***Sh-M-A* is an acronym from the verse (Isaiah 40:26) "*S'-ou M-arom A-ineichem*" ("Lift high your eyes and see"). To whom? *Sh-dai M-elech Ai-lyon* - God, the Divine Sovereign. When? During the**

**prayers of *Sh-acharit, M-incha* and *A-rvit*. And if you do so, you accept an *Ol M-alchut Sh-mayim*, the yoke of Divine Sovereignty upon you, which are the letters of "*Sh-M-A* in reversed order.**

1. In the opinion of Rabbi David, *Kriyat Sh'ma* is **akin to testimony**. What hints does he provide for the notion of testimony in *Kriyat Sh'ma*?
2. What does "*Eidut*" (testimony) mean? Before whom do we testify and on what matter?
3. Can the words of Rabbi David on testimony help explain the requirement of Rabbi Elazar Ben Azaria (Source #1) that *Kriyat Sh'ma* be read outloud, or the requirement of Rabbi (Source #2) that it only be recited formally in the Holy Tongue?

#### **Source #4 - The First Blessing Before *Kriyat Shma* with Kedusha of "*Yotzer HaMeorot*"**

(see siddur with *Titbarach Tzureinu...Baruch Kvod Adonai Mimkomo*)

1. In the opinion of Rabbi David (Source #3) *Kriyat Sh'ma* involves giving public testimony regarding individual acceptance of the sovereignty of God, in front of one's fellow prayer participants. In the blessing of "*Yotzer HaMeorot*" there is a similar description of acceptance of *Ol Malchut Shamayim*, when each angel addresses its neighbor. Try to describe the dialogue between the angels here.
2. Try finding parallels between reciting *Kriyat Sh'ma* in a minyan and the angels' "vowing one to another their loyalty oath to God's Sovereignty."
3. In your opinion, is the individual's experience of *Kriyat Sh'ma* significantly different from *Kriyat Sh'ma* in a minyan? Explain.

#### **Source #5 - *Shirat HaYam* in the Blessing of *Ga'al Yisrael* after *Kriyat Shma***

Rinat Yisrael siddur (Ashkenaz) (see siddur with *Al Zot Shibchu...Leolam Vaed*)

1. In the blessing following *Kriyat Sh'ma* an additional ceremony of accepting Divine Sovereignty is described. Which is it? By whom is it accepted?
2. In both this source and the previous one the word *Kulam* - "all of them together" is repeated again and again when they sing in chorus acclaiming your sovereignty." What does this collective aspect add to the ceremony of God's coronation?

#### **Source #6 - The Ceremony of *Prisat Sh'ma* and *Shirat HaYam***

Tosefta, Sotah 6: 2-3

**Rabbi Akiva taught: At the time that the Jewish people came up from the sea, the Holy Spirit was upon them, and they sang as a child reads *Hallel* in school, each verse repeated as a group after the teacher.**

Moshe said: "*Ashira LaAdonai* - I will sing to the Lord," and the Children of Israel said: " *Ashira LaAdonai* - I will sing to the Lord." Moshe said: "The Lord is my strength, my song, my deliverance," and the Children of Israel said: "The Lord is my strength, my song, my deliverance."

Rabbi Eliezer son of Rabbi Yossi Haglili said: As an adult who reads *Hallel* in the synagogue, where the congregation repeats the refrain after each section recited by the cantor.

Moshe said: " *Ashira LaAdonai* - I will sing to the Lord," and the Children of Israel said: " *Ashira LaAdonai* - I will sing to the Lord."

Moshe said: "The Lord is my strength, my song, my deliverance," and the Children of Israel said: " *Ashira LaAdonai* - I will sing to the Lord."

Moshe said: "The Lord, triumphant in battle," and the Children of Israel said: " *Ashira LaAdonai* - I will sing to the Lord."

Rabbi Nechemia says: As people who read the *Sh'ma*, as it is written "*VaYomeru Leimor* -They said it so that it would be recited." This teaches us that Moshe began, and the Children of Israel inserted after him and finished. Moshe said: "Then Moses sang," and the Children of Israel said " *Ashira LaAdonai* - I will sing to the Lord."

Moshe said "The Lord is my strength," and the Children of Israel said "The Lord is my God, who I glorify."

Moshe said "The Lord triumphant in battle" and the Children of Israel said "*Adonai* is God's name."

1. Rabbi Akiva, Rabbi Eliezer, and Rabbi Nechemia provide three different answers. What is the question to which they are all referring?
2. According to the testimony of Rabbi Nechemia, how was *Kriyat Sh'ma* customarily read in the days of the Mishna? (It is known as *Prisat* [the Slicing of] *Sh'ma*, because the verses of *Sh'ma* are sliced like pieces of bread).
3. What can be learned about the perception of *Kriyat Sh'ma* from its public form of recitation and from comparing it to *Shirat HaYam*?

### **Source #7 The Rabbinic Story about our Ancestor Jacob / Yisrael**

Midrash Sifri Deuteronomy (#31)

"Hear O *Israel*, Adonai is our God, Adonai is One" - Why does it say "*Israel*"? Because it says : "Speak to the children of *Israel*." It does not say: "speak to the children of Abraham", nor "speak to the children of Isaac," rather it says "Speak to the children of *Israel*."

**Our ancestor Jacob (also known as Israel) was privileged to speak thus to his children [or perhaps the text means: Israel was privileged to hear the recitation of *Sh'ma* from his children]. For Israel was worried all his life and used to say: "Woe is me, I fear that 'reject' offspring will come from me as they came from my ancestors." [Abraham had produced Ishmael and Isaac had produced Esav, who each abandoned the faith in the one God. So now as an aging father in pagan Egypt whose children would remain there] he warned each of his children. Then he called them together and questioned them: "Do any of you have a doubt regarding who created the world?"**

**They answered "*Hear O Israel, our father. Just as there is no doubt in your heart, so there is no doubt in our heart regarding who created the world, Adonai is our God, Adonai is One.*"**

1. How does the author of the Midrash move from the verse "*Sh'ma Yisrael*" to the story of Jacob's words to his children?
2. How does Jacob feel about his children living in Egypt? What does he do about it? Do your parents have similar worries? How do you feel about the strong language of the midrash - *psolet* - "reject offspring"?
3. According to the Midrash, the words "*Sh'ma Yisrael*" are an answer. To whom? To what question? What do Jacob's children want to convey to him on his deathbed?
4. According to this Midrash, what is the **content** of "*Sh'ma Yisrael*?"
5. According to this Midrash, why is it important to recite *Kriyat Sh'ma* outloud?
6. Why do you think the author of the Midrash wishes to compare everyday *Kriyat Sh'ma* to the dramatic scene of Jacob's deathbed?

### **Source #8 - "*Baruch Shem K'vod Malchuto Leolam Va'ed*"**

Maimonides, Sefer Ha'Ahava, Hilchot *Kriyat Sh'ma* 1:4.

**When reading *Kriyat Sh'ma*, upon finishing the first verse one whispers: "*Baruch Shem Kvod Malchuto Leolam Vaed,*" and returns to the regular reading tone from "*You shall love the Lord your God*" until the end of the *Sh'ma*. Why is it read so?**

**According to our tradition, when our ancestor Jacob gathered his children around his deathbed in Egypt, he commanded them and urged them to recognize the uniqueness (*Yichud*) of God and the path of God that was walked by Abraham and Isaac his father.**

**He asked them: "My sons! Perhaps there is something disqualifying/objectionable in you? Does anyone not stand with me in recognizing the uniqueness of God?"**

[Jacob was doing something] like Moshe [did at the ceremony of renewing the covenant with God not long before his death]: "Perchance there is among you some man or woman...whose heart is even now turning away from the Lord our God,"(Deuteronomy 29:17).

All [Jacob's sons] answered and said: "Hear O Israel, *Adonai* is our God, *Adonai* is One."

In other words, *Sh'ma*, hear from us, our father Israel, *Adonai* is our God, *Adonai* is One. The old man replied: "*Baruch Shem Kvod Malchuto Leolam Vaed* - Blessed is the name and the glory of the Kingdom of God forever more." Therefore it is the custom of all of Israel to recite the same words of praise that old Israel used after hearing the verse *Sh'ma*.

1. Maimonides quotes the Midrash about our ancestor Jacob in order to explain a *halacha* regarding *Kriyat Sh'ma*. What is the *halacha*?
2. What is the meaning of the comparison between the question of our ancestor Jacob and the question of Moshe? (See the context of Deuteronomy 29:17, where the scene of signing a covenant is described).
3. Reread Source #1. In this source there is a dispute over how to recite *Kriyat Sh'ma* - reading it outloud as a public declaration **or** reading it with inwardly-directed *kavannah*. In light of the Midrash, what is preferable? Explain your answer.
4. In this unit we have emphasized that *Kriyat Sh'ma* has an aspect of public declaration addressed to someone. Reread Sources #3-7 and prepare a **table** presenting what is being declared and to whom. Which view is your favorite? Why?
5. Compare Jacob's demand for loyalty to the past to Arnold Eisen's contemporary view:  
"The first question facing many contemporary American Jews is not *what they believe* but *where they will stand* in relation to the Jewish past. They know Judaism is a commitment, not a creed, ...a live relation with the aspects of our inheritance that speak with "inner power." Some Jews feel addressed in politics or the arts. Others hear it in prayer or study. Still others...through ritual observance or projects in social justice" (*Taking Hold of Torah* by A.Eisen, p. 28).

## **Source #9 - Have I Burdened You with My Kingdom?**

Vayikra Rabba on Leviticus 22:27.

[God asked:] "What hardship have I caused you?" (Micha 6:3) [Have I burdened you with My Kingdom?]

Rabbi Yitzchak said: This is a parable. It is like a ruler who sent a royal decree to the country. What did the people do? They stood up on their feet, removed their hats, and read it with awe and fear, with tremor and shuddering.

**So God said to Israel: *Kriyat Sh'ma* is my royal decree, but I have not burdened you. I have not told you to read it standing up on your feet, nor did I tell you to remove your head covering, rather recite it "when you sit at home and while you go on your way." (Deuteronomy 6:7).**

1. What is the parable and to what is it being compared? Create a table comparing **all** the elements of the parable and *Kriyat Sh'ma*.
2. If *Kriyat Sh'ma* is like a royal decree, then what is its content and to whom is it addressed?
3. Which demands from the people did God forgo in comparison, unlike a flesh and blood ruler would have? Why did God do so? In other words, why didn't *halacha* according to this midrash require behavior appropriate for a ruler's decree?

How does the verse from *Sh'ma* serve as proof for the Midrash's leniency?

How do the following halachic sources in the appendix contradict the midrash? Why do you think they changed the ancient practice of *Kriyat Sh'ma* as reported in the midrash? Note the variations in this version of the midrash - especially the extra sentence at the end. It may be a later emendation. Do you prefer the halacha of the first or the second version of the midrash? Explain.

**Appendix :** Aruch Hashulchan Orach Hayim, Hilchot *Kriyat Sh'ma* 61:

**One must recite *Kriyat Sh'ma* with intention, respect, fear, tremor, and shuddering. When a flesh and blood ruler sends a royal decree to the country, the words are read and heard with fear and respect, - all the more so (*Kal Vachomer*) before the Ruler of rulers, God.**

**Rabbi Akiva wrote: At all times that a person reads *Kriyat Sh'ma* one must compare it to a newly issued royal decree (*prosdegma*). A *prosdegma* is an official letter from the ruler to the subjects of his country. *Kriyat Sh'ma* is God's decree, and so it is written in the Midrash *Vayikra Rabba, Parashat Emor*):**

**Rabbi Brachya said - a flesh and blood ruler sends a decree to the country. What do they do? All the people of the country stand up on their feet, remove their head coverings and read it with fear, respect, tremor, and shuddering.**

**But God tells Israel: Read *Kriyat Sh'ma*, my decree, yet I have not burdened you and required its reading while standing or bareheaded, rather it is read "when you are on your way [that is walking with head covered on the road, and not standing at attention bare-headed before a king]." Nevertheless it must be read with fear, respect, tremor, and shuddering.**

## **Source #10 - The Beit Shamai - Beit Hillel Disputes**

TB Brachot 10b

**Mishna:**

**Beit Shamai says: In the evening one leans sideways and reads *Sh'ma*, and in the morning one stands up, as is written "when you lie down and when you get up."**

**But Beit Hillel says: Every person reads as one is accustomed to reading, as it is written: "and when you are on your way."**

**If so, why was it written "when you lie down and when you get up?"**

**At the hour that people lie down and the hour that people stand up.**

1. This Mishna deals with the behavior of a person reading *Kriyat Sh'ma*. Explain the dispute between Beit Hillel and Beit Shamai regarding the *halachic* significance of the *Sh'ma*'s phrase "when you lie down and when you get up."
2. Beit Hillel determined that *Kriyat Sh'ma* must be read in a physical position according to what each person wishes and finds most comfortable - "every person reads as one is accustomed to reading." What is the source of authority for this determination?
3. What ideational considerations do you think underlie the opinion of Beit Hillel? Compare their opinion to that of the author of the Midrash in the previous source.

## **Source #11 - Comparative Customs in the Land of Israel and in Babylon**

**The people of the Land of Israel stand during *Kriyat Sh'ma* and the people of Babylon sit.**

1. What is the relationship between the dispute in the previous Mishna (Source #10) and the Comparative Customs in this source (that apparently reflect customs of the *Geonim* period)?
2. The *halacha* was determined back in the time of the Mishna, in favor of Beit Hillel for *Kriyat Sh'ma*. Does the behavior of the people of Israel in those times contradict the *halacha*? Does it contradict the spirit of the *halacha*?
3. Why do you think the people of Israel used to stand for *Kriyat Sh'ma*, despite the fact that they were permitted to sit and be more comfortable?
4. Do you think it is desirable to stand during *Kriyat Sh'ma*? Explain.

## **Source #12 - "To Recite *Sh'ma Yisrael* Outloud"**

Aruch Hashulchan, Orach Hachayim, chapter 61.

**The custom in all Jewish Diaspora communities is to recite "*Sh'ma Yisrael*" out loud, to arouse intention and to recite it with excitement. It is customary to place one's hands over one's face when reading the verse "*Sh'ma Yisrael*," in order to prevent distraction caused by looking at something else.**

## **Source #13 - "But That Was Not the Custom"**

Aruch Hashulchan, Orach Hachayim, chapter 61.

***Kriyat Sh'ma* should be recited with the appropriate musical notes [*ta'amei hamikra*], just as one reads Torah.**

**However, that was not the custom in these countries (Ashkenaz).**

**It appears to me that the reason is that many people, when reading with the notes, become confused and will not understand the meaning of the words; the tune could confuse someone who is not familiar with it, and then the *kavanah* is lost.**

1. According to the nineteenth century Aruch Hashulchan (sources #12-13), what are the three ceremonies customary during *Kriyat Sh'ma*? From your personal experience, how do these customs affect the experience of *Kriyat Sh'ma*?
2. Why does the Aruch HaShuchan think we no longer sing *Sh'ma* according to the Biblical musical notes? What is the benefit and the loss from dropping this custom? Have you heard *Sh'ma* recited according to the Torah notes?

---

<sup>1</sup> Thank you to Jaclyn A. Rubin who volunteered to play a major role in editing the English of this curricular unit that was translated from the Hebrew.

<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Yosef Soloveitchik, a member of a family of rabbis from Brisk, Lithuania, who immigrated to the US, described in his books how he senses the Divine presence during his Torah study, and how an intellectual experience is transformed into a spiritual one. A person who seeks solitude with a holy book is truly in communion with all the national giants since Moshe.

<sup>3</sup> Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and Rabbi Yehoshua struggle with the question of the constant study of Torah and provides for the ordinary Jew a symbolic solution - recite *Kriyat Sh'ma* daily at the beginning of day and the beginning of night, and it will be regarded by God as if you had studied Torah non-stop day and night. However, not every Jewish group was so lenient. A much earlier and more demanding solution was practiced among the Essenes sect of the Second Temple.

---

The ideal of studying Torah day and night became a religious reality in the communities of the Dead Sea at Qumran, between 200 BCE and 68 CE (at which point they were destroyed by the Romans). We know so much about them because in 1947 the scrolls they had written and hidden away were rediscovered, and later placed in the Shrine of the Book Museum in Jerusalem. The Qumran community called themselves *Beit Torah* or *Limudei Adonai*, and their learning they called *Midrash HaTorah*. Here is how they interpreted and practiced the words of Joshua 1:8.

In the place of the Ten, let the one who is studying Torah (*doreish baTorah*) never stop - day and night, continuously, by taking turns, one replacing the other.

Let the many, the community of *Yachad*, apply themselves diligently the first third of every night of the year to the reading of the book, the study of law, and then reciting blessings. (*Serach haYachad*, the Scroll of Discipline 6:6-8).