

# שמע

## *The Shema, Lesson 1*

While the Jewish people have never written out a religious creed, we have, from ancient times, considered Deuteronomy 6:4 to be our “confession of faith.” So important is this verse from the Torah for us that we have come to refer to it by the first word, שמע, *shema*.



Actually, the Shema consist of a number of Scriptures from the Torah but its most recognized verse is from Deuteronomy 6:4 which states: Hear O Israel the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is ONE. The first word in Deuteronomy 6:4 is the word Shema which is a Hebrew word meaning “listen up!” The word Shema is often teamed with the word בקול, *b’kol*, meaning “voice” or “His voice.” Here, in the Shema, the word “hear” is a command, and so carries the idea of “listen up to what G-d is saying.” The idea is not that we just hear with our ears but that we would also be obedient with our lives.

G-d’s voice is heard when we listen or read the Scriptures. G-d’s voice was heard when He gave the Torah to Moshe on Mount Sinai. The commands given to us in the Torah are meant to give us a good and long life. If we will be obedient to what G-d has commanded, then we will fulfill the desire of the Shema in its call to hear/obey G-d’s Word. The one thing that G-d wants most from His people is their unconditional obedience to His Torah. Every Shabbat we stand and recite the Shema facing east ( the direction of Jerusalem) or facing toward the Torah (the Torah goes forth from Jerusalem). We demonstrate our love for G-d by carefully guarding all of His commands. In order to be obedient to G-d’s word we must know what His word says. In order to obey G-d’s word we must be students of His word. We should all be obedient students of our G-d’s gracious words of truth.

The primary confession of the Shema is that there is only One true G-d, and He is HaShem, the G-d of Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov. While all of the peoples around ancient Israel believed in many false gods, the Torah given to us on Mount Sinai made known that there is only One true G-d. As such, we are compelled to give Him all of our allegiance and to serve Him alone. Each week when we recite the Shema together, we are confessing that HaShem alone is the G-d of the whole universe.