

## The Shema (You say Sh'mah)

The Shema is one of the most important Jewish prayers. It is one of the first prayers that Jewish children learn. Religious Jews say the Shema three times each day as part of their regular prayers, and it is included in almost every synagogue service.

The Shema reminds Jews that:

- There is only one God.
- God is good and loves them and they should love Him.
- God's rules apply to every part of a person's life.
- Children should be taught about Torah.

The Hebrew word SHEMA means **hear** or **listen**. The prayer has three paragraphs, each paragraph is a short passage from the Torah.

Here is the English translation of the first paragraph.

Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.

Blessed is His name, whose glorious kingdom is forever and ever.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your might. These words that I command you today shall be upon your heart. Repeat them to your children, and talk about them when you sit in your home, and when you walk in the street; when you lie down, and when you rise up. Hold fast to them as a sign upon your hand, and let them be as reminders before your eyes. Write them on the doorposts of your home and at your gates.

Deuteronomy 6: 4-9

"These words" in line 2 means the Torah, which tells Jews about God's rules.

Jewish people believe that they have made a *Covenant* with God. The Covenant is an agreement that the people will love God and follow His rules and in return God will take care

of them. Saying the Shema is a way that Jewish people have of reminding them of their promises to God.

The second verse of the Shema promises long life and good harvests to those who keep God's rules. The third verse tells Jews to wear clothes with **TZITZIT** at each corner. Tzitzit are tassels made of several threads tied together. The Shema says that when people look at the tassels they will remember their promise to keep god's rules. Some Jewish people follow this rule all the time and wear a sort of vest with tassels at the corners. Jewish people also wear a special prayer shawl called a **TALLIT** when they are praying in the synagogue. A tallit has four corners with tzitzit threaded through them.

Another way that Jewish people have of reminding themselves about the covenant is to fix a little box called a **MEZUZAH** to each door frame of their homes. Inside the mezuzah is a piece of parchment with the paragraphs of the Shema written on it.

### Questions

What do you think it means when the Shema says "These words [...] shall be upon your heart"?

Where does the Shema tell Jews to talk about God's rules?

Why do you think the Shema says that people should repeat the words to their children?

Could it be boring to keep talking about the rules?

What could you use or do to help you to remember promises that you have made?