

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
Requirements for  
Master of Arts in Religious Education Degree

**KNOW IT  
READ IT  
FEEL IT  
LIVE IT**

THIRD GRADE  
IVRIT CURRICULUM  
THROUGH  
THE *SH'MAH* PRAYER

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## II. INTRODUCTION

An important part of my cantorial duties is my work with B'nai Mitzvah students. Most of them find it difficult to read Hebrew. I have always asked myself: How can I help my students to learn Hebrew? Many of them come to B'nai Mitzvah preparation after years of Hebrew School and still struggle with letter and vowel recognition and accuracy of Hebrew reading. This problem led me to a process of rethinking the teaching of Hebrew and prayer.

I am attempting to change the culture of the school through my work with the rabbi, parents and students but also through the development of the *Sh'mah* curriculum. I believe that a meaningful curriculum that engages the students on a cognitive, practical, emotional, and communal level (head, hand, heart and feet), beginning in the third grade will help to reorient the school from B'nai Mitzvah preparation, to preparation for a Jewish life (The Whole Person Learning Framework, KDBB). I hope that this curriculum, using the *Sh'mah* prayer, will ease the students' frustration with Hebrew and open a door to a more positive and meaningful engagement with the Hebrew language and prayer.

After reviewing existing Hebrew curriculums I found that instruction in the Alef-Bet and basic decoding skills is generally separated from the study and practice of *t'filah*. Because the Temple Israel Religious School, like many schools, has a small number of instructional hours, it was necessary to create a curriculum that “has it all.” This curriculum includes recognizing and decoding Hebrew letters through games, technology, music and physical activities, teaching values through discussion of beliefs, and developing the child’s identity as a competent prayer participant through engaging in practice. Teacher facilitated discussions aim to create meaningful connections between prayer, Hebrew and students’ lives. By combining all these elements of study together, the goal is to nurture the child’s spiritual development and increase comfort with Hebrew and prayer, thereby cultivating a lifelong love and relationship with Hebrew, prayer, and Jewish community.

**a. Temple Israel of Lawrence Hebrew Religious School**

**Characteristics:**

- Reform Temple
- Most children start Jewish education at 3<sup>rd</sup> grade
- Hebrew Religious School operates once a week, for two hours

- Hebrew instruction for one hour total a day
- *Siddur* prayer approach
- Family services once a month
- Each grade leads Shabbat service once a year
- B'nai Mitzvah preparation

The traditional name of Hebrew Religious School that is currently instituted in the temple is an outdated concept. The vision for the new program is not given justice by its present name due to the vast opportunities and lessons that are intended to be provided to its students.

“The field of supplementary Jewish education suffers from an inadequacy of precise language. To some, the term supplementary is offensive because it downgrades Jewish education to secondary status. But the term preferred by some today, complementary education, confuses more than clarifies. Older terms such as congregational education misses the mark because some programs are independent of synagogues; religious school is inadequate to cover schools that do not teach Judaism; and Hebrew school hardly does justice to programs that predominantly teach subjects other than language. Moreover, the use of the word school may also do a disservice in setting up expectations of formal study that cannot be met by part-time supplementary Jewish education.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wertheimer, Jack. *Schools That Work: What We Can Learn From Good Jewish Supplementary Schools*. Avi Chai Foundation, March 2009. P.9

### III. RATIONALE FOR TEACHING HEBREW THROUGH THE

#### “SH’MAH” PRAYER

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד:

*Sh'mah Israel, Adonai Elohenu, Adonai Echad.*

*Hear O Israel: Adonai is our God, Adonai is One.*

We are a people with a common history, language, culture and homeland. Without these, we are neglecting the reality of our unique identity. Hebrew has kept Jews connected throughout time, and it is our duty to strengthen this connection. Without being the link in this chain, we will lose both our roots and our ability to connect to Jews worldwide which enables us to maintain our heritage as one unique people.

Hebrew is the language of Jewish people. It connects us to our sacred texts, which provide us with a comprehensive understanding of our common history. Reading and understanding Hebrew prayers are central to Jewish identity. The study of Hebrew is an indispensable element in the achievement of this purpose and must be an important part of a course of study. Using the Hebrew language to connect with others, the Jewish world, and God helps the learner develop a love for the language. Learning Hebrew can be an experience of empowerment, enabling young Jews to participate actively in a community of prayer and engage in the richness of Jewish life.

Hebrew language is not part of the lives of contemporary American Jewish children. But in terms of both religion and communication, Hebrew should be very important to them. Hebrew literacy is one of the steps towards personal Jewish empowerment and enthusiastic communal involvement. Hebrew knowledge is a key component of active participation in Jewish experiences, such as B'nai Mitzvah and temple services.

In most supplemental settings Hebrew curriculums are generally limited to decoding and recitation. What is different about this program is its use of the words of the *Sh'mah* as a tool to introduce the student to four key elements of learning Hebrew: alphabet, vocabulary, spiritual connection and practice.

Since Hebrew is a very part-time enterprise for students in the Diaspora, combining prayer and language through study and practice of the *Sh'mah* will give them a taste of an intensive multimodal experience of Hebrew. The goal is to develop a comfort level in the hope of stimulating a lifelong love and connection to prayer and Hebrew.

It is important to have congregational support in place to make this curriculum successful. According to Cyd Weisman, in order for Hebrew learning to succeed the congregation must understand how the learning of Hebrew enlivens the values and choices of our people: exploring Hebrew



prayer within a community that uses the *siddur, middot, and mizvot* as a roadmap to a life with meaning and purpose, discovering the triumphs and challenges of modern Israeli and Jewish experience, speaking the same language of friendship, culture and inquiry, all that will ensure that the Hebrew language is lived, not taught. Hebrew is a portal, a sign post and a roadmap to a life well lived guided by Judaism. <sup>2</sup>

The “*Sh’mah*” prayer is a declaration of Jewish faith. Many Jews identify with the *Sh’mah* statement because it is a core Jewish belief that links Jews in the present with all Jews past and future. The *Sh’mah* is also very familiar, and is a central part of prayer. It directly teaches us about God. Reciting the *Sh’mah* is also not difficult to learn. It is short, with limited but important vocabulary and concepts.

This program puts a strong emphasis on:

- Nurturing phonetic awareness
  - Building decoding skills
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<sup>2</sup> Weissman, B.Cyd. *Hebrew is Not a Subject to Be Taught*.  
<http://thehebrewproject.wikispaces.com/file/view/Hebrew+is+not+a+subject+to+be+taught.doc>

- Building Hebrew vocabulary
- Building a relationship with Hebrew
- Cultivating an interest in further learning of Hebrew
- Reading the first line of the “*Sh’mah*” prayer
- Understanding the meaning of the *Sh’mah* (vocabulary and concepts)
- Understanding the purpose of learning Hebrew prayers
- Creating the opportunity to seek personal meaning in prayers
- Developing the capacity to participate in a service
- Building connection to Jewish community
- Engaging the child’s family
- Learning through forms of creative expression: music, movement, storytelling, acting (skits) and games
- Connecting the formal information to students experience
- Introducing the Jewish concept of God

### **a. Distinctiveness of Hebrew Language**

Reading any language is a highly complex process. Teaching how to read Hebrew in the United States meets extraordinary challenges: both the linguistic and orthographic features of a Hebrew language are different than the English ones.<sup>3</sup> Reading involves decoding and recitation. Hebrew decoding is totally unlike decoding English. It requires a different approach and places a greater demand on the reader's visual processing system. Hebrew roots can produce many forms since Hebrew is an inflected language which demands complete grapheme-to-phoneme translations. In order to provide students with the strategies that are most appropriate for Hebrew reading, we must be aware of the unique qualities of the Hebrew language:

- Directionality is from left to right
- Top to bottom reading procedure

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<sup>3</sup> Maiben, Dina. The Ultimate Jewish Teachers' Handbook. *Teaching Hebrew Reading*, A. R. E. Publishing, Inc. 2003.

- Progression from consonants to vowels
- Words lack distinctive shapes and features
- Some letters are identical except for one small element
- Some symbols are similar when rotated
- Some share only an overall shape
- Different symbols represent the same sound
- Some vowel pairs are visually similar
- Vowels are much smaller than consonants and pushed away  
below or above the line of print

These technical issues create challenges for the student attempting to learn Hebrew. Since Hebrew symbols look very similar, visual skills are central and essential to successful Hebrew decoding. Special attention has to be put on vowels by structuring reading drills around single vowels rather than consonants. The most beneficial reading approach is to emphasize phonetic decoding of single letters and vowels and not attending to word shape. The amount of information presented in each lesson should be as small as possible so that the learner is able to focus completely on the task, to avoid confusion. Introduction of each consonant through a story in which the sound plays an important part is helpful along with repetition. Consonant

introduction should be in association with words from the student's previous vocabulary, and appear in the middle or end of these words in addition to the initial position.

The proper pronunciation of the phonemes should be demonstrated by the teacher modeling the correct pronunciation to help students develop awareness of the differences between sounds. Music plays a role as an additional reinforcement to remind students of the key sounds.

Students can be trained, from the start, to chunk words into syllables. Because one or more consonants may be grouped with only one vowel sign, the syllable becomes the most important unit for decoding. Counting the vowel signs, breaking apart the word into syllables, and determining how many syllables are in the word, are the steps that help learners to develop Hebrew reading skills. Working in small groups, and home practice with a properly prepared parent, if feasible, will make the process easier, and more engaging, and meaningful.

#### **b. Vocabulary of the “*Sh'mah*” Prayer**

*Sh'mah* facts:

- The *Sh'mah* prayer comes directly from Biblical verse: Deuteronomy 6:4, *Parashat Va-et'chanan* (“I pleaded”).

- The prayer is written on the parchment stored inside the doorpost mezuzah.
- It is a mitzvah (commandment) to say the *Sh'mah* when waking up in the morning and going to sleep at night.
- The *Sh'mah* is recited on Sabbaths and festivals, and at the end of Yom Kippur.
- It is traditional to teach Jewish children the *Sh'mah* prayer before any other.
- *Kavanah* is especially important when reciting the *Sh'mah*: people cover or close their eyes, either sitting or standing.
- *Sh'mah* is included in the conversion ceremony.
- *Sh'mah* visually expressed in the *Mishkan T'filah*, a new Reform prayer book, allows for its reader to understand the importance of the prayer as a central theme in Judaism.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Reform Judaism Magazine. *A conversation with Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman on the making of Mishkan T'filah*. Summer 2006.

This six word phrase, the first line of the prayer “*Sh’mah*” identifies many important themes in Judaism:

<i>Sh’mah</i> /Listen, Hear	Importance of listening to God and by extension the importance of listening to others (teachers, parents, friends, and ones inner self).
<i>Yisrael</i> /Israel	Defines the collective group of the Jewish people. We are all part of the congregation of Israel.
<i>Adonai</i> /God	God’s name in the Torah and the <i>siddur</i> , prayer book
<i>Eloheinu</i> /Our God	A covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish people as a whole
<i>Echad</i> /One, Alone	The Hebrew word for the number A proclamation of exclusive loyalty to the one, unique God

### **c. Developing a Spiritual Connection to the “*Sh’mah*”**

Judaism is an ongoing search for meaning and this search starts in childhood. The congregational school is a place for nourishing the development of Jewish identities. The best way to convey the joy and beauty of being Jewish is to provide new and creative ways for children to explore

Judaism at each stage of their development. Hebrew language is one of these ways: it helps convey multiple understandings of words and concepts including the purpose and meaning of prayer.

Important goals of Jewish education today are to foster a positive attitude towards Jewish learning and Jewish life, and help students develop the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in the life of the Jewish people at home, in the synagogue and in the community at large. By identifying learner outcomes and using assessment tools for whole person learning we can create powerful learning starting children off on a lifelong Jewish journey of meaning and purpose by: applying prayer to daily life, awakening their spiritual development rooted in Jewish practice and stories, and increasing a sense of belonging to the People of Israel.

*Sh'mah*, the proclamation of faith, when recited with comprehension and *kavannah*, helps the individual feel a connection to the minds and souls of other Jews who engage in prayer. Prayerful experience can even transcend time, space and other boundaries. Prayer can also help students grasp the concept of God as the creator of the world, understand that we pray to God in our liturgy in many ways, and recognize that we can communicate to God without seeing God.



The question students may ask: What purposes does the “*Sh’mah*” serve for me? This curriculum creates opportunities for active learners to engage with others and to become immersed in social contexts where they can experience personal meaning in and through connectedness and community. The congregational school reflects the values and culture of the congregation as a whole. To be meaningful to students, the words of the *Sh’mah* must be connected to meaningful prayer experiences and engaging conversations about issues related to prayer. The focus of the religious school then becomes combining the teaching of Hebrew with *t’fillah* taught in a way that encourages the development of *kavanah* in prayer. Class discussions and informal teaching methods allow students to analyze, evaluate and compare ideas and ethical values as well as encouraging them to continuously develop a personal relationship to religious questions.<sup>5</sup>

Teaching the *Sh’mah* is a great way to introduce prayer and praying to the students who are just beginning their religious education. It creates

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<sup>5</sup> Wertheimer, Jack. *School That Work: What We Can Learn From Good Jewish Supplementary Schools*. Avi Chai Foundation, March 2009, Pp. 4

opportunities for them to feel connected to God and express their emotions about feeling Jewish on a daily basis.<sup>6</sup> Connection of feeling and actions to the prayer throughout the guided questions about students' life experiences brings meaning to the prayer, not just while in the classroom, but while involved in the actual act of communal prayer and daily life. It is essential for students to transfer their knowledge to their home and synagogue practice so that they can say the words with real *kavanah*, or intent.

“It is essential for a teacher to show students the meaning inherent in Judaism. Without demystifying the rituals, students will feel disconnected and may reject those traditions.”<sup>7</sup> Reciting the *Sh'mah* while closing the eyes, can be the beginning of a spiritual practice. Also being creative in the seating arrangements and placement of the body (standing, sitting, lying down, walking), sound and voice timber, and opening the lesson with the wordless melody, the *niggun*, can stimulate energy and enthusiasm, and set the spiritual tone.

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<sup>6</sup> Raviv, Rachel. *Teaching About Prayer*. The Ultimate Jewish Teacher's Handbook. A.R.E. Publications, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Pp. 418.

#### **d. Integrating the “*Sh’mah*” Practice**

Jewish beliefs, Jewish behavior, and Jewish belonging are essential elements of Jewish identity. Development of a full Jewish awareness requires a systematic effort by the entire community. An important mission of the religious school’s curricula is to enrich and enhance the synagogue school experience by putting efforts to individualize instruction, creating innovative teaching and learning experiences, a variety of peer experiences - all designed to bring to fulfillment specific educational goals.

By encouraging the students to explore topics creatively and discover their own “Why’s,” they are then able to experience ownership of their learning and “own” their Judaism.<sup>8</sup> After being given a framework of practice each person can then use their experiences to make the practices and customs their own. The question at hand is how can educators deliver the information to their students to teach the lessons of Judaism so that each student may become engaged and make this material a part of themselves.

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<sup>8</sup> Cousens, Beth. *Making Jewish Meaning*. <http://ejewishphilanthropy.com/making-jewish-meaning/> April 26, 2010

As human beings we are constantly making our decisions based on how those choices will benefit us. In a selfish type of way we seek to fulfill our own interests and desires. The decisions that we make are influenced by how we view ourselves in the world and how the world works around us. This egocentric pattern of behavior is contradicted by “the Jewish idea of covenant”. According to the author of the book *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* by Sharon Daloz Parks, faith development is the process of exploring and answering the questions for oneself. A person attempts to make personal meaning of traditional and historic information in order to understand the purpose of their own life, and attempt to understand or clarify their future path and destiny. Jewish education at its best can help young people fully engage in a Jewish journey exploring big questions about life through a Jewish lens and growing spiritually, and emotionally with the support of their community and two thousand years of texts and study addressing many aspects of the human experience. Now this philosophizing might sound a bit grand and over ambitious for third grade students who are just beginning to grapple with the Hebrew language and prayer. But if these young learners see that their questions and concerns are taken seriously they will begin a process of learning and spiritual exploration that will continue

to adolescence and even into adulthood. The creation of a spiritual, content rich, and meaningful third grade Hebrew and *Tefilla* curriculum will provide the young learner with habits of the mind and heart that they will be able to utilize in the future.

By asking students engaging questions, Jewish educators trigger a series of thoughts that will guide students in beginning to ask themselves of the meaning of Judaism in their lives, and the fact it will stay with them and affect them through their life journey. They will be given “the tools necessary for self-discovery, self-authorship and also self-leadership”.<sup>9</sup> The purpose of Jewish education is to promote in students skills, abilities, and a “passion to build their own Jewish lives, rooted in who they are and what they consider important. When through this individualized Jewish exploration, *am’cha* leads themselves into their own dreams, they will

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<sup>9</sup> Cousens, Beth. *Making Jewish Meaning*. <http://ejewishphilanthropy.com/making-jewish-meaning/>

contribute in new and beautiful ways to the diversity of Jewish life. Even in these challenging times, there is no greater investment we could make.”<sup>10</sup>

Parental influence is crucial and necessary for this curriculum to fully succeed. Parents’ relationship with their children gives them the influence to establish with support of the school and temple, meaningful Jewish family experiences. Adults are aware and can also be educated in the importance and meaning of the values introduced to students during their education. It is by making these lessons a practice in the home that students can truly understand and immerse themselves in the experience. By stimulating their children’s learning the parents find reasons to extend their own education.<sup>11</sup> For example, some communities say the *Sh’mah* with their eyes open, some say it with their eyes closed, and some cover their eyes with their hand while reciting the prayer. Some congregations stand for the *Sh’mah*, while others remain seated. Some say both lines of the *Sh’mah* aloud, while others speak

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<sup>10</sup> Wertheimer, Jack. *School That Work: What We Can Learn From Good Jewish Supplementary Schools*. Avi Chai Foundation, March 2009, p. 9

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 5

or sing the first sentence aloud and recite the second softly<sup>12</sup>. Children, parents, educators, and clergy can have discussions about these practices as a way of modeling the questioning and self discovery that can occur when examining tradition and customs.

#### **IV. PRIORITY GOALS**

Having clarity about specific goals of the curriculum determines success. This curriculum adds important elements of Jewish practice to the actual experiences of the students and enables students to:

- deepen their relationships to the Jewish people through Jewish values applied now and in the future
- develop confidence in reading and understanding prayers at our services
- find meaning in the language of the Jewish prayers
- develop practice to translate learning into Jewish living

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<sup>12</sup> Kadden, Bruce and Binder Kadden, Barbara. *Teaching Tefilah*. A. R. E. Publishing, Inc. 2004.

- connect them to their Jewish heritage, people, culture, and ancestral homeland
- strengthen their Jewish life and identity
- realize their divine potential
- master and recognize the Aleph-Bet and vowels
- read, identify, and explain the meaning of the *Sh'mah*
- learn about the centrality of the *Sh'mah* in our lives as Jews
- learn about the relevance of *Sh'mah* to our lives
- be listened to and listen to others
- discover God's world

**a. ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:**

- Hebrew is the sacred language of the Jewish people which connects us to God, other Jews, Jewish history, and prayerful life.
- The “*Sh'mah*” is central to Jewish liturgy, philosophy, and daily life.
- The practice of the *Sh'mah* prayer encourages spiritual growth through personal reflection.



- The “*Sh’mah*” reminds us that listening to our hearts and listening to hear God in our lives are central aspects of what prayer is all about.
- Praying and singing together are powerful ways to build a Jewish community.
- Every single Jew without exception is a part of a big family.
- Each person can find multiple meanings in the expansive and embracing words and ideas of the *Sh’mah*.
- Rich heritage of Hebrew prayer liturgy helps us to enrich and revive our prayer lives.

## **V. NOTES TO THE TEACHER**

Hebrew is a very challenging topic for educators as well as students and parents. Many parents and students judge success or failure by the child's ability to read Hebrew. I feel fortunate to have the opportunity to develop and test out a Hebrew curriculum that approaches learning Hebrew in a more holistic and meaningful way and that is also practical and easy to implement.

This curriculum is only a beginning. I hope each of us will continue to grapple with the challenge of helping children and their families live and practice Judaism in richer and more knowledgeable way.

Even though the reality about the amount of time in which Hebrew is taught in an English speaking environment; and the degree of fluency and training that a teacher needs to have in order be able to use some of the most effective methods, reasonable progress can be made when several hours a week are dedicated to Hebrew, when opportunities are sought for reinforcement, and when teachers are comfortable with Hebrew and receive special training. But even relatively small gains in language learning only can be made and sustained through concerted efforts of both students and parents.

The process of learning Hebrew can be a truly thrilling experience for students. Teaching Hebrew is an opportunity to gently lead them to greater Jewish involvement and further religious growth. Educators play a vital role in nurturing a future generation of Jewish people. They empower students with the knowledge of their legacy and tradition, and bring them closer to Judaism. Teachers should always improve education's reach, impact, and effectiveness by serving as role models for excellence, creativity, and mastery.

Focus on teaching, instead of a child centered focus on learning, diminishes the level of understanding and creates confusion and frustration for the students. Teachers of today face new professional opportunities and challenges. They need to be encouraged and equipped with the new skills in order to raise the standards of excellence. Teachers have a unique opportunity to introduce the beauty of Judaism to Jewish children through understanding the importance and relevance of our prayers. They transfer to the students their belief in the primacy and importance of Hebrew.

I believe that despite the obstacles that everyone faces, each person is able to master Hebrew successfully. Effectiveness of the process depends on building the necessary skills and desire. This Hebrew Language curriculum is designed to make learning experience of the young Jews meaningful. It equips teachers to guide young Jews and to offer constructive activities centered upon students' personal participation and bringing their own experiences to the class.

## VI. CURRICULUM

This unit is a part of the Hebrew Religious School's curriculum at Temple Israel of Lawrence, NY. It represents the first half of the Hebrew Alphabet based on the letters of the *Sh'mah* first line. This is an instruction program for the students in third grade. It encourages continuing practice of Judaism by exploring the depth and meaning (*kavanah*) of the prayers. It builds a partnership between students, teachers, and parents. It extends the learning experience beyond the classroom, through activities involving the children's families at home and by inviting parents to take an active role in their child's Hebrew experience. Above all, this unit is created to provide and foster a meaningful and engaging Jewish environment where children are introduced to a process of continuous learning which extends beyond the prescribed program of the Religious School and lasts as long as life itself.

This curriculum is based on "enduring understandings" or "big ideas" within Judaism and helps teachers work as a learning community both within their own class and across levels sharing ideas, collaborating and cooperating in their learning experiences. In large, by putting emphasis on learning Hebrew and leading *T'filah*, teachers will be able to motivate students to develop their own spirituality, discuss their beliefs, and

participate in services. With better Hebrew skills, B'nai Mitzvah preparation will become more meaningful, enjoyable and significant in students' lives.

With the greater comprehension students will be able to express and experience personal growth, connection with their people and shared destiny.

## **LESSON 1: HEBREW-LANGUAGE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE**

### **Lesson Overview:**

This lesson fosters an understanding of the place of Hebrew in the Jewish tradition, and cherishing of this Holy Language through the use of the Jewish people during personal praying, synagogue worship and home celebrations. Students will be introduced to Hebrew language and its different kinds: Biblical, *Siddur* and Modern. They will start learning Hebrew “Alef –Bet” and sing the song “Alef Bet” by Debbi Freidman. Students will be sent home with the copies of the *Sh'mah* prayer and be asked to try praying in the morning and evening for a week.

### **Enduring Understanding:**

Hebrew is the sacred language of the Jewish people which connects us to God, other Jews, Jewish history, and prayerful life.

**Essential Questions:**

- Why study Hebrew?
- How do I incorporate Hebrew into my life and the life of my family?
- How does Hebrew language connect Jewish people?

**Core Concept:**

Hebrew is the language of the Jewish history and the language of Israel.

Observing Jewish customs and sharing Jewish life together makes Hebrew come alive.

**Evidence of Understanding:**

Students will be able to:

- Discuss the importance of learning Hebrew
- Find ways of using Hebrew in their daily life
- Sing “Alef Bet” song

**Materials:**

Song “Alef Bet” <http://youtu.be/UiCzoTs1AdE>

Hebrew Alphabet Chart

## **LESSON 2: LIVING THE “SH’MAH”**

### **Lesson Overview:**

The lesson will remind students that praying is a “life style” of the Jewish people. Students will explore different ways of “living” the *Sh’mah* daily, and the relationship between the *Sh’mah* prayer and their lives. Students will read it in English transliteration, sing the prayer, and experiment reciting the *Sh’mah* in different positions. They will discuss which position felt most “prayerful” and why. The Hebrew Alphabet will be reinforced by reviewing the song “Alef Bet”. Students will discuss why God wanted us to do something special with the doorposts on our houses and why *Sh’mah* is in the mezuzah. Own mezuzot will be made. Student will be asked to write reaction statements or journal their responses and feelings to recitation of the *Sh’mah* at home. They will ask questions like: How can we tell that a Jewish family lives in the house? Why God wanted us to do something special with the doorposts on our houses? Why do we recite the *Sh’mah* at home? At synagogue?

### **Enduring Understanding:**

The practice of the *Sh’mah* prayer encourages spiritual growth through personal reflection strengthening one’s relationship with God.

## **Essential Questions:**

How does prayer affect me?

How do we “meet” the *Sh'mah* in our daily life?

Why do you think the *Sh'mah* words are in the mezuzah?

Why do you think the first words Jews say when they wake up in the morning and the last words they say when they go to bed are the words of the *Sh'mah* prayer? **Core Concept:**

When Jewish people say *Sh'mah* we try our best to concentrate and recite it with all our heart. A mezuzah contains *Sh'mah* and it is a daily reminder and a public declaration of Jewish identity and faith.

## **Evidence of Understanding:**

Students will be able to:

- Experiment of reciting the *Sh'mah* differently (eyes open, closed nad covered, standing and sitting)
- Recite and sing the prayer
- Sing “Alef Bet” song
- Make own mezuzah
- Express the meaning of the prayer
- Identify the reasons for the *Sh'mah* importance
- Desire to recite the *Sh'mah* at home



**Materials:**

Mezuzah kit

“Alef Bet” song by D. Friedman

Transliteration of the *Sh'mah*

**LESSON 3: THE PRAYER “SH’MAH” IN THE TORAH****Lesson Overview:**

This lesson explores the origins of the “*Sh’mah*” prayer in the Torah (Deuteronomy 6:4,) and its significance for the Jewish people. Students will be introduced to the laws concerning how the Hebrew Alphabet must be written. Students will notice the letters that stand out (*Ayin* in *Sh’mah* and *Dalet* in *Echad*) in order to form the Hebrew word “eid”, and crowns on letters *Shin*, *Sin* and *Nun*. Students will read the prayer in English transliteration and sing it. The song “Alef Bet will be reviewed.

**Enduring Understanding:**

Hebrew is the sacred language of the Jewish people which connects us to God, other Jews, Jewish history, and prayerful life.

**Essential Questions:**

Why is the Torah important to the Jewish people?

How is reading the *Sh’mah* in the torah connect us to the Jewish people?

**Core Concept:**

*Sh'mah* is affirmation of faith and of Jewish identity which is written in the Torah, t. The *Sh'mah* and Torah connect us to Jews of generations past, present and future.

**Evidence of Understanding:**

Students will be able to:

- Recite and sing the *Sh'mah* prayer
- Identify the importance of the *Sh'mah* in the Torah
- Articulate the prayer's origin

**Materials:**

Torah scroll

“Alef Bet” Song

Transliteration of the *Sh'mah*

**LESSON 4: THE PRAYER”SH’MAH” IN THE SIDDUR****Lesson Overview:**

This lesson will introduce the *Siddur* (1<sup>st</sup> printed was not until 1475) and focus the discussion of why the *Sh'mah* can be found in the prayer book.

This process will try to enable each student to enjoy the comprehensive

experience of prayer. Students will explore the relationship between prayer and their lives and will share the stories about the *Sh'mah* experience.

**Enduring Understanding:**

Rich heritage of Hebrew prayer liturgy helps us to enrich and revive our prayer lives.

**Essential Questions:**

Why pray with a *siddur*?

Why do we repeat the same prayer every day?

**Core Concept:**

The *siddur*, a vast repository of all the principles of Jewish faith, provides insights into daily Jewish living as well as into all the special occasions and festivals in the Jewish calendar. Different denominations of Judaism have developed their own *siddurim* and customs of reciting the *Sh'mah*.

**Evidence of Understanding:**

Students will be able to:

- Find *Sh'mah* in the prayer book
- Define the meaning of the prayer book
- Identify the importance of the *Sh'mah's* appearance in the prayer book
- Articulate the differences in the customs of reciting the *Sh'mah*

**Material:** *Siddur*

## **LESSON 5: THE WORD *SH'MAH* (Part A)**

### **Lesson Overview:**

This lesson explores the word *Sh'mah* and how we listen to God. It is derived from the root *Shin, Mem, Ayin* that can mean either Hear or Listen. It can also be used to convey “understand” and “obey”. Students will examine the meanings of the *Sh'mah* in English, differentiate between hearing and listening, and respond to these meanings. The students will explore the shapes and sounds of the three letters in the word “*Sh'mah*” *Shin, Mem, Ayin*, and find these letters in other words. They will be engaged in physical activity and discussion through music, movement, and watching video clips.

### **Enduring Understanding:**

The “*Sh'mah*” reminds us that listening to our hearts and listening to hear God in our lives are central aspects of what prayer is all about.

### **Core Concept:**

Sensory, cognitive and emotional perspectives on the *Sh'mah* teach us about listening, how to listen to God.

### **Evidence of Understanding:**

Students will be able to:

- know how to translate the word *Sh'mah* in different ways
- distinguish between hearing and listening

- give examples of hearing, listening, and both
- articulate their ideas about listening to God
- identify and pronounce *Shin*, *Mem*, and *Ayin*
- learn new words which have some of the *Sh'mah* word letters

### **Materials:**

Handout “Hear, Listen or Both”, Pencils

Kiddush text from “Gates of Prayer”

Vocabulary list of the words containing letters “*Shin*, *Mem*, *Ayin*”

Screen and projector, Internet

Craig Taubman from “Friday Night Live” CD

Alef-Bet Yoga for Kids, Ruth Goldeen & Bill Goldeen

### **Activities:**

1. Set Induction (10 min).

Put on the board two words: HEAR and LISTEN.

How do we HEAR? Expect to hear many different things such as:

Recognize sounds and understand words

How do we LISTEN? Expect to hear many different things such as:

Pay attention, give respect, and focus on

Give an example of “Dog Barks”: dog barks outside-HEAR, dog barks

inside the house-LISTEN.

2. Personal Reflection. (10 min)

Work in groups of three. Give students the handout and ask them to fill it out:

HEAR, LISTEN or BOTH

Put the letter **H** by the hearing activity and letter **L** by the listening activity, or both.

- a. Landing airplane
- b. Mom's calling
- c. Teacher at school
- d. Ocean sounds
- e. Police siren
- f. Trying to understand what others say
- g. TV show
- h. Clock ticking
- i. Story telling

Give two other examples for HEAR, LISTEN or BOTH. Share them with the class.

♪ 3. Learn song “Listen Israel” by Craig Taubman from “Friday Night Live” CD. (10 min.)

- a. Listen with closed eyes to the song and try to remember the words.
- b. Sing the song together.

Teacher: The word *Sh'mah* in Hebrew has both meanings: Hear and Listen, hearing with the ears and the act of listening. In the prayer “*Sh'mah*” God commands us both: to Hear and to Listen.

What does God try to say to us, Jews, when God says “*Sh'mah*, Jewish people”?

Why is it important to pay attention, give respect and understand what God is saying to us?

4. Introduction to the shape and sound of the letter Shin. (10 min)

- a. Watch the video “Shalom Shin”

[http://www.chabad.org/images/multimedia/kabbala\\_toons/flash/shin.swf](http://www.chabad.org/images/multimedia/kabbala_toons/flash/shin.swf)

Please look at the letter *Shin* and describe how it looks.

Expect to hear answers such as: *Shin* has three legs, looks like crown or a bush, a snake with three heads (watched video and like in “Percy Jackson and the Olympians”), and has a dot on the right.

- b. Hebrew Letters Yoga (5 min.)

Let's look at the photograph of the child in yoga pose matching the letter *Shin* and try to replicate it. Everyone benefits from the stretching and strengthening offered by "*Shin*" pose.

- c. Play letters game "Find Me" in KIDDUSH, "Gates of Prayer"

Work in groups of two. In the text students will need to find and circle the words containing the letter *Shin*. The group who finds 12 words wins a prize: pencils with the Hebrew letters.

5. Introduce the sound and shape of the letter *Mem*. (10 min.)

- a. Take a look at the word *Sh'mah* and its second letter. It is called *Mem* and makes sound Mmm. How do you describe it? Mountain with open pass
- b. Take a look at the Alef-Bet Yoga photograph. Try to replicate the letter pose

Play game "Identify letter *Mem*" in the "Kiddush" text by putting words with *Mem* in square. The group who finds 8 words wins a prize: pencils with the Hebrew letters.

6. Introduce the sound and shape of the letter *Ayin*. (10 min.)

- a. Take a look at the word *Sh'mah* and its third letter. It is called *Ayin* and does not have a sound at all. How do you describe it? Looks like letter Y in English



- b. Take a look at the Alef-Bet Yoga photograph. Try to replicate the letter pose.
- c. Play game “Identify letter *Ayin*” in the text by putting diamond around the word. The group who finds 3 words wins a prize: pencils with the Hebrew letters.

7. Conclusion (Wrap Up) “What did we learn today?” (10 min.)

Do you need always to LISTEN when it is enough to HEAR?

If it is important and meaningful to you will you HEAR or pay attention and LISTEN?

Next time you recite the *Sh'mah* what will you think about it?

What do you think *Adonai* is trying to say by commanding us to hear and listen?

How do can we show that we hear and listen to God's words? At temple, at home, every day

8. Post Game (Homework):

I. Remembering the “old” and building a new vocabulary.

Provide students the list of words containing the “*Sh'mah*” letters:

Shalom, Shanah Tovah, Shamach, Sheket, Shushan, Kiddush, Yerushalayim, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Kadosh, Mishpacha, Shophar, Kosher, Mezuzah,

Moshe, Menorah, Mitzrayim, Chumash, Shehecheyanu, Shalach Manot, Sh'mah, Mah Nishmah?

a. Highlight the words you already know.

b. Review the new vocabulary list with parents. Find and circle the “*Sh'mah*” letters: *Shin*, *Mem*, and *Ayin*.

II. Recite the *Sh'mah* prayer twice a day.

a. Try to do it at night and in the morning.

b. Write in your journal the reflection about this experience.

## **LESSON 6: THE WORD SH'MAH (PART B)**

### **Lesson Overview:**

This lesson explores the word *Sh'mah*, how we listen to each other, ourselves, and how God listens to us. Students will have opportunity to strengthen their knowledge they gained at the previous lesson, review the information they received then, and reinforce the “*Sh'mah*” letters *Shin*, *Mem*, and *Ayin* by making body movements and project with the word.

### **Enduring Understanding:**

The “*Sh'mah*” reminds us that listening to our hearts and listening to hear God in our lives are central aspects of what prayer is all about.

### **Core Concept:**

Sensory, cognitive and emotional perspectives on the *Sh'mah* teach us about listening, how to listen to each other and ourselves, and God's listening to us.

**Evidence of Understanding:**

Students will be able to:

- know how to translate the word *Sh'mah* in different ways
- demonstrate the ability to listen to each other and the teacher
- articulate their own inner thoughts and feelings about Hear and Listen
- articulate their ideas about listening to God and God listening to them
- identify and pronounce *Shin*, *Mem*, and *Ayin*
- review the new words which have some of the *Sh'mah* word letters

**Materials:**

Vocabulary list of the words containing letters "*Shin*, *Mem*, *Ayin*"

Story "Can God Hear Me?" from the book "Hear, O Israel. About God",

Molly Cone. UAHC, 1978

Craig Taubman from "Friday Night Live" CD

Alef-Bet Yoga for Kids, Ruth Goldeen & Bill Goldeen

Debbie Friedman "*Sh'mah*" CD

Personal Journals

## Activities:

### 1. The value of listening (10 min.):

Why is it important to listen to others? To help, give advice, learn from

What can happen if we do not listen to each other? (How do we listen to others?)

Why is it important to listen to yourself? What can happen when we do not listen to ourselves? (How do we listen to ourselves?)

### 2. Sing song “Listen Israel” by Craig Taubman. (5 min.)

### 3. Read the story “Can God Hear Me?” (15 min.)

Questions after reading:

Why do you think the shepherd boy played to his flock?

How do we know that the boy listened to the frogs and didn't just hear them?

How do you know the boy really listened to the prayers? (Think of three ways)

When the boy played the flute during services there were different reactions to his playing, what were some of the reactions?

Who was listening to the boy and who was hearing him?

### 4. Project to make letter *Shin* based on your story: noodles, or any products. (15 min.)

### 5. Creating a story describing the shape of the letter *Shin*. (15 min.)

a. Read the story about *Shin* written by Andrew Fang, 6<sup>th</sup> grade student.

“There lived triplets, three brothers: the athlete, the tall one and the silly one.

The silly brother threw a rock in the air and it hit his head. The brothers laughed at him and he cried. After seeing their brother being sad, they apologized and got him an ice pack.”

b. By looking at its shape, can you create your own story about letter *Shin*? Work in pairs.

c. Share the stories with the class.

6. Review the words containing the *Sh'mah* letters. (10 min.)

Integrate the words in sentences in English with saying the words from the list in English.

7. Make a word “*Sh'mah*” out of letters with yoga help. Each group will have three students. (10 min.)

While the children make the poses, listen to Debbi Friedman “*Sh'mah*”.

8. Ask students if they would like to share their reflections on *Sh'mah* recitation at home. (5-10 min.)

## **LESSON 7: THE WORD “YISRAEL” (PART A)**

### **Lesson Overview:**

This lesson discusses the importance of communal prayer. Students will talk about their feelings about belonging and connection to other Jews. They will learn to sing different musical settings for the prayer *Sh'mah* and explore the meaning of the word *Yisrael* and its letters.

### **Enduring Understanding:**

Praying and singing together are powerful ways to build a Jewish community.

### **Essential Questions:**

What can a group accomplish more a person by him/herself?

How is praying in community different than praying individually?

How is the community strengthened through communal worship?

### **Core Concept:**

*Sh'mah* signifies our unity as people. When we read or recite the *Sh'mah*, we are saying, “I am a member of the Jewish people”. *Sh'mah* brings us closer to God, to each other and other Jews. The word “*Yisrael*” means “prince of God” or “wrestled with God”. There are particular ways when Jewish community comes together: study Torah, worship and pray, celebrate and

offer comfort, passing tradition and remain connected to the Jews around the world, repairing and improving the world. Melodies of all styles are written as interpretations of the prayers. Music is used to enhance or heighten the prayer experience and to inspire the prayer participant.

**Evidence of Understanding:**

Students will be able to:

Recite and sing the *Sh'mah*

- Discuss their connection to the Jewish people
- Articulate the ways Jewish community comes together
- Recognize the letters Yud, Sin, Reish, Alef, and Lamed

**Materials:**

The prayer “*Sh'mah*” (in Hebrew, English transliteration and translation)

CD player and CD “*B'Chol Le'yavcha*” by Jay Rapoport

“Alef Bet Yoga for Children” book

**Activities:**

1. Class sits on a rug in a circle.
2. Introduction (5 min.):

Shalom, everybody. Shalom.

I am Galina... Every student says “I am...” his/her English name

Anee Shirel... Every student says “Anee...” his/her Hebrew name

3. Set induction (10 min.):

Teacher recites first line of the “*Sh’mah*” prayer.

Where can you hear this line? At the synagogue, religious school

Who says this prayer at synagogue, religious school? Rabbi, cantor,  
children, families and congregation

Do your parents say it? Do you?

Why do you think we say the *Sh’mah* at synagogue?

How do you feel when you sing the *Sh’mah* together with your family and  
community? “We feel connected to each other”.

4. Learn how to sing song written by the young Jewish artist Jay Rapoport “We Are All Connected” from the album “With All Your Heart”, 2010. (10 min.)

Distribute the words of the song and listen to it.

While listening to the song think: How are Jewish people connected in this  
song? Jews read Hebrew, have sense of right or wrong, read Torah when 13  
years old, through Shabbat, dinner with family, and recipes.

What are the key words composers emphasizes in each verse? We belong,  
we are told, and we last.

How do you feel about yourself, your family: do you belong, told, and last?

5. The letters of the word *Yisrael*. (20 min.)



This word is read *Yisrael*. In Hebrew it means Israel. Look at the first letter and describe how it looks. Yud is the smallest letter of the alphabet. Its sound is short, Y. Write the letter in the air with your finger. Look at the picture of Yud in “Alef Bet Yoga” book. The words with Yud are: Yom Kippur,

The second letter is called Sin and it sounds as Ss. Sin looks similar to... Shin. What do these letters have the same, what different? How does Shin sound? Sh.

Do you know other Hebrew words or expressions that have the same sound as Sin? Simhat Torah

Notice that Reish has rounded corner to the right of the letter. Look for this curve at all the times. It sounds Rr. The words with Reish are: Rosh

Hashana, Purim, Yom Kippur, Nerot, B'racha, Siddur

Alef is the name of the first letter in Hebrew alphabet. It does not make a sound. It is silent. Describe how it looks (like X). Make an Alef with pretzel sticks. Then eat it.

Lamed is tall like Lulav and makes L sound. We know the Hebrew words with Lamed: Lechem, Lev, Levavcha, Melech, Eloheinu, Ha-olam, Challah, Mazal Tov, Loh

6. Meaning of the word *Yisrael* (10 min.)

Look on the blackboard. We use the word “*Yisrael*” to mean many things that are related to each other but also different. Read them all:

Children of *Yisrael*

State of *Yisrael*

Nation (people) of *Yisrael*

Land of *Yisrael*

Which “*Yisrael*” do you think *Sh’mah Yisrael* refers to? Explain and read choices in *Sh’mah* prayer.

7. “Building a Community”, *hevruta* activity (15 min.).

A group of people who live, work, study, pray, celebrate, play together, and comfort when somebody said, often called a community.

Break students into groups of three and distribute the chart “Building Jewish Community: True or False”. Read the list and chose which way a Jewish community operates. Fill out extra space with the actions Jewish community takes together. Share the answers and discuss each option.

8. Musical versions of *Sh’mah*: NFTY and Sulzer (10 min.)

Listen to the versions and discuss the differences. Express the feeling about each version. Sing both.

At the service at the synagogue we not only read this line but also sing it. Sometimes you can hear different melodies for the *Sh’mah*: cantor sings

one or another, or both of them together. Different melodies help us to feel the words differently.

♪ Teacher sings NFTY's version.

What kind of feeling does this tune bring to you?

♪ Teacher sings Sulzer's version.

How do you feel when you hear or sing tune?

9. Home work:

Read or sing the *Sh'mah* prayer in Hebrew and English before going to sleep and when getting up in the morning.

## **LESSON 8: "YISRAEL" (PART B)**

### **Lesson Overview:**

This lesson will continue our investigation about Jewish community and its ways of operation. Students will learn about different names of the Jewish people. They will be encouraged to interact with others within the context of the worship service which will help build community bonds. Two versions of the song "*Am Yisrael Chai*" will be introduced and learned.

### **Enduring Understanding:**

Every single Jew without exception is a part of a big family.

**Core Concept:**

Worship is an opportunity to build community. Jewish people may be known by many different names but they all tell us that we are one people, all of us, together.

**Essential Questions:**

How can we create the sense of community in a school setting?

Why is praying in a group important to Jews?

**Evidence of Understanding:**

Students will be able to:

- Call the names of the Jewish people
- Recite the names of loved ones for Mi Sheberach and Kaddish
- Participate in singing *Sh'mah* and reading English selections from the *Siddur*
- Know how to sing “Am Yisrael Chai”

**Materials:**

*Siddurim*

*Am Yisrael Chai* (two versions)

## **LESSON 9: THE WORD “ADONAI”**

### **Lesson Overview:**

In this lesson students will be guided and encouraged to think and talk about God. They will ask questions about God and discover their own understanding of God. Students will create their own text that describes their relationship with God. They will explore how God’s name is pronounced and written in Torah and *Siddur*.

### **Enduring Understanding:**

*Sh’mah* prayer is as a way of acknowledging God and our connections to each other, God, and God’s creations.

Each person can find multiple meanings in the expansive and embracing words and ideas of the *Sh’mah*.

### **Essential Questions:**

Why do Jews pray God?

What do I believe about God?

What is my relationship with God?

How do we talk to God?

How does the synagogue, and its people and objects, help me connect to God?

What do I do when I feel distant from God?

**Core Concept:**

Jewish people are in continuous search for answers to questions about God.

Praying to God connects us to one another and to God, and unites us with Jews throughout the world and throughout all time.

**Evidence of Understanding:**

Students will be able to:

- Express their relationship with God
- Examine how our relationships with one another help us have a relationship with God
- Participate in worshipping God individually and as a community

**Materials:**

Prayer Books

Paper and pencils

**LESSON 10: THE WORD “ELOHEINU”****Lesson Overview:**

This lesson will explain about the *B’rit*, an agreement of Jewish people to live in partnership with God. Students will learn that the Ten Commandments are some of the most important rules God gave us to live by. They will watch the part showing the receiving of the Ten

Commandments” by Moses from animated movie “Ten Commandments”, 2007. Students will discuss how God’s laws teach us to make ourselves and our world better and will learn about the meaning of the “commandment” (mitzvah) word. Students will create a Mitzvah Chart—a poster that lists the *mitzvot* children can do. Each student will choose their favorite mitzvah and explain their decision. For homework they will perform the mitzvah and will share their experience at the next lesson. During the next class students will decide which Mitzvah project they will perform as a group. The meaning of the word “*Eloheinu*” and its letters will be introduced as well.

**Enduring Understanding:**

When we perform God’s commandments, our actions are strengthening our relationship to God and the Jewish people.

**Core Concept:**

When we say “*Eloheinu*” (Our God), we follow God’s laws, we live a Jewish life. A mitzvah is one of God’s rules. Keeping our covenant with God helps us to be better and make the world a better place.

**Essential Questions:**

Why is it important to keep your promises?

What are some of the ways I follow God’s laws?

How do God’s laws make us and our world better place?

**Evidence of Understanding:**

Students will be able to:

- Express what it means to them to be commanded by God
- Tell about a mitzvah in different settings such as home, school, community in relationship to God
- Explain in age appropriate language what covenant means to them
- Describe their actions in keeping Covenant

**Materials:**

Paper and pencils

Animated movie “Ten Commandments”, 2007

**LESSON 11: “ECHAD”****Lesson Overview:**

This lesson will help students to understand that “*Echad*” (One) has several meanings: unique, singular, and indivisible. Also *Echad* is a number.

Students will play with the word *Echad* as a number and also explore the meaning in relationship to God. Students will listen to and act out the story about Avraham and idols in order to better understand the concept of one God. The letters of the word *Echad* will be introduced as well.



**Enduring Understanding:**

Each person can find multiple meanings in the expansive and embracing words and ideas of the *Sh'mah*.

**Core Concept:**

Jewish tradition upholds a belief in one God. *Sh'mah* teaches us there is only one God. But monotheism does not mean that there is only one way to think about God or relate to God. God cannot be narrowed to one thing but One God is in charge of a lot of things, and beyond.

**Essential Questions:**

What does it mean to say that God is One?

What did Avraham figure out about God that others did not get?

What does it mean that God is special?

What does it mean to believe in mysterious God?

**Evidence of Understanding:**

Student will be able to:

- Express a basic understanding of the concept of One God
- Use knowledge from previous lessons
- Know that *Echad* is also used as a numerical number One
- Recount and pact out the story about Abraham

**Materials:**

Script of “Abraham Story”

Work sheet with Hebrew letters and number One

**LESSON 12: IN SPIRIT OF THE “SH’MAH”****Lesson Overview:**

This lesson is the final wrap up and reviewing with the students what was taught about *Sh’mah*. Students will play a game “*Sh’mah* Jeopardy” to review the words, letters, and concepts. They will create the *Sh’mah* pillow cases by tracing the first line of the prayer and decorating it with their own images. Students will lead the school community service including the songs they learned.

## VII. FURTHER ENRICHMENT FOR TEACHERS:

### **MIDRASHIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE “SH’MAH” IN THE TORAH**

The *Sh’mah* teaches us that there is only One God. It is the original Jewish statement of monotheism. We are only to pray to and worship the God of *Yisrael*, and no one else. The recitation of the prayer *Sh’mah* begins with the word *Sh’mah*, which means “hear or listen.” It is among the most familiar of all Hebrew words. The root for this is shin, mem, ayin that has other meanings, particularly “understand” and “obey”.

“*Yisrael* refers to the entirety of the people summoned by Moses to hear the proclamation of the divine unity. Similarly, when an individual worshipper recites these words, he is making a public proclamation. He thereby testifies to his belief, as it were, before all Israel. Indeed, the affirmation of divine unity is not a “private” matter between one person and God alone; it is an affirmation by each individual Jew, who is declaring his faith, integrates into *K’lal Yisrael*, as well as into the unbroken continuum of Jewish faith and faithfulness. That is why this verse begins with the word *sh’mah*, “hear”, in a singular (rather than *shim’u* in plural): the original words were addressed to the entire people of Israel as one, rather than to a mass of individuals.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Lamm, Norman. *The Shema: Spirituality and Law in Judaism*. Jewish Publication Society, 2000. Pp.19.

The Gemara (Shavuot 39a) states that, “Kol Yisrael Arevim Zeh l’Zeh, which means, “All Yisrael are interconnected within one another.” The word Arev is sometimes translated as “responsible,” thus the statement is offered to mean that all Yisrael are mutually responsible for one another’s welfare. *Sh’ma Yisrael* speaks of our responsibility as part of the Nation of Israel to keep the commandments and profess belief in God.

The Hebrew Nation was delivered from Egyptian bondage in order to be consecrated to an eternal national sanctity. Since becoming a “Kingdom of priests and holy Nation” was the purpose for Israel’s liberation from slavery, the Jewish people must strive to live up to our mission in all spheres of life, both collective and individual. As a hallowed society that lives a national life of *kedusha*, Am *Yisrael* is to participate in and elevate all spheres of existence in order to reveal the inner connection of everything to the Divine Ideal.

The Name of *Adonai* is written one way and pronounced a totally different way. “The Tetragrammaton (Y-H-V-H) is ineffable, it is never pronounced as it is written. Talmud held that the proper pronunciation was known only to the priests (*kohanim*) of the Temple in Jerusalem, where the High Priest enunciated only on one day of the year, Yom Kippur, during the

solemn service, as the choir of priests chanted so as to make impossible for non-priests to hear the Name as it was uttered by the High Priest.”<sup>14</sup>

The letter **י** appears twice, once in the beginning of the written Name and once in the Name as pronounced, hence, two *Yuds*. *Adonai* appears 6828 times in the Torah. The gematria of two *Yuds* and Vav is number 26 that of God’s holy four-letter Name. The two *Yuds* one to the upper right and the other to the lower left, joined by a diagonal Vav. *Alef* is Alef is formed by number one, first of all countable numbers. "God is One": the absolute unity of God.

“The double *Yuds* is not one of the names of *Adonai* and has no *kedusha* (sanctity). It's simply a substitute for the name of *Adonai* and it appears randomly in various versions of the *siddur*. The *siddur* we use (Gates of Prayer) has the name of *Adonai* in two *Yuds* written out fully all the time. Essentially, the reason for using a substitute is out of respect. The name of *Adonai* has *kedushah* and must not be erased or abused. Since two

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<sup>14</sup> Lamm, Norman. *The Shema: Spirituality and Law in Judaism*. Jewish Publication Society, 2000. Pp. 23.

*Yuds* isn't a name of *Adonai*, it was substituted so that if the *siddur* wasn't treated properly it would be less serious. Especially today, with the availability of inexpensive printed *siddurim*, *siddurim* aren't treated with the same care and respect with which they historically were treated.

*Eloheinu* is a compound word, the noun "*Elohim*" and the suffix "*-einu*," which means "our." The noun is a plural noun, indicating majesty (the singular form is "*Elo'ah*" which is recognizable from the *Yom Kippur* confessional "*Elo'ah S'lichot*, God of forgiveness"). Unlike *Adonai*, *Elohim* does not claim to be or stand in for the name of God. It is the generic Hebrew word for God, and also for gods. In both the ancient Hebrew of the Bible and modern Hebrew of Israel, in order to use a colloquial term for God or gods, the word "*Elohim*" is used.

In Torah the word "*Elohim*" also means "judges," the individuals charged with interpreting and applying law. For this reason, the sages identified those parts of the *Torah* in which God is identified as "*Elohim*" as representing God's attribute of judgment.

“Maimonides taught that the statement “God is one” should neither be understood to suggest that God is solitary nor that God is the sum of many parts. Indeed, “God is one” should not be read as a numerical claim at all, argues Maimonides. Rather, “God is one” comes to teach something much more salient: God is without equal and, what’s more, absolutely nothing in the universe is comparable to God. Seven hundred years later, Hermann Cohen (1842-1918) sharpened this point when he suggested “God is one”

ought be understood to mean that, insofar as God is without peer or referent, God is unique. Or harkening back to the words of the Prophet Isaiah (8th Century B.C.E.), “To whom will you liken Me that I should be equal!” (Isaiah 40:25)<sup>15</sup>

There are certain laws concerning how the Hebrew Alphabet must be written by the Jewish Scribe. According to tradition, the last letter of the first word and the last letter of the last word are written in large script on the Torah scroll. The combined two letters spell *ed*, meaning “witness.” The *Sh’mah* expresses the purpose of Israel’s existence: to serve as a witness to the primacy of *Adonai* as the one and only Master of the universe.<sup>16</sup>

#### Letters in the Torah<sup>17</sup>

The letters of the Torah come in three sizes: large, small, and the standard letters with which most of the Torah is written. A large *Alef* is known as an *Alef Rabbasi*, a small *Alef* as an *Alef Zeira*. A medium-sized *Alef* is called an *Alef Regila* (a regular *Alef*).

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<sup>15</sup> Rabbi Bisno, Aaron. *Hear O Israel Adonai is our God Adonai is unique*. The Jewish Chronicle. June, 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Hoffman, Lawrence. *My people’s Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries*. Vol. 1-Sh’ma and Its Blessings, 1997. Pp. 14

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.betemunah.org/letters.html>

The Encyclopedia Judaica tells us that there are seventeen places in the Torah where a letter is written extra-large or extra-small: the scribal terminology is *majuscule* and *miniscule*. There are six miniscules and eleven majuscles. For example, the first letter in the Torah, the bet in the word *Bereshit*, is a majuscule (this is probably the origin of the illuminated capital of medieval manuscripts). The most famous majuscles are certainly the ones from the *Sh'mah* in *Devarim* (Deuteronomy) 6:4. In this case, the letters are large to avoid confusion: a large ayin in the word *sh'mah* to avoid confusion with aleph: 'perhaps O Israel.' The large *dalet* to avoid confusion with *reish*: 'the Lord is another'. The large *Daled* has a numerical value of four (in Gematria), representing the union of God's kingship in the heaven; earth and all four directions.

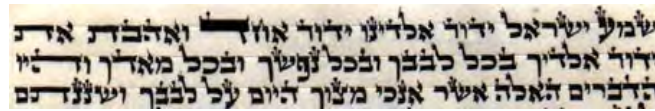
Alternatively, the *daled* is larger so it won't be confused with the letter *reish* which is similar in shape and if mistaken, would change the reading of the *Sh'mah* into a statement of heresy ("Adonai acher"-“a different god”) in place of the fundamental declaration of belief ("Adonai echad"-“God is one”).

### Scripts

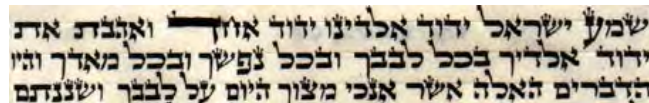




*Vellish*, is the script generally used by Sephardi Jews.



*Ari* is the script generally used by Jews of Chassidic descent or influence.



*Beit Yoseph* is the script generally used by Ashkenazi Jews.

### Quills and Ink

The scribe makes quills for writing a *Sefer Torah*. The feathers must come from a kosher bird, and the goose is the bird of choice for many scribes. The scribe carefully and patiently carves a point in the end of the feather and uses many quills in the course of writing one *Sefer Torah*. The scribe also prepares ink for writing the *Sefer Torah* by combining powdered gall nuts, copper sulfate crystals, gum arabic, and water, preparing only a small amount at a time, so that the ink will always be fresh. Fresh ink is a deep black, and only this is acceptable for writing a *Sefer Torah*.

### References in Talmud and Midrash

“Whosoever prolongs the word "*echad*" [one] in reciting the "*Sh'mah*" prayer, his days and years shall be prolonged—especially if he

prolongs the letter "dalet". Proverbs begins with a large "mem"—which has the numerical value of forty—because Solomon, like Moshe, fasted forty days before penetrating to the secret of the Torah. According to another explanation, the "mem" is the center of the alphabet, as the heart is the center of the body, the fountain of all wisdom, as revealed in Solomon's Proverbs.

The seven letters א, ל, ו, ג, ה, ע, ש have the crowns on the points of the upper horizontal bars. The flourishes are placed on the tops of the letters, and they are found only in the Scroll of the Law, not in the printed copies of the Torah.”

#### Black Fire on White Fire<sup>18</sup>

”*Eish da’at*, the fiery law.” (Deuteronomy 33:2) The *Midrash* states that this phrase is a description of the Torah. In its words: “*eish shahor al gabei eish lavan*”, the Torah is written “black fire on white fire.” (Midrash Tanhuma, Genesis 1) On the simplest level, black fire refers to the letters of

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<sup>18</sup> <http://bethaderech.com/black-fire-on-white-fire/>

Torah, the actual words, which are written in the scroll. The white refers to the spaces between the letters. Together the black letters and white spaces between them constitute the “whole” of the Torah. On another level, the black fire represents the *p’shat*, the literal meaning of the text. The rabbis point to the importance of *p’shat* when stating “the text cannot be taken out of its literal meaning.” The white fire, however, represents ideas that go beyond the *p’shat*. It refers to ideas that we bring into the text when we interact with it. This is called *d’rash*-interpretations, applications, and teachings that flow from the Torah. The *d’rash* are the messages we read between the lines. On yet another level, the black letters represent thoughts which are intellectual in nature, whether *p’shat* or *d’rash*. The white spaces, on the other hand, represent that which goes beyond the world of the intellect. The black letters are limited, limiting and fixed. The white spaces catapult us into the realm of the limitless and the ever-changing, ever-growing. They are the story, the song, and the silence. Sometimes I wonder which speaks more powerfully, the black, rationalistic letters or the white, mystical spaces between them. Most of the Torah is made up of prose, the narrative of the text. The large majority of our portion is not prose-it is rather poetry. The rabbis speak of Divine poetry as black letters resting on the frame of the white empty spaces. “Half bricks on whole bricks,” the Talmud

notes. (Rashi, Megillah 16b. sv. Ieveinah) It is the white fire that gives the black fire its foundation. In fact the spaces in the Torah take up twice the amount of place as the actual letters, perhaps indicating that at times it is of greater importance. Interestingly, water is the first element mentioned in the Torah; (Genesis 1:2) while fire - *esh da'at* - is the last. There is a marked difference between them. Of course, Torah is often compared to water, both are crucial to life and have endless depth. Still, water flows toward the lowest level, while fire seeks a higher plateau. It reaches high, higher, and higher still, burning past our eyes and ears into our hearts and souls and memories. It soars heavenward, linking the finite human being with the infinite God. Such is the power of *esh da'at*-the fiery law-the Torah.

When we think about a Torah scroll, black ink on white parchment, we usually only consider the letters themselves, written in black ink. Yet, the Talmud [Menachot 29a] rules that every letter in a Torah scroll must be completely surrounded by parchment. This requirement is called “*mukaf gevil*”. This means that the white parchment around the letters is an integral part of the Torah. In fact, the white space is a higher form of Torah. It is analogous to the white fire of Sinai - a sublime, hidden Torah that cannot be read in the usual manner. There is a delicate balance between black and white in the Torah. The *shirot*, the poetic portions in the Torah, are written

in a special fashion, like a wall constructed from layers of black and white bricks. These poetic sections are the loftiest parts of the Torah.

Consequently, they have more white space - they contain a greater measure of the esoteric white fire. If a scribe were to write other sections of the Torah in this special layout, the Torah scroll would be rendered invalid. After the Torah was revealed and restricted to our limited world, it must be written with the appropriate ratio of black to white.

# The Boy and the Flute

ONCE THERE was a shepherd boy who made a willow flute.

He played to his sheep.

He played to his goats.

And, sometimes, just for the fun of it, he played to himself.

One day, very early in the morning, he led his sheep to a pond.

He heard frogs singing.

“Listen!” he said to his flock.

And he put the willow flute to his lips and played the sound of the frogs.

One day, even earlier in the morning, he led his sheep to the top of a hill.

He watched the sun rise.

“Listen!” he said to his flock.

And he put the willow flute to his lips and



played the sound of the sun rising.

One day he went home in a different way.  
He passed a synagogue.  
He heard chanting come from inside.  
The shepherd boy stopped to listen.

“What are they doing?” he asked a person  
passing by.

“They are praying,” the person said.

The shepherd boy listened for a long time.  
Then he opened the door and went in.  
He had never been inside a synagogue before.

Everyone was reading prayers.  
They were reading out loud.

The shepherd boy picked up a prayer book,  
too.  
He looked, and he listened, and he swayed  
in tune to the sound of the reading.

Suddenly the shepherd boy wanted to pray,  
too.  
But he did not know the words.

He put down the book and raised the flute to his lips.

He blew.

He played the sound of the feeling in his heart.

Everyone stopped praying and frowned.

Frightened, the shepherd boy put down his flute.

"I don't know how to read words," he whispered.

"I just know how to play notes."

The rabbi looked at him over all the heads of the congregation.

And the rabbi smiled.

"You have made a true prayer," the rabbi said, "for it came from your heart."

And the shepherd boy looked at his flute in surprise.



## **WE ARE ALL CONNECTED**

1. We are all connected

From the east side to the west

We all read our Hebrew

From the right to the left

Our holidays, traditions

And our sense of right and wrong

This is why

We belong

### **CHORUS:**

**We are Jews**

**Amiyut**

**All our people**

**Connected**

**Around the world**

## **Jay Rapoport**

2. We are all connected

From the US to Yisrael

No matter what our differences

No matter where our shul

We all read the Torah

When we turn thirteen years old

This is why

We are told

### **Chorus**

3. We are all connected

From the first stars on Shabbat

Through candles and our blessings

And a nice big fresh challah

Dinner with our family

Recipes from the past

We last.

## Building Jewish Community: True and False

ACTION	TRUE	FALSE
Praying Together		
Gossiping		
Celebrating Shabbat and Holidays		
Contributing to <i>Tzedakah</i>		
Studying Torah Together		
Comforting One Another		
Judging Others		

## AVRAHAM STORY

According to Jewish tradition, Abraham was born under the name Abram in the city of Ur in Babylonia in the year 1948 from Creation (circa 1800 BCE). He was the son of Terach, an idol merchant, but from his early childhood, he questioned the faith of his father and sought the truth. He came to believe that the entire universe was the work of a single Creator, and he began to teach this belief to others.

Abram tried to convince his father, Terach, of the folly of idol worship. One day, when Abram was left alone to mind the store, he took a hammer and smashed all of the idols except the largest one. He placed the hammer in the hand of the largest idol. When his father returned and asked what happened, Abram said, "The idols got into a fight, and the big one smashed all the other ones." His father said, "Don't be ridiculous. These idols have no life or power. They can't do anything." Abram replied, "Then why do you worship them?"

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This handbook contains teaching information on 41 mitzvot, and it is a tool which offers possibilities for Jewish educators. Chapter 11, “Reciting the *Sh’mah*”, includes an overview with historical background and information, activities organized by grade level, and resources, both print and media. The content provides the basis for a curriculum on *Mitzvot* for a grade, several grades and entire school.

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