

## Is Love Enough?

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Va'et-hannan (Deuteronomy 3:23–7:11) contains two of the most famous Jewish texts of all time: the first paragraph of the Shema (Deut. 6:4–9) and the Ten Commandments (Deut. 5:6–18). The second paragraph of the Shema appears a little later, in Parashat Eikev (Deut. 11:13–21). Both paragraphs constitute a pillar of the morning and evening *Amidah*. And yet, many people do not know why we recite both paragraphs since they contain so many identical phrases. When I was a chaplain for the Jewish residents in a Catholic nursing home in Lower Manhattan, and I led Shabbat services there, I once explained, briefly, the difference between the two paragraphs of the Shema. A visitor, whose husband was in residence in the facility, grew so angry at learning of the second paragraph's threatened punishments that she stormed out. Even so, I will here take the risk of explaining in full.

Both Shema paragraphs appear as part of Moshe's valedictory speech, delivered as the people are camped on the east side of the Jordan River, waiting to cross over to the Promised Land. As he reviews their history with them, Moshe recounts their lapses of faith and resulting punishments. The message that he repeats several times (in his very long talk) is that the Israelites showed themselves, again and again, to be people of little faith who were not appreciative of the great good that God had showered upon them. Moshe depicts God as demanding unwavering loyalty from His chosen people. If they stray, they will suffer dire consequences.

This context helps explain why both Shema paragraphs need to be included in our morning and evening prayers. The first paragraph opens with a confession of faith in the one God, and demands loving this one God with all our heart, soul, and might. It goes on to say that we are to keep

the words God issued this day in our hearts and on our lips at all times, and we should teach them to our children. We are even told to “wear” these commandments on our arms and foreheads and to display them in public places. In all, the first paragraph of the Shema is very upbeat, with its focus on love of God and mitzvot.

The second paragraph opens with a statement similar to the first line of the first paragraph: love God with all one's heart and soul. It goes on to say that if we do so, then all will go well. The rains will come in due season, the crops will grow, people will eat and be satisfied. But the paragraph then switches tone: if the people abandon God, catastrophe will result. The rains will not come, the crops will not grow, and people will perish from the good land to which God brought them. Moshe ends the section with words nearly identical to those that ended the first iteration of the Shema: place these words on your hearts, bind them on your arms and between your eyes, teach them to your children, and display them in public places.

We now realize that the first paragraph of the Shema in Deuteronomy 6 is the version without contingency. We are merely told to love God and keep God's words always on our lips. No threat of punishment for deserting God. But that is only half of the covenantal offer. It is the repetition of the Shema in Chapter 11 that presents the complete terms of the offer. Before we sign on, we need to understand that there are consequences to lack of compliance.

When the rabbis of the Talmud instituted Jewish prayer, they decided to mandate the recitation of both versions of the Shema, morning and night, every single day of the year. But why include the first version if the second, expanded version, which immediately follows in the prayer service, says

everything? My guess is that since the first opens with the statement of belief in one God in very clear and direct terms, which the second does not, the rabbis decided to make it the opening paragraph, even though it does not demand observance of the mitzvot. The second does make such a demand. Both are therefore necessary: first tell the people to love God and the mitzvot without mentioning consequences for not doing so, and then tell them what happens if they stop loving God and observing the mitzvot.

In addition to these two paragraphs of the Shema, the rabbis of the Talmud added a third, Parashat Tzitzit (Num. 15:37–41). The point is to have a physical reminder, fringes on the garments, to keep the mitzvot and not stray.

In today's Orthodox and Conservative siddurim, both versions of the Shema appear, one after the other, as has been standard practice over the years. The Reform movement, in its *Mishkan Tefilah* siddur, omits the second paragraph, seeing no need to threaten serious punishment for non-compliance. This is not the way, in its opinion, to incentivize people to keep the mitzvot. But all three siddurim include the third paragraph.

In all siddurim, there is one more addition to the Shema. Following the Shema Yisrael opening statement, we find the words *barukh shem kevod malkhuto le-olam va'ed* (Blessed is the name of the One whose glorious kingdom is forever and ever). Since these words interrupt a series of verses from Va'et-hannan, even though they themselves are not a verse, they should appear in a smaller font. And in most siddurim they do. This line is simply a call to bless God's name upon hearing it recited aloud, as did the *kohanim* in the Temple in Jerusalem, most famously on Yom Kippur. The Mishnah tells us that when the *kohanim* would say these words, they would prostrate themselves, nose to the ground (Mishnah Yoma 6:2). On all days of the year, except for Yom Kippur, this line is now said quietly to distinguish it from the verses of the Shema. On Yom Kippur, it is still said out loud.

Shema is one of the few prayers for which the rabbis of the Talmud stipulate that one has to recite the words with *kavanah*, intention. Not an easy task for prayers that are so familiar to many of us. But knowing that the second

paragraph is an expansion of the first, with some sections repeated and others introducing demands for observance of the mitzvot, should not make us angry but rather assist us in achieving a deeper engagement with this prayer.