

Just Say Shema

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine

A child was missing. Not just one child; many children were missing. Thousands to be exact. Jewish leadership mobilized in an attempt to bring them back.

Rav Herzog, the Chief Rabbi of Israel, traveled to the Pope to obtain his consent. Thousands of Jewish children had been entrusted to the Church when their parents were "deported" during the holocaust. Now, with many of the parents dead or grieving, the Jewish community was asking that the children be returned. The Pope's answer was "No".

Rabbi Silver, coming from the United States, tried a different tactic. He was awarded honorary status in the United States army and he traveled freely throughout Europe doing what he could for the surviving Jews.

Rabbi Silver approached the headmaster of a Christian boarding school and asked, "Are there any Jewish children here?" Predictably the answer was, "No, there are no Jewish children in our facility." Rabbi Silver was sure that many of the children were in fact Jews. He said, "Perhaps there are a few Jews among the children. I just ask for two minutes with the children after supper." The request seemed innocent enough. The headmaster agreed to grant the Rabbi a two-minute audience with the children.

After the children ate supper, Rabbi Silver was ushered into the dining area. The meeting which the Rabbi promised would take no more than two minutes actually took no more than ten seconds. In a booming voice he called out, "Children, say with me, 'Shema Yisroel, Ado-noy Elo-heinu, Ado-noy Echod.' 'Hear O'Israel, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is the One and only.'"

As he concluded his brief statement tens of children flocked towards him, tears pouring down their cheeks as memories of their parents flooded back to them. Caught up in the children's emotion Rabbi Silver had to fight back his own tears as he turned to the headmaster and said, "These sir, are the Jewish children."

The power of Shema is not limited to reconnecting with children after years of separation. The Shema is equally useful in helping anyone reconnect with the Creator. In fact, the Talmud tells us that if one feels that the challenges of life are about to get the better of him, "Let him recite Shema, and he will be protected."

Say you are sitting at work tempted to bend the truth just a bit for significant benefit. You sense that it is wrong to do, but the pressures of opportunity make it difficult to be strong. "Say Shema," the Talmud advises, and you will regain strength. Like a guided missile that suddenly receives course-correcting information, you will be able to realign yourself with your spiritual mission.

How does the Shema do it? It is really very simple.

"Shema Yisroel," "Hear O'Israel." The Shema addresses the Jew of every generation.

"Ado-noy Elo-heinu," "Our Master, the Merciful One, is our G-d."

Although G-d asks much of us, He does so with kindness and mercy. The Torah is a guidebook for spirituality. Every Mitzvah empowers us to achieve eternal greatness.

"Ad-noy Echad," "G-d is the One and only." We are reminded that G-d is not just for the synagogue during prayer service. "G-d is the One and only" means that there is no facet of our lives which is out of G-d's purview. He is with us in the kitchen, in the bedroom, on the playground, and in the office. In Judaism there is no area of life which doesn't have G-d's guiding Hand through Torah to help us do things right.



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