

## **Menachem Persoff**

### **SH'MA YISRAEL: A Roadmap for Life**

In this week's Parsha, we come across the first passage of the SH'MA. SH'MA YISRAEL has become the clarion call of every believing Jew from time immemorial. But what must we "hear", internalize, understand and actualize?

In essence, these words that we utter twice (if not three or four times) daily draw us into recognizing the basic tenets of our Jewish faith.

We are to express our belief in what Rabbi Elie Munk describes as the Absolute Prime Spirit that incorporates the concept of Unity - "the unity of love and justice, spirit and matter, freedom and necessity, of the Infinite and the multitude of finite forces."

The Almighty appears to us as HASHEM, the merciful father, and ELOKIM, the omnipotent majestic Master of Judgement. However, when we recite the SH'MA, we are to embody the notion that everything stems entirely from One Source, including the contradictions of joy and pain, life and death.

With that central motif in mind, we

can better appreciate the directive to serve HaShem with every fiber of our being - heart, soul, and bodily assets. By so doing, suggests Rav Munk, we lead a moral life that permeates all the diverse phases of our lives and being. Moreover, to the extent that we achieve that goal, our personalities will be forever integrated and harmonious.

Notably, there is a sequence to the application of these noble sentiments embedded in the three passages of the SH'MA. First, through recognition and knowledge of the infinite God, love arises that expresses awareness that HaShem is the Source of all our blessings - dependent, of course, on our reciprocating His Chesed.

Then, we must continually review Hashem's teachings with our offspring and students. We are to surround ourselves with symbols awakening us to Hashem's Presence. And we are to observe God's commandments and appraise the path to follow so that we might better fulfill His will in this world.

The three passages are addressed to the individual, the society, and the nation, reminding us that our responsibilities incorporate these three different but critically connected domains. Ultimately, whether as individuals or as a nation, our mission