

# Walk thru Davening

*with Rabbi David Walk*

## THE DAILY DOSE

### SH'MA & HER B'RACHOT - part 10

In reality, we have already concluded our description of the recitation of the Sh'ma by explaining the first two passages. What we usually call the third passage of Sh'ma, really isn't. The obligation of daily recitation both morning and evening is clearly stated only in the first two passages, both declare 'when you lie down and when you arise'. Also, both of the first passages declare our obligation to 'listen', again missing in passage three. So, what is the nature and purpose of this enigmatic 'third passage'?

Well, the most important aspect of this passage, which was appended to the Sh'ma, is to fulfill the Mitzva of 'remembering the Exodus' every day and night. This was the famous conclusion of Rebbe Elazar ben Azaria (with a little help from his friend, Ben Zoma) in the Haggada, that we must remember and recite that God redeemed us from Egypt every day and every night. But that requirement is mentioned in other verses, like Shmot 13:3 and D'varim 16:3. So, why utilize this passage?

Good question. I think that the answer to that query is that this passage complements the first two, in a number of ways. Of which I will describe two.

I believe that the first reason is that this material fits in nicely with the obligations laid out in passages one and two. Just like in that material, we have a rationale for total Mitzva observance. In the first passage we discuss mitzvot as a physical protection which envelopes the individual. In the second passage we have the idea of reward and punishment as an incentive for Mitzvot. Here, in passage three, we're told that Mitzvot are to be the filter or prism through which we observe the world.

How is that accomplished? Through wearing TZITZIT! By means of a famous GEMATRIA, our TZITZIT remind us of the totality of the Mitzvah universe. The letters of the word TZITZIT have the numerical value of 400. Then add the eight strands which hang down, plus the five knots, and VOILA the sum is 613, the traditionally accepted number of Biblical Mitzvot.

Fine. But I believe there is an added attraction in these verses. While the first two passages begin with the

obligation to 'HEAR' the words, teachings and message of the Torah, this passage demands that we 'LOOK' (UR-I-TEM). Just as we must control what we take in through our ears, we must have a similar filter or regulator on our 'eyes'. These are the two main venues of education, listening and observing, and we must be the masters of the content we allow in.

This visual control will allow us to never 'stray' (LO TATURU) into dangerous areas of the heart or the eyes. The use of this term, TATURU, is, of course, significant. Two chapters earlier than the passage of TZITZIT we have the story of the 'scouts' or 'spies' who misled the Jewish nation. Their job was LATUR (observe) the land. They allowed their eyes to deceive them, because they focused on the wrong items to observe. God, through Moshe, required them to report on the nature of the land and its inhabitants. After a short report, they immediately departed from their instructions and delivered opinions and conclusions about their observations.

They were supposed to report and let the people decide. If we analyzed our chances of survival based on the observable facts of our history, we would have concluded that we must have perished thousands of years ago. The wonder of Jewish survival is:

We accept God's analysis and predictions about our fate. Otherwise, we'd have thrown in the towel ages ago.

We observe through the filter of God's Torah and our traditions. Those keep us going. To a certain extent the first two passages are about self-regulating what we hear, and the third passage is about continuing that regulation to what we see. So that we are not seduced by heart and eyes to stray from what God has told and showed us. So, that's how we stay on the road (DERECH) to spiritual success.

Finally, we conclude the Sh'ma with the seemingly redundant verse: I am the Eternal your God, Who took you out from the land of Egypt to be your God, I am the Eternal your God (Bamidbar 15:41). Why the repetition? Some say that it is not repetitive: I am God who took you out of Egypt to be your God (Rabbeinu Bechaye). But Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev explains that we repeat these words as a special safeguard, 'if we keep constantly aware that we are under continuous Divine supervision, this is the greatest safeguard against our deviating from the right path'.

Rav Soloveitchik saw these words as a very special declaration that our relationship with God isn't based on

the reality that the Eternal is in fact the one and only God. Others can (and do) have that relationship. Our connection to the one and only God is the historical reality that God took us out of Egypt to be our God, and we, therefore, have a covenantal connection forged by the redemption. There is the universal connection to God and then there is our historical relationship with God, which is as unique as the Eternal is.

We cap off this Sh'ma process by declaring that this entire process is EMET, the whole truth. But even that declaration gets repeated in a three-word recap to make the total number of words recited 248, equal to the number of positive Mitzvot in the Torah. Again, Rav Soloveitchik adds that the addition of this word and its repetition emphasizes the profound reality that 'the point being made here is not that God is the God of truth, but that God is truth itself. He is truthful because His thought is identical to reality' (the Emergence of Ethical Man, p. 140).

Reality is the result of God's thoughts and intentions. This point must be powerfully emphasized. Thus we end the Sh'ma, having strongly declared our belief in God and dedication to the Torah's system of Mitzvot.

Next we will turn our attention to the third of the blessings surrounding the declaration of Sh'ma. This section will discuss the special relationship of the Jewish nation to God throughout history. ❤️