

# Rav Kook Torah

by Rabbi

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## The Double SH'MA

“SH'MA – Listen Israel! The Eternal is our God, the Eternal is one” (D'varim 6:4)

When we recite the Sh'ma, Judaism's central affirmation of faith, we accept upon ourselves OL MALCHUT SHAMAYIM, God's kingship and authority. The Torah instructs us to recite the Sh'ma twice a day – "when you lie down and when you rise up" (6:7).

Yet one might wonder: why isn't once a day sufficient?

### Public and Private Domains

When we contemplate and reflect on a concept, we deepen its impact on the soul.

The day can be divided into two distinct parts: the daytime hours, when we engage with the outside world, and the evening hours, when we retire to the quiet sanctuary of our homes. By reciting the Sh'ma both in the morning and evening, we affirm our acceptance of God's rein and dominion throughout both parts of the day. In other words, our affirmation of the Sh'ma serves as a guiding force in our public activities during the daytime as well as in our

private lives at night.

Reciting the Sh'ma before the day begins helps prepare us for the daytime hours, so that our social interactions and public activities will meet the Torah's ethical standards. And the Sh'ma of the evening is meant to infuse our private lives with holiness and purity.

Both affirmations are vital. Ethical living should not be restricted to one's private life, just as it should not be limited to the sphere of one's public affairs.

This dual recital of Sh'ma provides an additional insight. The ethical directives for society as a whole differ from those for the individual. Public life is too varied and complex to be governed by the same guidelines that guide private individuals. Hence, the Sh'ma of the morning is inherently different than the Sh'ma of the evening.

### The Private Service of the Kohen

This insight enables us to understand a peculiar statement of the Sages. The Mishna teaches that the evening Sh'ma is to be recited “after the hour when the kohanim return [from the mikveh] to eat their t'ruma offerings” (B'rachot 1:1). In the case of a kohen who becomes ritually impure, he must immerse himself in a mikveh and await nightfall before partaking of t'ruma. When in fact did the kohanim

become pure and could once again eat t'ruma? When the first stars appear in the night sky.

Why doesn't the Mishna mention this time explicitly? Why the digression about kohanim returning home to eat their t'ruma?

In fact, this serves as a beautiful metaphor for the evening Sh'ma. The primary service of the kohanim takes place the day; however, their evening meal of t'ruma also constitutes a form of Divine service (see Pesachim 73a). The inspiring image of a kohen entering his home to partake of t'ruma corresponds to our own recitation of the evening Sh'ma, wherein we affirm God's dominion in our private lives. Through the recital of the evening Sh'ma, we demonstrate that we belong to a "kingdom of kohanim" also in the privacy of our own homes.

### **The Sh'ma of the Nation**

The distinction between the evening and morning Sh'ma, delineating our private and public service of God, has a parallel on the national level. There are times and situations in which the Jewish people must be a "people who dwells alone" (Bamidbar 23:9) – a people separated from the other nations to safeguard their unique heritage. On the other hand, the nation of Israel is also charged to influence and uplift the rest of

humanity, to serve as "a light unto the nations" (Yishayahu 42:6).

The evening Sh'ma corresponds to the distinctive spiritual life of Israel, a nation living its own existence in pure faith. The blessing recited after the evening Sh'ma is EMET VE'EMUNA – "Truth and Faith". This is a time when the unique character of the Jewish people must be protected from foreign influences, much like the kohen who returns to his home in the evening, after publicly representing the community in the Mikdash during the day. In the privacy of his home, the kohen separates from non-kohanim as he partakes of the holy t'ruma offerings.

The morning Sh'ma, on the other hand, corresponds to our national mission of proclaiming God's Name throughout the world. Consequently, the blessing recited after the morning Sh'ma is EMET V'YATZIV, where word YATZIV is simply EMET (truth) translated into Aramaic. We translate the Torah's message to other languages, as this is a time when its truth should be grasped by all nations of the world, inspired by Israel's acceptance of God's reign.

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