

# The Echad of God

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One of the great foundational beliefs of Judaism is the "*Shema*" (pronounced *shm*□), which literally means "to hear." It is comprised of three distinct passages of Scripture: Deuteronomy 6: 4-9; Deuteronomy 11: 13-21; and Numbers 15: 37-41. The first part of the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) is by far the most recognizable of the three passages and stresses a belief in the unity of God as well as an absolute loyalty to Torah and all the commandments contained therein. The instruction was also given that the commandments were to be carried in one's heart, taught diligently to the children in the home, spoken of habitually, and remembered upon waking and before sleep every day. They were also to be bound upon the hand, worn as frontlets on the head, and placed upon the doorpost of the house and gates.

In his book *Judaism A-Z*, Yacov Newman says, "The central and most ancient element of Jewish liturgy, Shema calls for *love* (and not only 'fear') of God through physical service and spiritual devotion; exemplary conduct and (if need be) self-sacrifice; instruction of young and fulfillment of Divine precepts; awareness that there will be reward and punishment for obedience or disobedience; and promotion of individual and national holiness through constant wearing of fringes (*tzitzit*) by males as outward sign of devotion to God. Twice-daily recital, during the first quarter of day (in *Shacharit* or morning service) and after nightfall (in *ma'ariv* or evening service; also when retiring to bed), is based on Biblical injunction of 'talk of them . . . when thou liest down, and when thou riseth up' (Deuteronomy 6:7). Further injunctions to 'bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and . . . for frontlets between thine eyes' (6:8) and to 'write them upon the doorposts of thy house, and upon thy gates' (6:9) are basis for *teffilin* and *mezuzah* observances. During *keri'at Shema*, a special responsive formula is inserted between the 1st two verses: *Barukh Shem Kevod Malkhuto Le-Olam Va'ed* (Blessed be His Name, Whose Glorious Kingdom is for ever and ever). This credo is always recited in an undertone, except on *Yom Kippur* when it is read aloud (as in period of Roman oppression). Together with this formula, the entire *Shema* comprises 245 words, but repetition of *Adonai Elohekhem* (end of third paragraph) with *Emit* ('true'; first word of following prayer) increases this number to 248, equivalent to the sum of positive precepts in Torah . . . Another affirmation of the Talmud is that, 'if you will recite the *Shema* morning and evening, you will not be conquered' (Sota 42a)."1

Consider the first part of the *Shema*:

(Hebrew font)

(*Shema Yisra'el, Adonai Elokhenu Adonai Echad*).

In translation this says, "Hear O Israel, the Lord, the God of us, the Lord is one." In this passage there are four words that should be closely examined. Examined separately, these words form the foundation of a very important concept that concludes in the New Testament. These words, (font not available), and (font not available), have been translated: hear, Lord, our God, and one, respectively.

## What Does It Mean To Hear

The word (font not available) *Shema* means much more than just "to listen or hear." The act of hearing is a three-part process. By Hebraic definition, a person has not really heard unless he first listens, understands (guards) what he has heard, and then takes action on what he has heard. This is contrary to the Western mind which often concludes that hearing is a completed act upon understanding and that action may or may not be involved or even necessary. In Deuteronomy 12: 28 we see this process of hearing: "Observe and hear all these words which I command thee, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee for ever, when thou doest that which is good and right in the sight of the Lord thy God." Notice the three elements of hearing in this passage: listen; observe (font not available) "to guard, to fasten down with nails,"<sup>2</sup> which shows understanding; and, finally, do that which is right and good in the sight of the Lord thy God. We see this same process of hearing in the New Testament as well. In the parable of the sower who goes out to sow seed (Luke 8: 15), Jesus defines the good ground where the seed falls as, ". . . they which in an honest and good heart, having heard the Word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience." Here, once again, is the three part process of listening, guarding, and action.

To "keep" in this passage means to build a high fence around for the expressed purpose of protection. This process of hearing is shown in the Epistles as well, where James says, "For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed" (James 1: 23-25). Once again we see the three part process: listen, understand (guard), and do.

## The Name Of God

The second word that needs to be considered is the Hebrew word (font not available). It has been translated "Lord" but in actuality is the proper name of God (Yehovah). This name shows that God is our ultimate source as well as our provider and deliverer, past, present, and future. This name has been translated into English as "I am that I am," or "the Preexistent One." In some cases, it is translated as "I shall be as I shall be." Both of these express that God is both timeless and eternal. This name is the "*Shem Ha Meforash*" or the "Ineffable Name," which many believe is derived from the Hebrew words for past, present, and future.

(font not available) *Hayah*—This is the Hebrew word for "was" (past).

(font not available) *Horeh*—This is the Hebrew word for "is" (present).

(font not available) *Yiheyeh*—This is the Hebrew word for "is to come" or "will be" (future).

The combination of these three Hebrew words results in the proper name of God (font not available). This makes the verse in Hebrews 13:8 all the more significant. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday (font not available), today (font not available) and forever (font not available). Jesus is (font not available).

## Biblical Oneness Defined

The third word that needs to be examined in the opening statement of the *Shema* is the word (font not available). This word is a combination of two Hebrew words in construct form: (font not available) *anachenu*, which means "we" or "our," and (font not available) *Elohiym*, pronounced *Eloheem*, which is one of the names of God. When the final ! or *mem sophit* is dropped from the word (font not available) and the (font not available) ending is added, the result is the constructed word (font not available) which means "our God" or "God of us." We want to consider the word as it appears before the construct form. This would be the word (font not available) which is usually translated "God" but which has a greater meaning of "God above all Gods." The root of this word is

(font not available) (*El*) and this word, which is in the singular form, is often translated "God" as well. *El* also has a deeper meaning of power, strength, and might, conveying the idea that our God is a God of strength and power.

It is not our intention to delve into Hebrew grammar, but some points need to be made for the purpose of further discussion. The word *El* as stated above is in the singular form. The word *Elohiym* (pronounced *Eloheem*) is in the plural form. Hebrew words are unique because they can show number, gender, and direction depending upon the prefixes and suffixes that are attached to the root word. For the sake of this discussion, we will only consider the gender and number of the words (font not available) and (font not available). Again, we must start with the root of the word, which in this case is (font not available) (*El*) and defined as "God." If we wanted to make the word *El* dual (that is, plural showing more than one but less than three), we could simply add the ending (font not available) making the word (font not available) (*Eloheyim*). This would make the word plural (dual), two in number. Since the word ends with the dual ending of (font not available) and the final mem (font not available) or *mem sopherit*, this word is also masculine. In order to make the word plural with reference to "three" as well as masculine, we would write it (font not available). The (font not available) ending makes the word masculine and plural, three or more. This is a very important fact in the opening verse of the *Shema* and would almost make the *Shema* obscure without this understanding. Understanding this plurality in the Godhead is a very different concept than polytheism. To believe in the plurality in one God does not make one a believer in polytheism. With this understanding, we can see that the first part of the *Shema* could read, "Hear, understand, and act on the fact, O Israel, the Lord, the God of us [*three in number, masculine*], the Lord is *echad*."

### **One In Unity**

Now we are ready to consider the most important word in this passage, (font not available), (pronounced *echad*). It is this word that brings the richness of understanding and sets the stage for a concept that is developed throughout the rest of the Word of God. *Echad* has been translated "one" in the Bible. While it certainly does convey the numerical meaning of "one," it should be pointed out again that in Biblical Hebrew, we do not really need a separate word to show a number. This can be done quite easily by the suffix that is added to the root of a word. Once again, a Hebrew word can show not only number, but gender and direction. Since we have a word already present that shows both plurality and gender, there is really no need to specify the number one. Stated another way, the use of the word *echad* to specify number is not only redundant but contradictory. There must be a deeper meaning to this word. According to *Gesenius Hebrew/Chaldee Lexicon To The Old Testament*, (font not available) (*echad*) means, "to unite, to join together, to be in unity."<sup>2</sup> *Echad* also conveys the idea of being "bound together" like the cords of a rope. The tighter the cords are bound, the greater the strength produced. *Echad* does indeed mean "one" but it is a oneness that is produced by unity. We see this idea of *echad* in Genesis 2:23-24 when Adam said, "This is now bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh: she shall be called woman because she was taken out of man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one ((font not available) *echad*) flesh." Here we see two distinct individuals declared as "one" flesh. This is not talking about one in number but one in unity, harmony, peace, and the sharing of common goals. Adam and Eve were joined together, twisted, bound, and wrapped together in singleness of purpose.

In Matthew 19:3-6 Jesus says that when a man and woman are married, the two of them become one (font not available) flesh. They are united, joined, and wrapped together like the cords of a rope. They have singleness of purpose in marriage, and no man should try to destroy that unity. This unity does not destroy the diversity nor the individuality of the people in the relationship.

This is the very idea presented in the *Shema*. We have seen that *Eloheem* (font not available) is both plural and masculine. What is being said in this statement, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one"? Israel: hear, understand, and act on the fact that our God is a God of unity, and that this plurality and unity of the Godhead is tightly bound together like the cords of a rope. They have singleness of purpose, and you should partake of this unity by sharing the same goals with God.

### **A Witness to *Echad***

It is interesting that in the Scripture verse itself, the *Shema* is written with the [ and the d much larger than the rest of the letters. Please notice:

(font not available)

The two letters (font not available) and (font not available) form the word (font not available) which means "witness." This could certainly be interpreted that Israel was being asked by God to bear witness not only to the Godhead but also to the unity contained therein and to be a part of that unity by observing all of the commands. This idea of being "one" is not an isolated idea but a major concept of the Word of God. Consider the instructions given on the construction of the *tzitzit* or fringes. According to the Code of Jewish Law the construction of the fringes was begun by taking four stands of thread and weaving them into a string. "If one does not take four separate strings, but takes one long string, folds it into four, puts it through the aperture (hole), makes a knot, and thereafter cuts the string, it is invalid."<sup>3</sup> Four strands must be put through the aperture thus doubling them to make eight. It was not permitted to take a single strand and cut it into four pieces and then put those four through the aperture creating the eight strands. Once the four strands are put through the aperture, two knots are made. Then the longest strand, called the *shamesh*, or helper strand, is used to make the wrappings. Again, according to Jewish Law, ". . .the strands of the *tzitzit* are to be twisted, and if any strand becomes untwisted, it is considered as cut off and nonexistent."<sup>4</sup> The *tzitzit* was a reminder to remember and do all of the commandments of the Lord.

The number four is important here. The number three represents the Godhead, and the remaining strand represents your life. As you twist, wrap, and bind your life with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit you become (font not available) (one) with Him.

This concept is further developed in Isaiah 40:31, "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." The word translated "wait" in this verse is the Hebrew word (font not available) (*qavah*) and it means to "twist and bind, like a rope; to be strong and robust from the idea of binding fast."<sup>5</sup> Again, the concept is that strength is produced as we twist and bind our lives together with the Lord. This twisting, this binding makes us (font not available) with God.

### ***Echad* in the New Testament**

In response to a group of Jews who asked Him to tell them plainly if he was the Christ, Jesus said, "I and my Father are one" (John 10:25-31). Jesus makes an extraordinary statement here: "I and my Father are (font not available) [one]." It is the same word used in Deuteronomy 6:4, and by using it, Jesus clearly defines it. He was using the word *echad* in the same way it in which it was used in Genesis. He was identifying himself as part of the Godhead. The Jews knew exactly what he was saying, and they picked up stones to stone him. He was declaring that he and the Father are united, twisted, and bound together: they were in complete unity; they had the same goals. They shared singleness of purpose. Jesus' clearest interpretation and definition of *echad* is found in John 14:7-11, "If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. . . . he that hath seen me hath seen the Father . . . Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very work's sake." Here is Jesus' interpretation of *echad* with God: I am in the Father and the Father is in me, united, bound together, sharing, and working toward a common goal.

## Believers Are to be *Echad*

Jesus also tells us that *echad* is not something that he alone shares with the Father. In his prayer found in John 17, Jesus prays for not only the disciples but also for all those who shall believe on him through their word, ". . .that they may be one, as thou Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one [*echad*] in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."(vs. 21) Jesus again defines *echad* and prays that we may be *echad* (united, bound together, sharing and working toward a common goal) in the Father and in the Son. He goes on to say, "and the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one [*echad*] even as we are one." (vs. 22) Jesus then tells us that this *echad*, this oneness, will not only bring maturity in our lives with God but with one another. "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect [*mature*] in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me."(vs. 23) The manifestation of this *echad*, this binding together, this unity, is love for the Lord and for each other. "That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them."(vs. 26) Jesus is our example of *echad* (font not available) with God. If a person says that he is *echad* with God but does not manifest love, then by definition, *echad* does not exist.

## Jew and Gentile in *Echad*

Paul's description of *echad* in Ephesians 2 is both didactic and prophetic in nature. In verses 11-18 we read, "Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh . . . that at that time ye were without Christ being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world; But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one(font not available) in Hebrew, ei'" in Greek] and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one (font not available) new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one (font not available)body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby. . . ."

This passage of scripture is prophetic as well as didactic. It tells us that through the sacrifice of Jesus, God has made of Jew and Gentile one (*echad*) new man. This one new man is to function under the Lordship of Jesus, being united and bound together with Him and each sharing the same goals and purposes with the Lord—to be a part of accomplishing God's purpose in the world. Ephesians is telling us that because of the sacrifice of Jesus, Jew and Gentile which in times past were two different "men" will come together and become one new man. Paul is telling us of a day when Jew and Gentile will be *echad*. They will be united, joined together, unified, sharing a specific purpose.

So how are we doing? Are Jews and Gentiles united, bound, twisted together, and unified for a specific purpose? There is still a long way for us to go. This passage has only begun to come to pass. A great deal of the church is still anti-Semitic, thinking that the Jews are under the curse of God and that the Church has replaced Israel. A large portion of the church still has no idea that we share a common heritage with Israel. We share the same root. A great portion of the church still teaches the Word of God from a Greek mindset rather than a Hebraic mindset. There is still today a lack of understanding that we, as Gentiles, are called alongside the Jew to accomplish a greater purpose of bringing salvation to a lost and dying world, as well as making a stand against such things as the New Age Movement and the Greco-Roman philosophy and Hellenization of the Church. We may be "one new man" in position but we have yet to fully carry it out in experience, to the level that would be pleasing to the Lord. There is still a large portion of the church community that does not even recognize that the Old Testament is still a viable part of the canon of Scripture. There are still many churches that never mention, much less teach on, such things as the feasts of the Lord, the influence of Hebrew on the New Testament, and the importance of Romans 11.

As Christian leaders we must change this. We must begin to teach our people the language of Hebrew, the Jewish or Hebraic roots of their Christianity, as well as the vast heritage that is theirs as a result of being grafted into the root. We must teach people the importance of understanding that "we being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and **with** them partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree." We must begin to teach people that the Lord has placed in our lives the richness of the Hebraic (Jewish) root and that it is available to them. This must not be done just to increase our head knowledge but to bring us back to a vibrant and powerful relationship with Jesus that was evident in the early Church. There is much still there that keeps us from being *echad* (font not available) not only with the Jews but with each other. We must remember that we can be no deeper in *echad* with God than we are with people. Love must be manifest in all that we say and do.

What is God's vision for this *echad*? Does He reveal the level of *echad* that we, as Gentiles, should achieve with the Jews? First, consider a few historical facts. The church was born in the midst of Judaism. The members of the first church were Jewish and not Gentile. They were in fact one of the four major sects of Judaism called the "*Notzrim*" (Nazarenes). Even within this group there were major divisions. It was not until 150 years later that the church completely broke away from Judaism, and that separation came because of the person of Jesus. The traditional Jews could not tolerate the church's claim that Jesus was God and had a unique and special Sonship with God, nor its interpretation of Jewish symbols such as identifying Jesus as the paschal lamb.

In order to understand God's vision of *echad*, we need to understand that God had always made provision for the Gentile and the stranger in the land. Gentiles were always on the mind of God even as were the Jews. Jews and Gentiles have always been together in the plan of God. In Zechariah 9: 13 we read, "When I have bent Judah for me, filled the bow with Ephraim, and raised up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons O Greece, and made thee as the sword of a mighty man." Ephraim represents Gentiles who will be loaded into the bow of Judah (the Jews) for the specific purpose fighting against the New Age movement, anti-Semitism, and the Greek mindset. Jew and Gentile will work together to accomplish God's plan in the earth. This can only be fully accomplished by Jew and Gentile together.

This is the true meaning of *echad*, to be *echad* with God, to be *echad* with one another, and to be *echad* with the Jews. We must understand that we are spiritually linked to Israel and that we are to come alongside the Jews in order to accomplish God's purpose in the earth. Shalom, and may we be *echad* with the Lord and with each other, Jew and Gentile alike.

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1 Yacov Newman, *Judaism A-Z* (Dept. for Torah Education and Culture, Israel, 1980), pp. 212-213.

2 H.W.F. Gesenius, *Gesenius Hebrew/Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament* (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 1979), p. 28.

3 Rabbi Solomon Ganzfried, *Code of Jewish Law* (Hebrew Publishing Co., New York, 1963), Vol 1, p. 21.

4 *Ibid.*, p., 24.

5 Gesenius, p. 726

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