



Hilkhot Keriat Shema Recitation of the Shema

Chapter 1:1-4

1 The *Shema* is read twice everyday—in the evening and in the morning, as it is said, “and when you lie down and when you rise up” (Deut. 6:7), the phrases in this text meaning at the time when men are lying down, that is, at night, and at the time when they have risen, that is, by day.

2 What does one read? Three sections as follows: the section beginning, “Hear, O Israel” (Deut. 6:4-9); that commencing, “And it shall come to pass” (*ibid.* 11:13-21); and that commencing, “And the Lord spoke” (Num. 15:37-41). The section beginning, “Hear, O Israel” is recited first, because it sets forth the duties of acknowledging the Unity of God, loving Him, and studying His words. This is the great and essential matter on which all depends.* Then, the passage beginning, “And it shall come to pass” is read, this containing a charge to fulfill all the other commandments. Finally the section concerning fringes is read, as it also contains a charge to remember all the commandments.

3 Although the precept to wear fringes is not incumbent at night, still the section concerning this precept is recited at night, because it mentions the departure from Egypt, which it is a duty to recall by day and at night, as it is said, “that you may remember the day of your going forth from the land of Egypt all the days of your life” (Deut. 16:3). The reading of these three sections in this order is termed, “The reading of the *Shema*.”

4 When reciting the *Shema*, after concluding the first verse, one repeats in a low tone the sentence, “Blessed be the name of His glorious sovereignty for ever and ever” and then resumes the reading of the first section in the regular order from the verse, “And you shall love the Lord your God . . .” to the end of the section. Why is the above-mentioned sentence interpolated? We have a tradition that when the patriarch Jacob, residing in Egypt, gathered his sons about him in his dying hour, he earnestly charged them concerning the Unity of God and the way of the Lord in which Abraham and his father Isaac had walked. He questioned them, saying to them, “Possibly, my sons, there is some one among you who is unworthy, and is not at one with me on the doctrine of the Unity of the Creator of the world, in the same way as our teacher Moses charged the people in the words, ‘Lest there be among you a man or a woman. . . whose heart turns away this day’” (Deut. 29:17). They all answered, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” This means, “Our father, Israel, hear this, our [confession of faith]: ‘the Lord our God is one Lord.’” The aged patriarch then ejaculated, “Blessed be the name of His glorious Sovereignty for ever and ever.” Hence, all Israelites keep the custom of reciting, after the first verse of the *Shema*, the thanksgiving uttered by the patriarch Israel

