

The Power of Six

For me, much of Jewish philosophy can be summed up in a single six-word phrase. It's often referred to by just its first name: *Shema*. This Hebrew phrase, is among the first every Jewish child learns: *Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad* translates to, "Hear, oh Israel, the LORD is our G-d, the LORD is one." *Shema* means "listen" as well as "hear." Our most sacred teaching begins with the importance of listening, which we are instructed to repeat every morning and evening. It all starts with LISTENING. Regardless of how focused we might be on OUR point of view, *Shema* reminds us to listen first. The second word, *Yisrael*, connects us to community, emphasizing that the responsibility of sacred devotion is a shared one. Then, G-d's name and role are repeated: the sacred name is said twice, and in between, we refer to "OUR G-d." Our relationship with G-d is both a personal and shared. The last word is "*Echad*" – one. The unifying concept there is one G-d, for all humanity and all the world.

These six words reflect the depth of Jewish thought. Yet, seven is often referred to as a more significant number in Judaism. We are taught in Genesis the world was completed in seven days. All of G-d's creations -- light, land, water, stars, birds, fish and mammals – came in the first six days. Each day, G-d evaluated the creation and said, "That's good." After six days, it was called, "very good." It wasn't until the seventh day, Shabbat, that the word *kadosh* – holy – was used: "and G-d blessed the seventh day and made it holy." No new *things* came into the world on Shabbat; but Shabbat established the holiness of time. Things can be good; time is holy.

The six words of *Shema* and the six days of creation allow for space to pause and contemplate a mysterious and loving relationship with holiness. While all the other aspects of the world were present after day six, the world was incomplete without Shabbat and its holiness. Perhaps our ability to listen that helps us make time holy. We can listen to sacred teachings, to the quiet of nature, to our fellow human beings, our loved ones and even those who oppose us. When we truly listen with an open heart, time becomes holy.

I pray in the coming year to be able to listen and learn, opening space for G-d and all of G-d's creations help us make time holy for all.

L'shalom,

Rabbi Dan Gordon

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