

## Parsha Va'etchanan: Religion, Creativity, Art and Prayer

This week's Torah portion is called Va'etchanan, "and I pleaded" → Shema and other liturgy as pleading

Prayer comes from a place of creativity. Torah manifests this.

Shema as an artistic statement:

- In the Koren Sacks siddur, Shema is "listen Israel", implying that listening to God's word requires a focus, concentration and attention to detail
- Etz Chaim points out that the Shema could just as easily be translated to "the Lord our God is unique" → similar concept of Mi Chamochah

Two or three ideas:

- To come into a relationship with God requires listening
- God is unique
- The Jewish relationship with God is an expression of this unique quality of godliness (redemption of Israel)

Expanded Shema translation → "pay attention Israel, this God who calls us into a relationship, this God is unique beyond anything we have ever experienced."

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## God As Artist

- The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path To Higher Creativity: "God is an artist. So are we. And we can cooperate with each other. Our creative dreams and longings do come from a divine source, not from the human ego."
- God's molding our world from a place of void (Genesis 1:2)
- God as potter who creates us with His hands (Isaiah 64:8)
- Negative space design principal → the emptiness of space The Shema, by being the unofficial central prayer of Judaism, is a perfect piece of negative space. The Shema says everything: listen, be a united community, recognize God, trust in God, understand the nature of the deity. And yet, all the Shema says is "there is one God". How can so little, say so much, so well?

## Part of the Shema with creative contexts

- Shema Yisroel: Listen Israel (creative potential, sets us on a course of doing after hearing)
- Yisroel Adonai: Struggle with God, The Lord (connects us as a people, the descendents of Jacob with this God)
- Adonai Eloheinu: The Lord our God (affirming that the Lord we call God is the correct God to worship)
- Eloheinu Adonai: Our God who is the Lord and nothing else (God exists beyond and above everything)
- Adonai Echad: The Lord is One (everything which we experience as God is God)

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Creativity and Suffering → Rabbi Akiva

God makes all things possible

Portable Religion through creative technologies: mezuzah, tefillin, etc.

Jews walking a path with God → art as a journey/path/pilgrimage

Tefillah → Palal → Hitpael form. Praying oneself. Judging oneself.

- Could it be, then, that our return to God is a journey, a creative, expressive journey?

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