

Hashivenu Forum #10 – January 2008
Prayer in Yeshua, Prayer in Israel:
The Shema in Messianic Perspective

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Messianic Judaism and the Centrality-Marginality Paradox

With the cry “Hashivenu” the Torah service concludes, imploring God to bring us back to himself. It is our conviction that Hashem brings Messianic Jews to a richer knowledge of himself through a modern day rediscovery of the paths of our ancestors – Avodah (liturgical worship), Torah (study of sacred texts), and Gemilut Chasadim (deeds of lovingkindness).

These are the opening words of the Hashivenu Mission Statement. In accordance with this conviction, the Hashivenu Forum follows the rhythm of the Jewish daily prayer cycle, and employs the liturgical forms of the Siddur. Such temporal rhythms and liturgical forms have shaped and expressed the spiritual life of the Jewish people through the centuries. By making them our own, we demonstrate that the Jewish people are our people and that Jewish life is our life.

At the same time, we differ from other Jews in our conviction that God has raised Yeshua from the dead and in our acknowledgement of him as our Master and Messiah. We have encountered the Rabbi from Nazareth, and nothing can ever be the same for us again. This includes "the paths of our ancestors." We "rediscover" them as followers of Yeshua, and consequently understand and experience them in a new way.

The Hashivenu Mission Statement conveys this aspect of our calling in its second paragraph:

However, Messianic Judaism is energized by the belief that Yeshua of Nazareth is the promised Messiah, the fullness of Torah. Mature Messianic Judaism is not simply Judaism plus Yeshua, but is instead an integrated following of Yeshua through traditional Jewish forms, and the modern day practice of Judaism in and through Yeshua.

From its inception, Hashivenu has rejected the formula of "Judaism plus Yeshua." Messianic Judaism involves more than the subtle tweaking of an existing form of Jewish life and thought -- adding a few elements required by faith in Yeshua and subtracting a few elements incompatible with that faith. Instead, the Judaism we have inherited -- and continue to practice -- is entirely bathed in the bright light of Yeshua's revelation. In a circular and dynamic interaction, our Judaism provides us with the framework required to interpret Yeshua's revelation even as it is reconfigured by that revelation. In this way our Judaism and our Yeshua-faith are organically and holistically "integrated."

Is this really possible? Almost all Jews outside our ranks would say "no," and perhaps most Christians would agree with them. This brings us to the theme of our Forum. To say that Yeshua has been "marginal" to traditional Jewish life is an irenic understatement. Just as Christianity has historically positioned itself as "non-Judaism," so Judaism has defined itself largely as "non-Yeshua-faith." In the past this put us beyond the margins of both communities.

Despite this undeniable fact, we make the radical and scandalous claim that Yeshua constitutes the true center of Jewish life, just as Israel constitutes the true center of Yeshua's *ekklesia*. The one who goes unmentioned in the Siddur is present on every page. He is present not simply through references to *Mashiach ben David* -- such messianic references are few. He is present not simply through prayers for future redemption and the messianic age, though indeed such prayers pervade the Jewish liturgy. How is he present? He is there as the "fullness of Torah," the human embodiment of God's eternal Name and Word. He is there as the "fullness of Israel," the anointed King who sums up in himself Israel's true identity and destiny. He is there as the heavenly

High Priest and *Shaliach Tzibbur*, offering himself to God as Israel's liturgical representative. This is the message we proclaim and incarnate: the one pushed to the margins stands veiled at the center.

In the present paper I will attempt to concretize such an "integrated" Messianic Judaism through exposition of the core unit of Jewish daily liturgy, the *Shema* and its accompanying blessings. If successful, this exposition could serve as a model for how we encounter Yeshua through Jewish life and practice, and how our Yeshua-faith reconfigures our Judaism.

But first, we must look more closely at the meaning and basis of Jewish and Messianic prayer.

Jewish Prayer, Messianic Prayer

What is Jewish prayer?

A text from the preliminary service to Shachrit answers this question by first reflecting on the problematic nature of all prayer:

Master of all worlds! Not upon our merit do we rely in our supplication, but upon your limitless love. What are we? What is our life? What is our piety? What is our righteousness? What is our attainment, our power, our might? What can we say, Lord our God and God of our ancestors? Compared to You, all the mighty are nothing, the famous nonexistent, the wise lacks wisdom, the clever lacks reason.¹

On what grounds do we, finite, frail, and wayward human beings, approach the infinite and holy Creator of the universe? Prayer seems impossible -- unless God makes it possible. According to this text, God does so by establishing a covenantal bond with a particular people – a bond expressed twice daily by the people of the covenant in its recitation of the *Shema*:

¹ All quotations from the Siddur, unless otherwise noted, are from *Siddur Sim Shalom* (ed. Rabbi Jules Harlow; New York: The Rabbinical Assembly and The United Synagogue of America, 1985).

But we are Your people, partners to Your covenant, descendants of Your beloved Abraham to whom You made a pledge on Mount Moriah. We are the heirs of Isaac, his son bound upon the altar. We are Your firstborn people, the congregation of Isaac's son Jacob whom You named Israel and Jeshurun, because of Your love for him and Your delight in him.

Therefore it is our duty to thank You and praise You, to glorify and sanctify Your name...How blessed are we that twice each day, morning and evening, we are privileged to declare: HEAR O ISRAEL: THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE.

As Reuven Hammer explains, "According to this prayer, it is our membership in the people of Israel that makes prayer possible."² Jewish prayer is offered by God's covenant people, in response to God's gracious invitation and summons.

This is why the Siddur is so integral to Jewish prayer. It reflects the corporate Jewish encounter with God throughout Jewish history, and provides a common language of prayer for Jews at all times and places. It makes it possible for Jews to pray as a people.

Hayim Donin puts it this way:

A Jew may choose his own words when praying to God; but when he uses the words of the siddur, he becomes part of a people. He identifies with Jews everywhere who use the same words and express the same thoughts. He affirms the principal of mutual responsibility and concern. He takes his place at the dawn of history as he binds himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He asserts his rights to a Jewish future in this world and to personal redemption in the world-to-come.³

To pray as a Jew is to pray "in Israel," as a member of the community with whom God has established an eternal covenant. The Siddur makes prayer "in Israel" a practical reality.

This provides the context necessary for understanding what it means to pray "in Yeshua." To explore the connection between prayer "in Israel" and prayer "in Yeshua,"

² Reuven Hammer, *Entering Jewish Prayer* (New York: Schocken, 1994), 10-11.

³ Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin, *To Pray as a Jew* (New York: Basic, 1980), 7.

we turn to the thinking of Will Herberg. This Jewish theologian of the mid-twentieth century understood well the corporate and covenantal nature of Jewish prayer:

The central category of biblical thinking is covenant...In the biblical view, man has, so to speak, standing with God, and a direct personal relation to him, only by virtue of his membership in the people of God, the redeemed and redeeming community.⁴

According to Herberg, the Apostolic Writings present Yeshua as a "one-man Israel," an individual who sums up in himself Israel's corporate covenantal identity. When a Gentile becomes united to Yeshua through faith, that person enters into God's covenant with Israel, and may approach God in prayer as part of the covenant people. Prayer "in Yeshua" is therefore an expression of prayer "in Israel," and "Christianity" involves the extension of Israel's covenant to the nations:

In both Judaism and Christianity, as I have pointed out, there is no such thing as a direct and unmediated relation to God; this relation must in some way be mediated through one's covenant status. In Judaism, however, it is by virtue of his being a member of the People Israel that the believer approaches God and has standing before him; in Christianity, it is by virtue of his being a member of Christ. This is clearly brought out in the structure of prayer of the two faiths...*To be a Jew means to meet God and receive his grace in and through Israel; to be a Christian means to meet God and receive his grace in and through Christ.*⁵

Being "a member of Christ" is not merely an individual relationship with the Messiah, but participation in a community that is itself united through Yeshua to the original people of the covenant.

While Herberg helps us see the integral connection between prayer "in Israel" and "in Yeshua," he does not go far enough. As the definitive "one-man Israel," Yeshua enables those from the nations to share in the riches of Israel; but he also comes to usher Israel into the fullness of its own inheritance. Herberg implies that praying "in Yeshua" has

⁴ Will Herberg, *Faith Enacted as History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 48.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 52. Emphasis added.

significance because it is a form of praying "in Israel"; we have begun to recognize that praying "in Israel" is also a form of praying "in Yeshua."

Yeshua can become the "one-man Israel" because he was already God's eternal Beloved in whom Israel was chosen before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). God adopts Israel as his "firstborn son" (Exodus 4:22-23) by attaching Israel to the Son whom God knew and loved before anything was made (Ephesians 1:5-6). Yeshua becomes the servant of the people who have their being through him. Israel did not know this before his incarnation, and has not acknowledged it since. But such non-recognition cannot nullify Israel's ineradicable dependence on Yeshua, and Yeshua's unwavering commitment to Israel.

To pray "in Israel" is to participate in the relationship that God established with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah. What God was and is to them, God is now to us, their children. Similarly, to pray "in Yeshua" is to participate in his intimate filial relationship with God.⁶ What God was and is to Yeshua, God is now to us, his disciples filled with his Spirit. Prayer "in Yeshua" is an expression of prayer "in Israel," since Yeshua is the elect Seed of Abraham whose relationship with God sums up all that God intended for the covenantal bond with the patriarchs and matriarchs. Even more, prayer "in Israel" ultimately depends upon and derives from prayer "in Yeshua," the incarnate Son in whom Israel has its adoption.

To pray "in Israel," we must embrace the temporal rhythms and liturgical forms concretized in the Siddur. To pray "in Israel" and "in Yeshua," we must discover how these rhythms and forms reveal something of Yeshua's own relationship with God, so that

⁶ Joachim Jeremiahs, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 180-81; Karl Barth, *Prayer* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002; original edition 1952), 22-23.

we may participate intelligently and passionately in that relationship as those who belong to him. We believe that this is a "discovery" rather than a forced and artificial reinterpretation, since we believe that the one whom "the builders rejected" and cast beyond the margins of Jewish life has never relinquished his hidden place at its center.

The Shema: Israel's Witness in Yeshua, Yeshua's Witness in Israel

Sinai and Martyrdom.

The Shema constitutes the core unit of the daily liturgy. It consists of three biblical texts⁷ which are recited every morning and evening in literal fulfillment of the words, "when you lie down and when you rise" (Deuteronomy 6:7 and 11:19).

In its earliest form the Shema began with the reading of the Decalogue.⁸ David Hartman rightly infers from this practice that "the recital of the Shema was meant to be a reliving of the covenantal moment at Sinai."⁹ The Mishnah confirms this interpretation by referring to the statutory recitation of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 as acceptance of the "the yoke of the Kingship of Heaven."¹⁰ Thus, each morning and evening a Jew re-enacts and re-appropriates the encounter with God at Sinai, receiving anew God's self-revelation and reaffirming Israel's pledge to live in covenantal fidelity. In reading the words, "You shall love Hashem your God with all your heart, soul, and strength," a Jew willingly accepts the obligation to give such love.

⁷ Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Numbers 15:37-41.

⁸ M. Tamid 5:1.

⁹ David Hartman, *A Living Covenant* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 1997), 164.

¹⁰ M. Berachot 2:2. See Hammer, 131-32.

But how is such love expressed concretely? Its most extreme embodiment involves the laying down of one's life.¹¹ The Mishnah explains "with all your soul" as meaning "even if God takes away your soul."¹² An early midrash reiterates and elaborates this tradition:

And with all thy soul. Even if God takes away your soul, as it is said, *For Thy sake are we killed all the day; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter* (Psalm 44:23)...Simeon ben Azzai says: *With all thy soul:* love Him until the last drop of life is wrung out of you...

R. Meir says: Scripture says, *Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God... with all thy soul*, as did Isaac, who bound himself upon the altar, as it is said, *and Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son* (Gen 22:10).¹³

The Akedah represents the ultimate fulfillment of the first paragraph of the Shema, and Jews re-enact the Akedah whenever they face persecution for the sake of their faith.

The most famous example of this understanding of the Shema is the story of Rabbi Akiva's martyrdom:

When Rabbi Akiva was taken out for execution, it was the hour for the recital of the Shema, and while they combed his flesh with iron combs, he was accepting upon himself the kingship of heaven. His disciples said to him: Our teacher, even to this point? He said to them: All my days I have been troubled by this verse, '*with all thy soul*' -- 'even if He takes thy soul.' I said: When shall I have the opportunity of fulfilling this? Now that I have the opportunity, shall I not fulfill it? He prolonged the word *echad* until he expired while saying it.¹⁴

Jewish history has sealed this bond between the Shema and martyrdom and made Deuteronomy 6:4 not only a daily renewal of Sinai but also a pre-death confession offering covenantal exegesis on the meaning of one's individual life:

¹¹ The unusual calligraphy in the traditional way of writing Deuteronomy 6:4 points to this interpretation of the Shema. In Torah scrolls the third consonant of the first word "Shema" (*ayin*) and the third consonant of the last word "echad" (*dalet*) are written in an enlarged script, so that one might mentally put the two letters together to form the word "*ed*" (witness). The Greek word for "witness" is "martyr." Israel bears witness to God through living out the Shema to the point of shedding its blood.

¹² M. Berachot 9:5.

¹³ *Sifre* Deuteronomy 6:5 (Piska 32). The translation is from *Sifre on Deuteronomy* (trans. Reuven Hammer; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 59, 62.

¹⁴ B. Berachot 61b. The translation is from *Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud: Berakoth* (trans. Maurice Simon; London: Soncino, 1984).

When reciting the Shema as part of worship, no sensitive person can help but be aware that he or she is saying words uttered by millions of Jews who were slain because of their faith. From Akiva to Auschwitz, believing Jews have proclaimed this verse as they faced the knowledge that because they were Jews they were about to be killed. It has also become the practice for any Jew to recite these words on his or her deathbed, departing this world with the words of Jewish belief on one's lips.¹⁵

In this way the Shema constitutes the definitive statement of the meaning of the life of the Jewish people as a whole. Its ritual recitation, daily and at the end of life, bears witness to the same reality that is supposed to be reflected in every aspect of the individual and communal existence of the people of the covenant: Hashem as Israel's only God, loved more than life itself.

Yeshua's Covenantal Fidelity

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 plays a prominent role in the life and teaching of Yeshua. He views it as the first and greatest commandment, and links it to the commandment in the Torah to love one's neighbor (Leviticus 19:18).¹⁶ This linkage does not add to the Shema but interprets it: all attempts at loving God that compromise love of neighbor are proven fraudulent.¹⁷

In John Yeshua applies God's command to love one's neighbor to the mutual love required of his disciples, and presents "laying down one's life" as the ultimate expression of such love.¹⁸ This is what Yeshua himself does for his own in willing fulfillment of his Father's commandment, and thus the disciples' love for one another participates in their

¹⁵ Hammer, 134.

¹⁶ Mark 12:28-34; Matthew 22:34-40; Luke 10:25-28.

¹⁷ "The commandment to love one's neighbor gives decisive guidance for understanding the commandment to love God" (Charles H. Cosgrove, *Elusive Israel* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997], 44).

¹⁸ John 13:34; 1 John 2:7-11; John 15:13. The love commandment is "new" because of its eschatological realization in Yeshua's death and resurrection – not because it is absent from or marginal to Israel's revealed covenantal responsibilities. As the Shema (linked with Leviticus 19) demonstrates, the love commandment is at the heart of Israel's covenant.

Master's sacrificial self-giving.¹⁹ Yeshua's obedience to his Father in laying down his life bears witness to his wholehearted love of God:

The ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me; rather, this is happening so that the world may know that I love the Father and that I do as the Father has commanded me.²⁰ (John 14:30-31)

Yeshua's suffering and death thus embodies perfectly the love of God and neighbor required by the Shema.

In his sacrificial martyrdom Yeshua actualizes the fullness of Israel's covenantal pledge at Sinai, recapitulates the Akedah at a higher level (i.e., God is now the Father whose son yields himself to sacrifice), and consummates the authentic demonstrations of covenantal fidelity enacted throughout Israel's history. The unique and definitive character of Yeshua's loving martyrdom does not detract from the nobility of those other witnesses to the covenant, but empowers them to attain their intended purpose. This is the import of Hebrews 11-12, which offers a capsule chronicle of the faithful men and women of Jewish history – described in 12:1 as a "great cloud of witnesses" (*martyrs*). It brings the chronicle to a climax by presenting Yeshua as "the pioneer and perfecter of our faith" who perfects not only "our" faith but also that of the heroes listed in Hebrews 11.²¹

This vision of Yeshua as the epitome of Jewish covenantal fidelity should shape our recitation of the Shema as Messianic Jews. Just as the "faith" of Israel's greatest heroes cannot attain its purpose apart from Yeshua, so the covenantal summons to wholehearted love and obedience can only be realized in and through Yeshua. For us, the recitation of the Shema serves as more than just a renewal and reenactment of Sinai: it is a memorial of Yeshua's loving obedience unto death, which completes the covenantal encounter at

¹⁹ John 10:11, 15, 17; John 10:18; 1 John 3:16.

²⁰ All biblical citations are based on the NRSV, with modifications by the author.

²¹ Hebrews 12:2; 11:39-40.

Sinai and raises it to a higher level (Hebrews 12:18-24). Our recitation of the Shema involves grateful acknowledgement of Yeshua's covenantal fidelity, and commitment to participate in his loving self-offering to the Father. It also involves the recognition that all Jews who have lived faithful but imperfect lives before God and who have recited the Shema daily and at the hour of their deaths can only attain the consummation of their aspirations through union with Yeshua, the one-man Israel.

Reward & Punishment

The second paragraph of the Shema (Deuteronomy 11:13-21) repeats many of the characteristic ideas and phrases of the first paragraph.²² What distinctive material does it add that justifies its inclusion in Israel's most sacred confession of faith and loyalty?

The distinctive contribution of the second paragraph is found in verses 13-17:

If you will only heed his every commandment that I am commanding you today... -- loving Hashem your God, and serving him with all your heart and with all your soul -- then he will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain, and you will gather in your grain, your wine, and your oil; and he will give grass in your fields for your livestock, and you will eat your fill. Take care, or you will be seduced into turning away, serving other gods and worshiping them, for then the anger of Hashem will be kindled against you and he will shut up the heavens, so that there will be no rain and the land will yield no fruit; then you will perish quickly off the good land that Hashem is giving you.

This teaches the principle of divine reward and punishment.²³ If Israel remains faithful to the covenant, Hashem will provide generously for its communal needs. If Israel renounces the covenant and worships other divinities, Hashem will withhold heavenly

²² "Loving the Lord your God...with all your heart and soul" (11:13; see 6:5); "You shall put these words of mine in your heart and soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and fix them as an emblem on your forehead. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (11:18-20; see 6:6-9).

²³ Donin, 152-54; Hammer, 125-27.

blessing. According to verse 17, the ultimate punishment consists of perishing "off the good land that the Lord is giving you" – i.e., exile.²⁴

The Jewish commentary tradition also notes a difference in the formulation of the material that is common to the first and second paragraphs of the Shema: the commandments of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 employ second person singular verbs and pronouns, whereas the same commandments in Deuteronomy 11 are stated in plural form.²⁵ Based on this grammatical distinction, Rabbi Hayim Donin concludes, "In the first paragraph, Moses addresses the individual Jew. In the second paragraph, he addresses the collective body of Israel."²⁶

The promises of reward and punishment are thus directed here to the community as a whole. This makes good sense if, with Rashi, we take Deuteronomy 11:17 to be a reference to exile. Exile affects the nation in its entirety. Rashi sees the order of the various elements of the second paragraph of the Shema as reflecting a chronological sequence, so that the commandments of the first paragraph that are repeated in the plural form at the end of the second paragraph concern observance of the Torah *even in exile*: "Even after you will go into exile, be distinguished through performance of commandments; for example, put on *tefillin* [Deuteronomy 11:18] and make *mezuzot* [Deuteronomy 11:20] so that they should not be new to you when you will return."²⁷

The singular-plural distinction between paragraphs one and two of the Shema provides us with a key for reading the second paragraph as Messianic Jews. The singular forms of the first paragraph express our conviction that only one Jew has ever fulfilled its

²⁴ See Rashi on Deuteronomy 11:17.

²⁵ See Rashi on Deuteronomy 11:13.

²⁶ Donin, 151.

²⁷ Rashi on Deuteronomy 11:18.

commandments perfectly, and that all other Jews are summoned to participate in his whole-hearted love of God. The plural forms of the second paragraph take account of our wayward disposition, and anticipate national infidelity and punishment. Nevertheless, the preeminent recitation of even this second paragraph belongs to Yeshua rather than to us. His recitation of the second paragraph explains the concrete form that his recitation of the first paragraph must take: he identifies with Israel in its covenantal infidelity and willingly bears the punishment that rightly belongs to Israel, so that Israel might receive the reward that rightly belongs to him. Thus, his whole-hearted love for God, which fulfills the first paragraph of the Shema, must take the concrete form of suffering and death on Israel's behalf.²⁸

Israel does go into exile, despite Yeshua's atoning martyrdom. Yet, as Rashi recognized, exile from the land does not mean inevitable exile from Hashem or from the Torah. After Deuteronomy 11:17 mentions the punishment of exile, the following verses reiterate, in plural form, the commandments of Deuteronomy 6:4-9. We may be in physical exile, waiting for the day of redemption, but we need not remain in spiritual exile. Messiah Yeshua has taken our sins upon himself that we might be liberated from their weight, and he offers us his Spirit that we might share in his loving self-offering to God the Father. When Israel corporately appropriates his atonement and enters into his self-offering, then it will receive the blessing promised in Deuteronomy 11:21: "so that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that Hashem swore to your ancestors to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth."

²⁸ This is the meaning of Yeshua's immersion at the hands of John. John was appalled that Yeshua would be immersed, as he had no need for repentance and forgiveness (Matthew 3:13-15). Yet, Yeshua realized that his mission required that he identify completely with Israel and suffer the judgment that Israel deserved – figuratively in his immersion, literally in his atoning death (see Luke 12:50).

In the first paragraph of the Shema we focus on Yeshua's whole-hearted love of God, which fulfills the covenant. In the second paragraph we focus on Yeshua's love for his people Israel that leads him to suffer and die on our behalf. Yeshua's obedience to the second great commandment demonstrates the authenticity of his obedience to the first great commandment.

Messianic Redemption

The third paragraph of the Shema (Numbers 15:37-41) derives from the book of Numbers rather than Deuteronomy, and so its terminology and idiom differ from the first two paragraphs. Nevertheless, it shares much in common with the two preceding Deuteronomic texts. Like them, it focuses on the commandments and their faithful observance.²⁹ Like them, it charges Israel to honor the commandments through visual and tactile symbols.³⁰ Like Deuteronomy 11, it warns against turning away from Hashem.³¹ These commonalities make Numbers 15 an appropriate conclusion to the Shema.

What distinctive content does this third paragraph bring to the Shema? Earliest rabbinic tradition found its special contribution in its final verse: "I am Hashem your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am Hashem your God."³² The Mishnah identifies this paragraph by the phrase *yetz'iat Mitzrayim* (the exodus from Egypt), and affirms the importance of remembering the exodus in the evening as well as in the morning through the recitation of the third paragraph of the Shema.³³ As Reuven Hammer notes, "The mention of the Exodus from Egypt adds the

²⁹ Numbers 15:39-40; see Deuteronomy 6:6; 11:13.

³⁰ *Tzitzit*/fringes in Numbers 15, *tefillin* and *mezzuzot* in Deuteronomy 6 and 11.

³¹ Numbers 15:39b; see Deuteronomy 11:16-17.

³² Numbers 15:41.

³³ M. Berachot 1:5.

idea of redemption, another critical assertion which may be said to complete the fundamental ideas the Sages wanted us to affirm twice daily: God is one, the only one; He rewards and punishes; and He redeems."³⁴ As Hammer implies, the remembrance of the exodus from Egypt is intended to inspire hope for future redemption.

This final verse of the Shema also echoes its all-important first verse: "Hear O Israel, Hashem is our God, Hashem alone" (Deuteronomy 6:4). The three paragraphs of the Shema consist of an expanded explanation of the meaning and implications of this first verse. The final verse makes clear that the identity of Hashem is bound up with Hashem's redemptive action on Israel's behalf. In effect, the phrase "who brought you out of the land of Egypt" becomes an expanded form of the divine Name. The God who makes a covenant with Israel at Sinai and who asks for Israel's exclusive loyalty and love is the One who has acted redemptively in Israel's past, and who promises to act redemptively in Israel's eschatological future.

In the mouth of Yeshua, the third paragraph of the Shema becomes a proclamation and pledge of Messianic redemption. More specifically, it points us beyond Yeshua's atoning suffering and death to his victorious resurrection. In Luke's account of the transfiguration, we learn that Moses and Elijah "appeared in glory and spoke of his departure (*exodus*), which he was to fulfill in Jerusalem."³⁵ The resurrection of Yeshua "fulfills" the exodus from Egypt by recapitulating Israel's journey from slavery to freedom, from death to life, and by ensuring and effecting Israel's ultimate eschatological redemption. If "the One who brought you out of the land of Egypt" serves as an expanded form of the divine

³⁴ Hammer, 128.

³⁵ Luke 9:31.

Name at Sinai, then "the One who raised Yeshua from the dead" is the same Name articulated afresh in light of God's redemptive action on Yeshua's behalf.³⁶

Hashem lays claim to Israel's loyalty and love through the exodus from Egypt. He does so in an even greater manner through the resurrection of Yeshua. Because God has raised Yeshua from the dead, and ensured Israel's eschatological future in him, God calls for all to acknowledge Yeshua and affirm the renewal of the covenant accomplished in him.

Thus, for us as Messianic Jews the three paragraphs of the Shema point to the heart of all that we believe: the vicarious love and obedience of Yeshua which renews God's covenant with Israel; his atoning suffering and death as the bearing of Israel's exile; and his resurrection from the dead as the pledge of Israel's future redemption. The Shema likewise expresses the heart of all that we seek to embody in our lives: love of God and neighbor; obedience to the *mitzvot*; and solidarity with Israel even in its infidelity. Finally, the Shema helps us realize that we can only live in love, obedience, and solidarity through participating in the life and death of Yeshua, the perfect one-man Israel.

³⁶ Romans 4:24; 8:11. Robert Jenson notes the importance of these two ways of identifying the God of Israel, and their relationship to one another: "To the question 'Who is God?' the New Testament has one new descriptively identifying answer: 'Whoever raised Jesus from the dead.' Identification by the Resurrection neither replaces nor is simply added to identification by the Exodus; the new identifying description *verifies* its paradigmatic predecessor. For as the outcome of the Old Testament it is seen that Israel's hope in her God cannot be sustained if it is not verified by victory also over death... Thus, 'the one who rescued Israel from Egypt' is confirmed as an identification of *God* in that it is continued 'as he thereupon rescued the Israelite Jesus from the dead.'" (Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997], 44).

The Blessings Accompanying the Shema: In Praise of the God of the Covenant

Who is Hashem?

The three paragraphs of the Shema begin and end with an acknowledgement of Hashem as Israel's only God. The body of the paragraphs then consists of Israel's affirmation of the relational and behavioral consequences of this acknowledgement. In this way the Shema emphasizes Israel's response of covenantal fidelity.

In contrast, the blessings that accompany the Shema focus on the identity of the God Israel worships. They answer the question, "who is Hashem?" by praising Hashem's sovereignty and compassion. Their answer presents Hashem as the Creator and Redeemer, who has chosen Israel in love to be God's covenant partner and given Israel the Torah as a sign of that love. They also point to the eschatological goal of God's action in creating the world and establishing a covenant with Israel. These blessings thus provide a cosmic, historical, and eschatological context for Israel's loving response to God in the Shema.³⁷

Hashem, Creator of the World

The first blessing before the morning Shema answers the question "who is Hashem" by presenting Israel's God as the creator of all things. The One whom Israel worships is not a tribal deity restricted to a particular land or people, but *Adon Olam*, the Master of the universe.

³⁷ The Shema is recited twice daily, once in the morning and once in the evening. On both occasions blessings precede and follow the recitation. While the wording and length of these blessings vary in the two services, the themes remain the same. Since the morning blessings are longer and more elaborate, and since the morning service as a whole plays a more prominent role in the liturgical rhythm of Jewish daily prayer, my comments on the blessings that accompany the Shema will concentrate on the form these blessings take in the morning service.

Since this blessing accompanies the *morning* recitation of the Shema, it emphasizes God's creation of the heavenly luminaries, (i.e., the sun and the stars). Each morning the sun dispels the darkness of night, and we experience the world as though it had been created anew. According to this blessing, our experience reflects what is actually happening: in his goodness God daily renews the work of creation (*uvtuvo mechadesh bechol yom tamid ma'aseh vereishit*). Thus, God's role and work as Creator is not restricted deistically to the initial temporal events that gave rise to the universe, but instead includes God's continual loving care for the natural world.

Jews in the pre-modern era often associated the luminaries – sometimes referred to in Scripture as the army (*tzava*) of heaven – with angelic powers.³⁸ This association explains the insertion of the angelic *kedushah* in the first blessing before the Shema. Drawing upon the classic prophetic theophanies of Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1, the *kedushah* depicts the angelic worship of God that takes place in the heights of heaven. The insertion of the *kedushah* in a blessing that celebrates God as Creator underlines the response of praise that creation owes to the One who is the source of its being.

The *kedushah* also sets the stage for the recitation of the Shema. The three-fold angelic sanctification of the divine Name is described as their "acceptance of the yoke of the kingdom of heaven" (*vechulam mekablīm aleyhem 'ol malchut shamayim*) – the same language employed in rabbinic texts to characterize Israel's recitation of the Shema. Thus, Israel's affirmation of the covenant in the Shema corresponds to the angelic worship of the Creator. Israel's earthly service mirrors the angels' heavenly service. Furthermore, as the hosts of heaven assume a priestly role of representing the worship of all creation, so

³⁸ Genesis 2:1; Deuteronomy 4:19; 17:3; Isaiah 40:26. See E. Theodore Mullen, Jr., "Hosts, Host of Heaven" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary, Volume 3*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 301-304

Israel's response to Hashem involves more than its own relationship to the Creator. Israel is a priestly people, and its self-offering to Hashem represents the entire world.

Similarly, the final paragraph points forward to the blessing that follows the Shema. In that blessing we will read of the deliverance at the Sea of Reeds, and Israel's subsequent praise of God in the Song of Moses: "Who is like You, O Hashem, among the gods; who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises (*nora tehillot*), doing wonders (*oseh feleh*)?"³⁹ Here, in the final paragraph of the first blessing, Hashem is called "awesome in praises" (*nora tehillot*), "the Lord of wonders" (*Adon hanifla'ot*). At the Sea Israel first acknowledges Hashem's sovereignty, and enters into the priestly service that it shares with the angelic host. At the Sea Israel also receives a foretaste of the vision of God that will be given in fullness only at the eschaton, and its response likewise anticipates that day when God's Name will be sanctified on earth as it is in heaven.

Like all the blessings of the Shema, the first blessing concludes with a prayer for redemption. Continuing with the imagery of light, we pray that God might "cause a new light to illumine Zion," and that we might "all soon share a portion of its radiance" (*or chadash al tzion ta'ir venizkeh chulanu meheyrah le'oro*). We look for that day when creation will be definitively renewed, and when Zion will take its place at its center. The universal concerns of this first blessing are thus bound inseparably to Hashem's particular relationship with the people of Israel. Creation will only reach its goal when Israel attains its allotted destiny.

³⁹ Exodus 15:11.

Creation Through Yeshua

As we have seen, the Shema expresses Israel's response to Hashem. When we recite it in Yeshua, we concentrate on his fulfillment of that response in his self-offering to God, and participate in his self-offering through the gift of his Spirit.

The blessings that accompany the Shema praise God for the divine acts that make such a response possible and necessary. When reciting these blessings in Yeshua, we remember that antecedent to his role as our representative before God he is already God's representative to us. Messiah is the agent by whom God accomplishes all God's works.

God creates all things through the divine Word and Wisdom that became incarnate in Yeshua.⁴⁰ The first blessing before the Shema begins by celebrating God's acts of creation in the words of Psalm 104: 24:

O Hashem, how manifold are Your works!
In wisdom You have made them all (*kulam bechochmah asita*);
the earth is full of Your creatures.

In accordance with the teaching of the Apostles, we see the *Chochmah* of this psalm as the divine Wisdom that became flesh in Yeshua. Even when his role in God's creative work is not overtly alluded to, we recognize it and bless Hashem for Messiah's universal mediation.⁴¹

In accordance with the Jewish mystical tradition, Messianic Jews likewise see the Name of God as a distinct reality, inseparably one with God yet also possessing its own differentiated identity.⁴² The numerous references to God's Name in this blessing, and in

⁴⁰ John 1:1-3; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:15-16; Hebrews 1:1-4.

⁴¹ "Universal mediation" means that God does nothing apart from the mediation of the Son and the Spirit.

⁴² Jean Danielou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1964), 147-63; Richard N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 41-46; Jarl E. Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1985), 76-191, 239-56.

Jewish prayer as a whole, point us again to Messiah Yeshua as the eternal self-expression of the ineffable God. .

Messiah is also "the image of the invisible God" – both before and after his incarnation.⁴³ According to John, the enthroned human form that Isaiah saw was Yeshua.⁴⁴ This may explain the significance of John 1:18: "No one has ever seen God; it is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known." This verse follows a reference to the gift of the Torah through Moses. It implies that the God who Moses encountered in visible form was "God the only Son."⁴⁵

Thus, the three-fold sanctification of God found in the *kedushah* (and included in the first blessing of the Shema) includes for us the angelic recognition of the holiness and glory of the Son. He mediates God's creative work, and he likewise mediates God's self-revelation to the world created through him.

The image woven throughout the first blessing of the Shema is that of light: the light of the first day of creation, spoken into existence before the sun, moon, and stars; the light of the fourth day, identified with the luminaries (*me'orot*); the light of the last day, which will shine on a redeemed Zion. According to the Apostolic writings, Yeshua is the true light that is the source of all other light, the light of life.⁴⁶ To praise God for light is to praise God for Yeshua.

To understand and pray the Siddur in this way is neither arbitrary nor eisegetical. It is to pray the traditional Jewish liturgy in the same way that the early Messianic Jews

⁴³ Colossians 1:15; see 2 Corinthians 4:4.

⁴⁴ John 12:41.

⁴⁵ "Christ is greater than Moses as the one whom Moses saw is greater than Moses; in the Fourth Gospel, the glory witnessed by Israelite prophets was that of Jesus himself" (Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary, Volume One* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003], 419). Paul hints at something similar in 2 Corinthians 3:12 - 4:6.

⁴⁶ John 1:4-9; 8:12; 2 Corinthians 4:6.

prayed the Psalms, and read the Torah and the Prophets. We find Yeshua everywhere in the tradition because he is there. We know this not simply through a grammatical historical reading of the prayers themselves, but through the knowledge implicit in Yeshua's resurrected life and the gift of his Spirit.

Hashem, God of Israel

Who is Hashem? The final lines of the first blessing hint at a truth that becomes the main point of the second blessing preceding the morning Shema (known by its opening words, *Ahavah Rabbah*): Hashem is not only the creator of the universe, sanctified by the angels in heaven, but also the One who loves and chooses the people of Israel.

As its opening and closing lines indicate, *Ahavah Rabbah* emphasizes God's love and compassion. While God loves all creation, the second blessing of the Shema focuses on God's particular love for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah. It thereby establishes a context for the first paragraph of the Shema and its call to Israel to love Hashem wholeheartedly. The One whom Israel loves is the One who first loved Israel.

How has Hashem loved Israel? Hashem has singled out the people of Israel from among the nations of the world, established a covenant with them, and given them a way of life that expresses that covenant and reflects the character of the divine covenant partner. In short, God has given Israel the gift of the Torah – a gift of love that depends upon and is inseparable from the gifts of election and covenant.

While the second blessing accompanying the Shema acknowledges in praise the God who loves Israel "with great and exceeding mercy" (*chemla gedolah vitayrah*), it departs from the pattern of the other two blessings in the emphasis it gives to petition. Above all,

this blessing involves a request that we – the people of Israel – might receive inner divine illumination and strength in order to be able to live out the Shema in truth: "Illuminate our eyes with the light of Your Torah, cause our heart to cleave to Your mitzvot, and unite our heart to love and fear Your Name."⁴⁷ As we prepare to acknowledge Hashem's "unity" and pledge our lives to love Him completely, we first ask Hashem to "unite our heart" – that we might not be divided in our basic loyalties, but might offer ourselves in genuine love as a living sacrifice.

In making such a petition, Israel recognizes that it is unable to fulfill the Torah apart from God's inner empowerment. It is unable to love God unless God lovingly enables it to do so. We confess by means of this prayer that God's greatest gift of love to Israel is the capacity to love God in return.⁴⁸

Like all three of the blessings that accompany the Shema, *Ahavah Rabbah* includes a prayer for redemption. It focuses on the re-gathering of Israel to its land. However, according to this prayer the re-gathering is not an end itself, but has the purpose of enabling Israel to fulfill its destined vocation: "You have chosen us from all nations and languages, and drawn us near to Your great Name in truth, to acknowledge You and Your Oneness/Uniqueness in love."⁴⁹ Thus, even this prayer for redemption is oriented to Israel's recitation of the Shema, here presented in eschatological terms as the consummation of a renewed creation.

⁴⁷ Translation mine.

⁴⁸ A similar message is found in 1 Chronicles 29:14.

⁴⁹ Translation mine.

Yeshua, God's First Beloved

For the most part, our way of entry into this second blessing should be obvious. We see Yeshua as the living Torah, the supreme interpreter of the written Torah and the One to whom it bears perpetual witness. Moreover, he is the One who has given us his own Spirit so that through him and in him we might observe the mitzvot and faithfully fulfill the covenant. The second blessing of the Shema provides us the opportunity to pray that we may be bound to Yeshua by his Spirit, so that his fulfillment of the Shema might become our own.

Less obvious, but just as important, is the connection between Israel's election and that of Messiah Yeshua. In many ways, Ephesians 1:3-6 presents a Messianic version of

Ahavah Rabbah:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah,
who has blessed us in Messiah
with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,
just as he chose us in Messiah before the foundation of the world
to be holy and blameless before him in love.
He destined us for adoption as his children through Yeshua the Messiah,
to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Here we have a blessing formula that speaks of God's loving choice, as in the final words of *Ahavah Rabbah*.⁵⁰ If the "us" in these verses is "Israel" or "we Jews," as it appears to be in the verses that follow (Ephesians 1:11-13), the parallel becomes exact: God chooses Israel in love, to live a life that is "holy and blameless" (i.e., in conformity to the Torah).

The added words, however, provide the essential Messianic hermeneutical key: the One who chooses Israel is "The God and Father of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah," and the choice is enacted "in Messiah." In other words, God first chooses Messiah Yeshua in love, and then brings Israel into that election (just as he will later bring the nations to

⁵⁰ "The One who chose his people Israel in love" (*Habocheh be'amo Israel be'ahavah*).

share in Israel's election). The love which the Father has for the Son ("the Beloved") is extended to Israel, whose covenant gives it the status of adopted children.

We pray the traditional form of *Ahavah Rabbah*, in concert with other Jews throughout the world and through centuries past, but we pray it in light of Ephesians 1. In this blessing we acknowledge Messiah Yeshua not only as the goal of Jewish history, but also as its hidden origin and enduring center.

Hashem, Redeemer of Israel

Who is Hashem? We learn in the first two blessings of the Shema that Hashem is the Creator of all things who enters into a loving covenantal relationship with the people of Israel and enables them to live in a manner worthy of the One who has chosen them. Hashem is the earth's sovereign who invites Israel to lovingly acknowledge that sovereignty and serve as its effective sign among the nations of the world. It does so through the recitation and living out of the Shema.

The third paragraph of the Shema concludes by identifying Hashem as the One who "brought you out of the land of Egypt." The blessing following the Shema picks up these words, and makes them an essential feature of the identity of Israel's God. Hashem's sovereignty in Israel's life implies not only authority to rule over Israel but also a commitment to act redemptively on Israel's behalf.

Throughout this lengthy blessing one word receives special emphasis: *emet* (truth).

Your teaching is *true* and enduring...*True* it is that the eternal God is our King, that the Rock of Jacob is our protecting shield...For our ancestors, for us, for our children, for every generation of the people Israel, for all ages from the first to the last, His teachings are *true*, everlasting. *True* it is that You are the Lord our God, even as You were the God of our ancestors... You are, in *truth*, Lord of Your people, their defender and mighty King.

The "teaching" (*davar*) whose truth is confessed is that found in the first verse of the Shema: Hashem is the world's and Israel's only sovereign. The three paragraphs of the Shema focus on the covenantal obligations this sovereignty imposes on Israel. The final blessing accompanying the Shema underlines the fact that this sovereignty likewise imposes covenantal obligations on Hashem. God's *truth* means God's covenantal faithfulness

As the Shema relives the decisive moment of Israel's covenantal commitment to Hashem at Sinai, so the blessing following the Shema recalls the decisive moment in which Hashem manifests covenantal fidelity to Israel – the exodus from Egypt and particularly its climax, the passage through the Sea. Moreover, as creation and covenantal election are divine acts that God renews daily, so the exodus recurs again and again in Israel's national life and in the life of individual Jews. Most importantly, as creation and covenantal election reach their consummation at the end of the age (as implied by the petitions for redemption inserted in the first and second blessings of the morning Shema), so God's acts of deliverance in Egypt and throughout history point forward to God's definitive intervention at the eschaton. Thus, the celebration of God's redemptive love for Israel in the third blessing culminates in a prayer for the redemption yet to come: "Rock of Israel, rise to Israel's defense; fulfill Your promise to deliver Judah and Israel."

Beyond serving as a vivid illustration of the exodus from Egypt mentioned in the final words of the third paragraph of the Shema, Israel's passage through the Sea also echoes the angelic *kedushah* and anticipates Israel's covenantal acknowledgement of God's sovereignty realized at Sinai and renewed daily in the Shema.

With a new song the redeemed ones praised Your Name at the seashore, all of them in unison gave thanks, acknowledged [Your] sovereignty (*yachad kulam hodu vehimlichu*), and said: "Hashem shall reign for all eternity."⁵¹

Our earlier discussion of the first blessing pointed to its use of language from this third blessing to establish an implicit correspondence between the role of the angels on high and of Israel on earth. Here the third blessing returns the compliment and alludes to the language employed in the first blessing:

Then they all accept upon themselves the yoke of heavenly sovereignty (*kulam mekablīm alayhem ol malchut shamayim*)...All of them as one proclaim His holiness (*kedushah kulam ke'echad 'onim*).⁵²

Here Israel's unified acknowledgement of divine sovereignty at the Sea points beyond the angelic *kedushah*, the Sinai theophany, and Israel's daily recitation of the Shema to the eschatological fulfillment of divine sovereignty at the final redemption. Like *Ahavah Rabbah*, this blessing of God the Redeemer envisions the goal of redemption as a world in which Hashem's exclusive sovereignty is lovingly embraced by all.

Hashem's self-revelation reaches its consummation with the final demonstration of divine covenantal fidelity to Israel. Eschatological redemption thus manifests definitively the identity of God, even as the exodus from Egypt publicly manifests the divine Name for the first time. Hashem becomes known by all as the One presented in the three blessings of the morning Shema. As a result, Hashem's sovereignty is acknowledged by all in fulfillment of the Shema itself.

⁵¹ *The Complete ArtScroll Siddur* (trans. Rabbi Nosson Scherman; Brooklyn: Mesorah, 1984).

⁵² *Complete ArtScroll Siddur*.

Redemption through Yeshua

Messianic Jews believe that God liberates Israel and all creation through the work of Messiah Yeshua. The God who raised Yeshua from the tomb is the One who will give life to Israel and deliver the world from its bondage to the powers of death.

We pray the third blessing of the morning Shema in light of Revelation 15:2-3:

And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.

The book of Revelation repeatedly employs imagery from the exodus to depict the greater liberation at the end of the age. Here the victorious followers of the Lamb stand "beside the sea of glass," just as Israel stood beside the Sea of Reeds; and they sing a song that is simultaneously the song of Moses (Exodus 15) and the song of the Lamb. They do not sing two songs, but one: it is the song of Moses, sung now with explicit recognition that God redeems Israel from Egypt-Babylon through the death and resurrection of Yeshua.

The book of Revelation presents Yeshua as the lion of the tribe of Judah who establishes his messianic reign through becoming the slaughtered lamb. He obtains the right to open the scroll of God's redemptive plan by offering his life as a sacrifice.⁵³ *He is "the faithful martyr-witness" whose fulfillment of the three paragraphs of the Shema serves as the basis of God's fulfillment of the three blessings of the Shema.*⁵⁴ He is also the one who enables his followers to participate in his self-offering, so that their "martyrdom-witness," joined to his own, brings final deliverance and judgment to the world:

⁵³ Revelation 5:1-14.

⁵⁴ Revelation 1:5.

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony (*martyria*) they had given; they cried out with a loud voice, "Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?" They were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number would be complete both of their fellow servants and of their brothers and sisters, who were soon to be killed as they themselves had been killed. (Revelation 6:9-11)

But they have conquered him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony (*martyria*), for they did not cling to life even in the face of death. (Revelation 12:11)

Thus, the three paragraphs of the Shema are both the goal of the final redemption and the means by which it is achieved. God liberates his people and the world so that all might lovingly acknowledge the exclusive divine sovereignty and God also accomplishes that liberation through the perfect covenantal witness of Messiah Yeshua, the one-man Israel. Furthermore, the liberating witness of the Messiah finds a necessary echo in the witness of his servants, who "complete what is lacking in Messiah's afflictions" (Colossians 1:24).

The third blessing of the Shema both remembers God's past redemptive work and prays for its consummation at the end of the age. For us, this twofold orientation involves praising God for sending Yeshua and raising him from the dead, while at the same time praying for the final liberation that is the ultimate goal and fruit of his redemptive self-offering. This prayer leads naturally into the *Amidah* – but that is a topic for another discussion.

Conclusion

The Shema and its blessings, understood in light of Messiah Yeshua, provide us with a summary narrative framework for the Good News. The first two blessings describe God's

work of creation and God's covenantal election of Israel and the gift of the Torah, all accomplished through the mediation of the divine Son; the three paragraphs of the Shema describe Yeshua's work of fulfilling the Torah through his life, death, and resurrection; and the final blessing describes God's future redemption of Israel and the world as the result of Yeshua's fulfillment of the Shema and of the ongoing participation in that fulfillment by those who belong to Yeshua.

Yeshua is thus the fulfillment of the covenant – both from God's side, and from Israel's side. The blessings of the Shema emphasize the former, the Shema itself emphasizes the latter.

At the same time, the Shema and its blessings provide us not only with a narrative but also with a script intended to shape our involvement in a dramatic performance.⁵⁵ We are part of the story! As such, we are summoned to identify with Yeshua in his vicarious fulfillment of the covenant on Israel's behalf, and to participate in it. We do so ritually as we recite the Shema daily, and holistically as we live out the meaning of the Shema in all our daily conduct.

The redemptive power of Yeshua's Shema will only be realized when the fullness of Israel and the fullness of the nations have identified with and entered into his vicarious fulfillment of the covenant. Thus, our part in the drama is essential, though radically dependant on the part played by our Messiah.

This way of understanding the Shema makes it both the text of our covenantal response to God, and simultaneously the centerpiece of the wondrous works of God that

⁵⁵ On the relevance of the metaphor of "drama" for our understanding of Scripture, tradition, theology, and practice, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005).

we celebrate in the accompanying blessings. When Yeshua fulfills the covenant from Israel's side, he is *at the same time* fulfilling the covenant from God's side.

When we recite the Shema and its accompanying blessings, we are praying *in Israel*. According to the Messianic interpretation of this prayer offered here, any genuine recitation of the Shema and its blessings constitutes also a prayer *in Yeshua*. As we learn how to enter into this prayer consciously, explicitly, with Messianic *kavannah* inspired by the Spirit of the Messiah, we bear witness to the truth of Yeshua's mysterious centrality to Jewish life, and the mysterious centrality of Jewish life to God's purposes for history and the world.