Reciting the Shema

Keriat Shema Aleph: Deut. 6:4-9

We first say:

"And the LORD will be king over all the earth. On that day the LORD will be one and his name one." (Zech. 14:9)

Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu¹, Adonai echad²

HEAR, O ISRAEL: THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD

This implies acceptance of the yoke of heaven.

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your “muchness” (resources).

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

You shall impress them upon your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up.

You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

1 The Name הוהי represents God’s attributes of love and mercy (חסד והווה), as opposed to the Name אלהים, which represents God’s justice and role as our Creator.

2 The seminal verse is an affirmation of the acceptance of God’s sovereignty and our loyalty to God as His subjects. The word “hear” means “listen,” “obey,” “respond.”

3 What is the proper kind of love for God? Loving others as yourself: (“You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” Lev. 19:18).

4 The word “heart” is usually spelled with a single Vet. The double Vet is said to represent a double measure of love or a twofold love.

5 I.e., with all your money (Berachot 54a, 61b, etc.). Me’od is related to middah, “measure,” though some argue it means “much” (i.e., with all your “muchness”).

6 I.e., with the will and all your desires. With every breath we are obligated to thank the Creator.

7 The word means to “pierce sharply” or to impress sharply. The words of the Torah are to be “sharp” (i.e., familiar) in your mouth, not said with stammering.

8 The sages note this implies that the Shema should be recited twice daily: in the evening (after three stars appear) and in the morning.

9 Jewish tradition derives from this the various laws concerning the (hand and head) tefillin (phylacteries). The word totafot is obscure though refers to head tefillin.

10 I.e., affixing a mezuzah scroll to each doorpost of the house. It is customary to touch the mezuzah when entering or leaving the house. "Gates" refers to public displays.