

The Lord our God, the Lord is one

Dale Pauls

So we set out to encounter the presence of God. From one perspective, it's not all that easy. It's not easy to close our I's and see God. In most cases we must break the perceptual habits of a lifetime. But break these we must because far too often we are far less happy that we could be, far less connected, and far less conscious. Too often we live everyday driven by little more than the fear of failure. It's hard then to keep our wits about us. It's hard to make sense of it all. It's hard not to keep losing pieces of our souls.

So let the quest begin.

Early in our pursuit of understanding and encountering God, we come to one of the great classic and timeless texts of Scripture, the *Sh'ma* of Israel, Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Moses near the end of his illustrious life now on the plains of Moab says these immortal words to the people of Israel, words so transcendent that they belong now to all the peoples of the earth.

Sh'ma, Israel!

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

That's the *Sh'ma*. "Sh'ma" is Hebrew for "hear."

It all begins with listening,

with silence,

with stopping and listening,

really listening.

Hear, O Israel, you who wrestle with God:

The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

Love the Lord your God.

In a world filled with dark and deadly gods

to be deeply feared,

who must constantly be appeased

even by the sacrifice of one's children,

Moses says something different.

LOVE the Lord your God

with all your heart

and with all your soul

and with all your strength

– that is, with all that you are.

These commandments that I give you today,

"Listen", "Love",

are to be upon your hearts.

Impress them on your children.

Talk about them when you sit at home

and when you walk along the road,

when you lie down and when you get up.
Tie them as symbols on your hands
and bind them on your foreheads.
Do all that it takes to be mindful of them
wherever you are,
whatever you are doing.
“Listen.”
“Love.”
Write them on the doorframes of your houses
and on your gates.

This text, the *Sh'ma*, has become one of history's great assertions of monotheism – the conviction that there is but one God. Monotheism though can be tricky. Across the centuries, it has been used dogmatically to mark off one group's God (naturally just as they understand God) as the only God. And it has been used militantly. Sadly, the great monotheistic faiths have often been the ones who have most often incited religious warfare in the name of their one God.

But it did not need to be that way. Monotheism – the notion that behind all the colorful diversity of life, there is one Source – is a natural inclination of the human heart and the conclusion of spiritually sensitive souls everywhere. And the more I've read of Eastern and Native American spirituality, the more I've come to see that people everywhere, though they may speak of it in many ways, realize that reality is in the end ONE.

Rabbi Ted Falcon in a book he co-authored, *Getting to the Heart of Interfaith*, led me to see the *Sh'ma* in radiant new light. It's all about ONENESS. It's all about the Oneness of all Being.

Listen, Israel.
I AM is our God.
I AM (remember this is the root meaning of Yahweh
in Hebrew Scripture);
the Timeless,
the Eternal,
the one beyond words,
beyond category,
beyond expectation,
this I AM is our God.

For “God” the Hebrew is “Elohim” – this remarkable singular-plural word. It's both. It's singular. It's plural. It's the many now finally seen as One. But emphatically, this I AM is One. This Being unlimited by space and time, this Being that includes all that is and yet transcends it all, is our God.

And this Being is ONE.

This One Being is for everyone. This One Being includes everyone. Everyone is part and particle of this One Being, made in the image of this One Being. And so this *Sh'ma* is not simply or even primarily some abstract notion of monotheism. There's nothing abstract about it. It's not doctrine; it's a shared reality. It's saying we're all in this together. It's the assertion that everything that exists, everyone that exists, all that is good and true and beautiful, all that has being and all that lasts forever, is part of this One.

– Dale Pauls