

The Single Great Web of Being

Dale Pauls

The great *Sh'ma* of Israel, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one” in Deuteronomy 6:4-5, is all about ONENESS. It’s about a God whose fundamental reality is I AM; that is, this God is beyond words, beyond category, beyond expectation. This God is also “Elohim,” that is, both singular and plural. It’s the many now seen as One, the one being that includes all that is and yet transcends it all.

All of this has large implications for how we live. Everyone we come in contact with, everyone we work with, every client, every customer, every student, every patient, every neighbor, every stranger, we are connected to through this one God. Everything we do, or think, or decide, is part of the single great Web of Being.

Sh'ma Yisrael
Adonai Eloheinu
Adonai Echad.

And we would all do well to make these words a mantra, a meditative focus, to begin and end the day, carrying them with us when we are on the way and when we are at home: to be still, to let go of our preoccupations and attachments, those things we suppose we have to have and can't be happy without, to stop the incessant chatter in our minds, to drop the dark, fearful, little stories we are always telling ourselves, to keep going back to

Sh'ma Yisrael
Adonai Eloheinu
Adonai Echad.

We would do well to do what Brother Lawrence did – that seventeenth-century Carmelite working in the kitchen of his own order in Paris, devoting his life to living every moment in “the presence of God,” every minute, even when he was busiest, especially when he was busiest, bringing his mind directly and affectionately back to God.

All this is what Paul was saying to his readers in Colossae in Colossians 3:17. You may remember that Paul in this letter was picturing what a community might look like that was shaped by the story of Jesus, where people came to realize that the secret to transforming themselves and transforming the world was to recognize and honor the Christ inside them, but then to go on to recognize and honor the Christ who is all, and in all. He says many things, but finally in Colossians 3:17 he says, “Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” It’s all about God in Christ.

This is what makes sense of life. In a world that is complicated, confusing and competitive this is the anchor we need, the fixed and constant reference point, the

transcendent truth to keep us centered. It's practicing the presence of God. It covers everything we do in life – learning a job or teaching it to others, making a product or selling it, raising children or caring for the sick and dying, starting a business or closing one down, sending an e-mail or having a conversation, keeping the records or keeping your word, serving a client or serving a boss, listening to friends and meeting strangers, struggling with illness and loss, traveling for business or pleasure, watching what we watch, listening to what we listen to, reading what we read, building strong churches that understand these things, everything from being born and giving birth to facing death.

This is not a complicated idea. It all comes down to –

Sh'ma Yisrael
Adonai Eloheinu
Adonai Echad.

But consider now another word in the *Sh'ma*, “Hear, O Israel.” “Yisrael” in Hebrew is the name given to Jacob (we're back to Jacob again, this time in Genesis 32:22-32) that night by the brook Jabbok when he wrestled all night with a man and then realized that he had seen God face to face. So he was given the name Yisrael. And that became the name of his descendants. But you remember what it means, right? “One who wrestles with God.”

This story, like so many of these ancient stories, is archetypal. It's your story too. And mine. We come to God as Jacob, in Hebrew, “Ya-akov,” “the usurper,” always scheming, always fearful, always on the run, scared that we lack what it takes to be whole. By wrestling with God we become Yisrael, someone greater, someone who struggles with God, someone who is no longer separate from God but fully engaged with God. We shut our I's and we see God.

So we are called back time and again to the timeless words of the *Sh'ma*.

Sh'ma Yisrael
Adonai Eloheinu
Adonai Echad.

Remember. Remember. Remember.

Don't ever forget.

First thing in the morning.

Last thing at night.

All along your way.

Carry it on your body.

Write it on your doorframes.

Listen, sons and daughters of God.

I AM is our God.

I AM is One.

Listen.

Love the One who is All Good, All True, All Beautiful, the one who is beyond anything we can imagine in goodness, truth and beauty, the One finally revealed as Love.

Listen, sons and daughters of God.

I AM is our God.

I AM is One.

So everyone we come in contact with, everyone we live with, every client, every customer, every student, every patient, every neighbor, every stranger, we are connected to. Everything we do, and think, and decide, is part of the single great Web of Being, and everywhere we encounter the presence of God. It's simply a matter of closing our I's and seeing God.

– Dale Pauls