



My Jewish Learning Prayer Series: "Shema"  
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Sources referenced or quoted

**Rainer Maria Rilke** excerpted from *Rilke's Book of Hours: Love Poems to God*, Anita Barrows and Joanna Marie Macy, trans. (New York: Riverhead Trade, 2005), page 17

**You are the future...**

You are the future,  
The red sky before sunrise  
Over the fields of time.  
You are the cock's crow when night is done,  
You are the dew and the bells of matins,  
Maiden, stranger, mother, death.  
You create yourself in ever-changing shapes  
That rise from the stuff of our days—  
Unsung, unmourned, undescribed,  
Like a forest we never knew.  
You are the deep innerness of all things,  
The last word that can never be spoken.  
To each of us you reveal yourself differently:  
To the ship as coastline, to the shore as a ship.

**Martin Buber**

Listening is "something we do with our full selves by sensing and feeling what another is trying to convey so that together we can remove the barrier between us."



## Proverbs 8:34

Happy is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my doors	אַשְׁרֵי אֹדֵם שֹׁמֵעַ לִי לְשִׁקֹּד עַל-דַּלְתֹתַי יוֹם יוֹם
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## Sefat Emet on Ki Tavo (as translated by R. Art Green in *The Language of Truth*)

The midrash comments *Happy is the one whose listenings are to Me...hovering always at My doorways, door within door* (Devarim Rabbah 7:2) "Listenings" means that one should always be prepared to receive and listen closely to the words of God. The voice of that word is in every thing, since each was created by God's utterance and has the power of divine speech hidden within it. This is the hidden light that we are told to find. Inwardness goes on, deeper and deeper truly beyond measure. This is the meaning of "My doorways." Never think that you have come to the truth, understand that you are always standing at the entrance. The word "doorway" *delet* is related to *dalut* "poverty" or "humility". This is the way you find door after door opening for you.

## Annie Dillard from *Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters*

"At a certain point, you say to the woods, to the sea, to the mountains, the world, Now I am ready. Now I will stop and be wholly attentive. You empty yourself and wait, listening. After a time you hear it: there is nothing there. There is nothing but those things only, those created objects, discrete, growing or holding, or swaying, being rained on or raining, held, flooding or ebbing, standing, or spread. You feel the world's word as a tension, a hum, a single chorused note everywhere the same. This is it: this hum is the silence. Nature does utter a peep - just this one. The birds and insects, the meadows and swamps and rivers and stones and mountains and clouds: they all do it; they all don't do it. There is a vibrancy to the silence, a suppression, as if someone were gagging the world. But you wait, you give your life's length to listening, and nothing happens. The ice rolls up, the ice rolls back, and still that single note obtains. The tension, or lack of it, is intolerable. The silence is not actually suppression: instead, it is all there is."

## Rabbi Arthur Waskow "Why YAH/YHWH" Shalomcenter.org

What follows is a brief summary of my approach on the question of pronouncing the "Yod-Hei-Vav-Hei" Name of God that in transliteration comes out "YHWH":

- 1) It is unpronounceable in my view not because we are forbidden to pronounce it — that understanding is in my view a way of avoiding the deeper truth — but because if one tries to do so, pronouncing these four strange letters (semi-vowels, semi-consonants; linguists call



them aspirate consonants) WITHOUT any vowels, one simply breathes....

3) Moreover, it makes profound sense for at least one of the real Names of the real God to be not a Hebrew word, nor a word in Egyptian, or Latin, or Greek, or Arabic, or Sanskrit, or English - not in any single language but in all of them, or in some form of expression that both underlies and transcends language: just breathing, which all humans of all peoples do.

**Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis, "Echad" Rosh Hashanah sermon, 1997, Valley Beth Shalom**

"Echad" is the golden thread running through Jewish spirituality. "Echad" is the magnet that draws together all of the filings of our belief system and holds it together....

"Echad" is the singular attribute ascribed to God. It does not say Hear O Israel the Lord our God is omnipotent or the Lord our God is omniscient or the Lord our God is eternal. It says the Lord our God is "echad" is one. As the Zohar puts it, if you isolate any of the attributes of God: wisdom, mercy, justice and deify, you turn God into an idol. God is whole, entire, "echad" is one. Echad, but not one in the mathematical sense, one as opposed to two or as opposed to three, or as opposed to twenty. To believe in Echad is to understand God as the Great Connection, the Nexus, the Binding, that links me and you within the great chain of being.... To recognize God as Echad is to believe that everything and everyone is connected, that we all belong to each other and in the deepest spiritual sense that we are, all of us, cosmically connected. To believe in 'echad" is to know that nothing is isolated."

...

To believe in "echad" does not mean passivity, resignation. It means is Jewish tradition that God and man are interdependent. "Echad" means activism. We are, in the language of the rabbis, "shutafim l'kodesh baruch hu" -- we are partners with God.

**Menachot 99b**

Rabbi Yoḥanan says in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai: Even if a person recited only the recitation of *Shema* in the morning and in the evening, he has fulfilled the mitzva of: "This Torah scroll shall not depart from your mouth."

אמר רבי יוחנן משום רבי שמעון בן יוחי  
אפילו לא קרא אדם אלא קרית שמע  
שחרית וערבית קיים לא ימוש



**Anita Diamant, Saying Kaddish: How to Comfort the Dying, Bury the Dead, and Mourn as a Jew**

The Shema is the last thing a Jew is supposed to say before death—which is also why it is recited before going to sleep at night (in case “I should die before I wake”). The Shema is not a petitionary prayer, nor does it praise God. It is not really a prayer at all, but the proclamation of God’s oneness. It is also an affirmation of Jewish identity and connection. The Shema ends with the word *Echad*, which means “One.” Uttered with “a dying breath,” it suggests the ultimate reconciliation of the soul with the Holy One of Blessing, *Echad*, whom Jews also call Adonai.”