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Dear William,

Greetings from Israel! I hope this email finds you and your family doing well.

In my early childhood years, I was brought up secular. Twice a year, we would attend synagogue services: on the Jewish New Year and on the Day of Atonement.

At the age of eight, my family began the journey of becoming more committed to their Judaism. Besides going to yeshiva (a Jewish parochial school), observing Shabbat and the holidays, our home became kosher.

At that time, one of my favorite treats was dunking an Oreo cookie into a cup of cold milk before eating it. Unfortunately, Oreos contained lard, so I gave up my non-kosher indulgence.

In 1998, a miracle of biblical proportions took place when Nabisco made some of their famous product lines kosher. My seventeen year fast had ended! At the age of 25, I dunked my first kosher Oreo cookie into a tall glass of cold milk and didn't let a single crumb escape.



I invoke this story so I can introduce the Oreo cookie verse of the Hebrew Bible – Deuteronomy 6:4, known as the *Sh'ma*. According to Jewish tradition, *Sh'ma* is the first scripture taught to children. It is the hope of many Jews that these words will be their last when they physically depart from the world.

By the end of the Second Temple period, the *Sh'ma*, recited as liturgy twice a day, incorporated the sacred texts of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and Deuteronomy 11:13-21. Sometime in the mid-second century CE, Numbers 15:37-41 completed the final liturgical text of the *Sh'ma*.

Part of reciting the *Sh'ma* is the intention of actualizing the Kingdom of God in our daily lives. The importance of the Deuteronomy 6:4 in our prayers is so significant that these six words are sandwiched between two kingdom liturgical lines: (1) God is a faithful King (*El Melech Na'aman*); and (2) Blessed be His Name and His Kingdom eternally (*Baruch Shem Ka'vod OO-Mal'chu'to L'olam V'eid*). This means prior to praying the rest of the *Sh'ma*, we focus our complete attention on His Kingdom.

Translations of Deuteronomy 6:4

Sh'ma – Deuteronomy 6:4



שְׁמַע, יִשְׂרָאֵל: יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ, יְהוָה אֶחָד

(Hebrew)

Sh'ma Yisrael, A'do'nai Elo'hei'nu, A'do'nai E'chad

(Transliteration)

Hear, Israel: Our God YHWH—YHWH one!

(Literal Translation)

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one

(NIV)

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD

(KJV)

Listen, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone

(NLT)

Internalize, Israel, the Eternal is our God, the Eternal is One

(Author's Translation)

Taking a deep dive into Deuteronomy 6:4, there are several ways to interpret the verse:

- A monotheistic credo via a Deuteronomic 4:35 prism of – “the Lord is God; besides him there is no other.”
- A declaration of Israel’s loyalty to God as in 2 Chronicles 13:10 – “But as for us, the LORD is our God, and we have not abandoned him.”
- A Zechariah 14:9 eschatological vision that God will be accepted by all people as the one true God – “And the LORD will be king over all the earth. On that day the LORD will be one and his name one.”

It should be noted that I have intentionally translated the first Hebrew word of Deuteronomy 6:4, *Sh'ma*, as “internalize.” Also, I inserted the word “is” between “the Eternal” and “our God” as well as between “the Eternal” and “One.”



(This exclusive Sh'ma Worship song is only for The Isaiah Projects family.

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While English translations of the *Sh'ma* term is either “hear” or “listen,” I prefer “internalize.” There are certain Hebrew terms that do not have a one-word translation. The idea of these words is more than one English word can encompass. *Sh'ma* is one of these words.

In a faith that is often perceived by the world as full of commands, I find it quite fascinating that Biblical Hebrew does not have a term for “obey.” *Sh'ma* is the

the benefit of all humanity. Therefore, inherent in the word *Sh'ma* is the idea of free-will.

I do believe that the authors of Zechariah and 2 Chronicles excavated new revelation from the *Sh'ma*. Their description of Israel pledging its total allegiance to God and the promise for the other nations to know Him – that His Name will be One in the world, these concepts definitely add to the fullness of the *Sh'ma*. Zechariah and 2 Chronicles demonstrate how these six Hebrew words are packed with biblical nuggets waiting to be excavated.

As part of The Isaiah Projects' mission in fusing critical thinking skills with the study of Scripture and developing the art of the question via [Biblical Excavations](#), here are some things to consider as to you reflect on Deuteronomy 6:4:

- Why does Moses need to specifically mention “Israel” in his opening statement? Is it not obvious that he is speaking to the nation?
- It is rare for Moses to include himself in any directive; yet, in Deuteronomy 6:4, he says “...the Lord **our** God.” Yet, in the next verse, Moses reverts to his old directive pattern to Israel by saying, “**You** shall love the LORD with all your heart...” Why does he say “our” in Deuteronomy 6:4?
- It seems that the focus of Deuteronomy 6:4 is that God is one. If so, Moses should have simply declared, “Listen, the Eternal is One.” Keep it concise! Why does he draw this out?

The next time you are buying Oreos, remember the *Sh'ma*! The two cookies representing God is a Faithful King and Blessed be His Name and His Kingdom eternally. The crème signifying our willingness in accepting the responsibility to actualize His Kingdom. Dunking the cookie into the milk is a picture of us going into the world and bringing more of Him into it.

It is my hope that you have enjoyed the Oreo scriptural journey. May this message deepen your walk with God.

Blessings,
David Nekrutman
Executive Director

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