

The Sh'ma in the Shachrit Service

Welcome to worship shorts!

The *Sh'ma* is a key part of the morning service. The recitation of the *Sh'ma* implies that one is taking responsibility for whatever the Kingdom of Heaven requires of him. That is because it includes the phrase, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.” And the word “might” isn’t just flexing your muscles when you recite it. It implies all that is in your power to do. So that would include the ability to exert influence, apply resources, or even to surrender what is yours.

I want to describe what happens in a traditional *Shachrit* service. Ohev's is not traditional, as not all Jewish services are, so don't look for everything I am about to say in our morning service. Knowing the tradition gives us a starting point, yet we, as Messianic Jews, believe that we are free to modify as it suits our particular emphasis of the Messiah and the New Covenant.

Immediately before this portion of the morning service, a *Chatzi Kaddish*, half-*kaddish*, is prayed. Since the *Kaddish* is never prayed while sitting, people are already standing for the *Barchu*, which is officially the beginning prayer of the *Sh'ma*.

The *Barchu* is followed by a blessing of God for creating light and darkness, who makes peace and all that is created. In some traditions, it is about here that the congregation sits and remains seated until the end when we stand for the Amidah.

This blessing is followed by a prayer of thanksgiving and praise for all that God does and for His uniqueness. Then come liturgical songs, praising God for His many attributes, and for His rest and for the Sabbath.

Then there is a description of the angels that stand at the summit of the universe proclaiming, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is filled with His glory.” And those responding to them say, “Blessed is the glory of *Hashem* from His place.” Does this sound familiar? It’s a parallel scene to the one that is expressed in the *Kedusha*, and reminiscent of the scene described in [Isaiah 6](#).

Next is the *Ahavah Rabah* prayer: With abundant love have you loved us, *Hashem*, our God; with exceedingly great pity have you pitied us.

It’s during this prayer that we ask God to, “Bring us in peacefulness from the four corners of the earth and lead us with upright pride to our land.” It’s customary at this point for the men to gather the four corners of their *tallitot* in their left hand, where they are held throughout the *Sh'ma*.

Immediately after the closing blessing: Blessed are you, *Hashem*, who chooses his people Israel with love; we cover our eyes with the right hand, in order to concentrate on fulfilling the *Sh'ma*. The first line of the *Sh'ma* is recited aloud, and the second line is recited softly, under the breath.

There are denominations who do this differently, and Ohev’s manner of saying the *Sh'ma* is similar to the Reform manner, where both lines are sung aloud – with an option to cover the eyes or not.

Then comes *v’Ahavta*, with which we are all familiar, from [Deuteronomy 6:4-9](#). This is followed by another passage, from [Deuteronomy 11:13-21](#), and one from [Numbers 15:37-41](#). The Numbers passage is the one in which the *tzitzit* are commanded. The *tzitzit* are held in the right hand also, and every time the word “*tzitzit*” is said, they are kissed.

At the end of the Numbers passage, we say aloud, “*Adonai Eloheichem Emet*,” *Hashem* your God is true. During the next prayer, there is a final kiss and releasing of the *tzitzit*.

There are prayers remembering our redemption from Egypt and the splitting of the Sea of Reeds, followed by the reiteration of *Mi Chamocha*, “Who is like unto you?” And there is a unified saying of

Adonai Yimloch L'olam Va'ed, The Lord will reign for all eternity. The congregation will usually stand at about this point in preparation for the *Amidah*.

The Congregation recites in unity the prayer *Tzur Yisrael*. This is done together so as to avoid having to say *Amen* at the end, which would only delay the beginning of the *Amidah*. The *Tzur Yisrael* prayer says: “Rock of Israel, arise to the aid of Israel and liberate, as You pledged Judah and Israel. Our Redeemer – *Hashem*, Master of Legions, is His Name – is the Holy One of Israel. Blessed are You *Hashem*, Who redeemed Israel.”

Well that's the full *Shema*. There is no way that we would try to cram this much liturgy into one of our Sabbath morning services. But it would be a valuable exercise to see it done once in a while, and I hope it provides some perspective.

And thank you for listening to Worship Shorts!