

SH'MA



A Hebraic Concept
That Everyone Can
Embrace

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Even though we live in an English-speaking country in the 21st Century, the ancient Hebrew word *sh'ma* is one with which most of us have some minimal familiarity.

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This is true largely because adherents to one of the three great religions of the world – Judaism – recite each day, at least twice a day, an affirmation of faith called “the sh'ma”¹. This affirmation of faith, which predates both Christianity and Islam, is the cornerstone of monotheism, or belief in one God.

But the word *sh'ma* is not just the title of an affirmation of faith spoken by Jewish people. It is one of the most frequently recurring words found in the Bible. It is therefore a word – or more particularly, a concept – that is of critical importance to the spiritual journeys of all people who seek to know the God of the Bible.

What does an ancient Hebrew word or concept have to do with the personal spiritual lives of persons living today?

Virtually all the revelation of the Bible was recorded by persons whose native language was Hebrew. The recipients of Biblical Revelation thus thought and spoke not in English [which did not even exist as a language at the times of the revelation of Scripture], or even in Greek, but in the framework of the Hebrew language.

¹ This affirmation of faith is as follows: “Sh'ma Y'Israel Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad”. This is roughly translated as: “Hear O Israel! The LORD our God, the LORD is One!” This affirmation is traditionally followed by the prayer or blessing: “Baruch shem k'vod malchuto la-olam va'ed”. This is roughly translated as: “Blessed be His Glorious Name for ever and ever!”

Even the apostolic writings of the B'rit Chadashah [New Testament], though they have been preserved for us only in Greek translations, were, scholars are beginning to discover, likely originally penned in Hebrew – and represent Revelation from God to the Hebraic mindset and in the Hebraic way of understanding God, the Creation, and the relationship between man and the Word of God.

If, therefore, we desire to interact with the God of the Bible, while we may legitimately begin with our English translations, we will – or should – when searching out what our English translations really mean, and determining how they apply to us, always wind up back in the Hebraic conceptual framework in which all Scriptural revelation had its genesis.

Since God chose to speak His revelation in Hebraic concepts, it behooves us to try to understand it in the light of those concepts.



It is in that spirit that this article is written.

The Hebraic concept of *sh'ma* constitutes a primary thread running through not only the Torah [the first five books of the Bible], but also the writings of the Prophets of Israel, the writings and histories of the kings and sages of Israel, and the apostolic writings most of us know as the “New Testament”.

One of the dramatic and definitive usages that has historically been recognized and studied is the very passage in the book of Deuteronomy from which the Jewish affirmation of faith bearing the name *sh'ma* is taken. It is that passage of Holy Scripture at which I will begin.

What is the context of Deuteronomy Chapter 6?

The Book of Deuteronomy was penned by Moshe [a Hebrew man most English-speakers know as “Moses”]. Deuteronomy is a compilation of the God-inspired utterances spoken by Moshe to the generation of Israelites whose parents followed Moshe out of Egypt at the time of the “exodus” – along with a “mixed multitude” of non-Hebrews who joined themselves with the Israelites voluntarily as they left Egypt.



These utterances constitute farewell instructions and exhortations to the generation of Jews and non-Jews which had blended together under the teaching of God as revealed through Moshe, and which, so united, would actually enter into and possess the land flowing with milk and honey.

Deuteronomy Chapter 6 opens Moshe's second, and most detailed, teaching of the generation destined to enter and possess the Land of Promise.

In this chapter, Moshe explains, in passionate language, what was to be the abiding and over-riding principle of the lives of the people who would enter the promised realm of God.

That principle is stated beautifully, yet succinctly, in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, which has been translated into modern English as follows:

Hear [sh'ma] O Israel!

The LORD our God, the LORD is One!

You are to love the Holy One Your God,

With all your heart,

With all your soul,

With all your mind.

Set these words, which I command you this day,
upon your heart.

Teach them faithfully to your children,

Speak of them as you sit in your home,

And as you walk by the way,

When you lie down,

And when you rise up.

Bind them as a sign upon your hand,

Let them be a symbol upon your hand,

Let them be a symbol before your eyes.

Inscribe them on the doorposts of your house,

And on your gates.

What does "sh'ma" mean?²

The word sh'ma, sometimes interpreted in our English Bibles as "listen", or "hear", or "hearken", and sometimes as "obey", actually means each of the above and much more. This is because Hebrew thought and language sees a thing from seed form all the way through full maturity and ultimate state.

Hebraic thought, particularly ancient Hebraic thought, is thus as different from Western thought as a snapshot of you is different from a full-length movie of your life.

A Western person has a snapshot mentality. He looks at anyone or anything and takes a "snapshot" – he looks at this moment, and whatever appears before his eyes at that specific moment, becomes, in his mind, reality.



² The word *shin*, *mem*, *ayin* transliterated into English as the word *sh'ma*, is Strong's Hebrew 8085. It is a primitive verb root pronounced "shaw-mah". The definitions given by Strong's include: "to listen to, to give heed to, to hear with attention or interest, to consent or agree, to yield to, to obey or be obedient to, to regard, to respond to [as summons], and to cause to hear [to publish]. This primitive root is, according to Strong's, found 1, 159 times in the Hebrew text of the Tanakh, commonly referred to in Christian circles as the "Old Testament".

English language expresses this Western viewpoint. Hence, the English word "listen" means only "pay attention" [snapshot mentality].

The Hebrew word *sh'ma*, on the other hand, means "listen, and pay full attention, as if your life depended on it ...

And, once you have paid attention,
And have heard what is said,
Begin immediately to incorporate what has been
said into your life,
And adapt every aspect of your thought life,
speech, and conduct to what you have heard,
And begin to mediate on and memorize it,
And teach it to your children,
And walk it out tangibly so as to demonstrate it to
the world.
Until you, and the world around you, is transformed
into the image of the words you hear.

Where and how is the "sh'ma" concept introduced in the Bible?

The first chronological instance of the Hebrew word *sh'ma* in Biblical usage is found in Genesis 3:17, where Adam is said to have *sh'ma'd* what his wife said, as a result of which he ate from the tree about which the Holy One had given the instruction not to eat.

Adam did not just listen and hear and develop an intellectual understanding of what Chava [Eve] had said – he adopted her statement as true, and let it completely change his way of thinking, his way of relating to Creation, and his behavior.

Adam *sh'ma'd* Chava [Eve] ... totally disregarding the instructions for life the Holy One had given him.

We are to *sh'ma* the Holy One the way Adam *sh'ma'd* Chava [Eve]!

The first instance in which the Holy One is recorded as giving to a man the instruction to *sh'ma* is found in Genesis 21:12.

Genesis 21:12 *"¹²But God said to Abraham, Do not be distressed over the boy or your slave; whatever Sarah tells you, do as she says, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be continued for you."*

There, the Holy One told Avraham to *sh'ma* everything Sarah was to tell him concerning Ishmael [Avraham's son through Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian maid].



According to Torah, Avraham did just what the Holy One said.

He *sh'ma'd* Sarah, and forthwith took Hagar and Ishmael out into the desert and abandoned them forever, believing The Holy One's Promise:

- That it was through Yitschak, not Yish'mael, that God's Promises would be fulfilled, and,
- That the Holy One had another plan for Yish'mael, that required that he and Yitschak be separated.

Note how hearing God's Instruction led not only to believing, but also to acting in a manner consistent with the word spoken.

Let us consider one more Biblical usage of the word *sh'ma* – this time a negative one.

In Exodus 7:3-4, the Holy One says to Moshe, concerning Pharaoh:

“Even though I will increase My Signs and Wonders in the land of Egypt, Pharaoh will not *sh'ma* you!”

Pharaoh would not do to Moshe's words what Adam did to Chava's [Eve], or what Abraham did to Sarah's. Pharaoh would not let the words of Moshe change his perspective, his way of thinking, or his actions.

Let us not be like Pharaoh!

As can be seen from these examples, the *sh'ma* principle makes everything about the life of the hearer turn, or hinge, on the words of the speaker.

To *sh'ma* is not just to listen, or hear, or even to comply with what is said – it is to go beyond those things, and to unconditionally surrender to the speaker.

Once the submission occurs, the words of the speaker become to the hearer more important – and indeed more real and more powerful – than anything else in the world.

So strong is the power of the *sh'ma* response that the words spoken can immediately displace in the hearer all previous notions, attitudes, priorities and beliefs, and can override even the hearer's natural affections and appetites.

When the words spoken are those of the Holy One, they are infused with the same Creative power with which He spoke all things into existence. They literally become, to one who *sh'ma*'s, the driving and defining force of life – the reason for life, that which gives meaning and purpose to life.

The Holy One's words thus become the determining factor in who we will become – because they become the determining factor concerning what we will – and will not – think, speak, and do.

- People who *sh'ma* do not live by reason or by emotion.
- They do not live by instinct or by responding to stimuli.
- They do not live by outwardly conforming to a set of rules or traditions, or by adapting [consciously or unconsciously] to social expectation and customs.

People who *sh'ma* live, instead, by the Creative Power of the Voice of God ... to which they *sh'ma*.

Did Messiah Y'shua acknowledge the sh'ma concept in His Teaching?

The teaching of Deuteronomy 6:4-9, quoted previously, which is almost universally known simply by the title "the sh'ma", was expressly confirmed by Messiah Y'shua as the single most important guiding and defining principle of the life of all Redeemed persons of all generations.

In Mark 12:28-30, we find this dramatic and under-publicized affirmation by Y'shua:

One of the Torah-teachers came up and heard them [Y'shua and some of the "Sadducees" who had come to question Him concerning His interpretation of the Torah] engaged in this discussion. Seeing that Y'shua answered them [the Sadducees] well, he asked him, "Which is the most important *mitzvah* [covenant provision calling for action or abstinence] of them all?" Y'shua answered, "The most important is, 'Sh'ma Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad [Hear O Israel, the Holy One our God, the Lord is one], and you are to love Adonai your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your understanding, and with all your strength".



The *sh'ma* concept, is, thus, shown by Y'shua not to be Israel's life principle only. It is, according to Y'shua, to be reflected in the lifestyle of all who follow Messiah Y'shua – from whatever nation or people group they may come.

Want more proof? Have you ever noticed that our English renditions of the teachings of Y'shua are replete with references to hearing, listening, and obeying – the exact English words by which the Hebrew word *sh'ma* is translated?

Almost certainly the concept Y'shua was expressing in such passages as:

Luke 8:8 “8 ... He called out, He who has ears to hear, let him be listening and let him consider and understand by hearing!”

Revelation 3:20 “20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears and listens to and heeds My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will eat with him, and he [will eat] with Me.”

John 10:27 “27 The sheep that are My own hear and are listening to My voice; and I know them, and they follow Me.”

... represent His usage of the concept embodied in the Hebrew word *sh'ma*.

This explains what we read in I John 3:24:

“Those who obey [*sh'ma*] His Commands [the *mitzvoth*] remain united with Him, and He is with them.”

Why does our response to the Word of God not always include all aspects of the meanings of *sh'ma*?

The *sh'ma* lifestyle involves having a listening ear – an “ear to hear” – that hangs on every Word spoken by the Holy One as a drowning man would hang on to a lifeline in order to be rescued.

That should start in motion a chain reaction process in our lives, culminating in our lives being conformed to the Word we have heard.

What should this process look like?

Let me illustrate with the following “flow chart”, incorporating the different sequential aspects of the Hebraic concept of *sh'ma*.

To *sh'ma* means at least nine things, as follows:

1. To hearken, pay full attention to, the Voice of the Holy One.



2. To hear fully the words He speaks – not just what we want to hear.



3. To accept as true, and as good and beneficial, the Words we have heard.



4. To meditate on the Words we have heard from Him, and their implications to our life.



5. To discontinue thought-patterns, speech-patterns, associations, and behaviors inconsistent with the Words we have heard.



6. To incorporate the Words we have heard into our conversations.



7. **To begin, in baby steps at first, to implement the Words we have heard by concrete actions.**



8. **To keep pursuing the implementation of the Words we have heard by more and more specific and frequent behavior until the Words become a part of who we are.**



9. **To teach [by modeling and verbal instruction] our children, and any other persons God my place in our lives, the practical application of the Words we have heard.³**

Why does this not always occur?⁴

Because, at each stage of the foregoing “flow-chart”, our free will entitles us, if we so desire, to choose an “exit” ticket rather than proceed to the next step of *sh’ma*-ing.

³ The nine stages of the *sh’ma* process enumerated here are roughly equivalent to the listing of actions one is told to take with regard to the Holy One’s Words and Instructions in Deuteronomy 6:5-9. The author believes that the actions described in verses five to nine of Deuteronomy 6 are given by the Holy One to demonstrate the “lifecycle” of the Word of God in one who *sh’ma’s*. The end result of the Holy One’s Word is thus shown to be comparable to the description of the Seed which falls on the “good ground” in the Parable of the Sower, as told by Y’shua in Matthew 13. The Seed [which is the Instructions and Teachings of the Holy One – His Torah] does not produce a hundred-fold crop [or a sixty-fold or a thirty-fold crop] immediately, but does so progressively. The process of going from seed, to sprout, to shoot, to leaf, to blossom, to kernel, to head, and so forth, is the process of going from “listen” through the various listed stages above to “do”, and “teach”, and beyond.

⁴ It is certainly not because of any deficiency or lack of power in the Holy One’s Words. Romans 9:6. His Word is fully capable of making us “new creations” in accordance with His Divine Plan. Isaiah 55:10-11.

And, at each “exit” passageway, voices other than the Holy One’s call out to us to jump off the “flow chart” to what they promise as “freedom”.

At each possible exit passageway, the serpent’s call can be heard, whispering, “Did God really say ... ?” Joining the chorus are well-meaning acquaintances – even people we love and respect – scoffing and saying:

- “Don’t be a legalist”,
- “That’s not for today”,
- “We’ve been set free from ‘the Law’”,
- “You are in deception”,
- And so on.⁵

And they are very persuasive. And the Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. So what is the antidote to the serpent’s poison?

God’s Antidote to the Poison of the Serpent.

The Scriptural antidote to the poison of the serpent which threatens to interrupt the lifecycle of *sh’ma* is the related Hebrew concept of *sh’mar*. In Hebrew script, to make the word *sh’mar* one merely replaces the letter *ayin* at the end of *sh’ma* with a *resh* [r].

⁵ I believe that the “flow chart” of *sh’ma* as stated in the foregoing portion of the text, is the *dalet, resh, chet sofit* [Hebrew word transliterated as *derek*, and pronounced *deh-rek*, Strong’s Hebrew 1870 meaning the “way” or “prescribed path” of the Holy One for His People]. See Genesis 18:19, where the LORD speaks to Abraham, saying “He will direct his children and his household after him to keep the *derek* [way, prescribed path] of the LORD by doing what is right and just ...”. I believe that there are two primary exit passageways from this *derek*: one to the left [toward lawlessness] and one to the right [towards legalism]. Voices call from both the left [to unbounded “freedom” which in reality is the ultimate form of bondage] and to the right [to approaching the Torah as a list of do’s and don’ts which are seen as finite and external only]. Both kinds of voices, if heeded, have the effect of interrupting the “flow chart” referenced above and aborting the fruit of *sh’ma*-ing the Words of the Holy One. When one departs from the *derek* to the right or to the left, it is as if that one, who was planted by the rivers of living water [Psalm 1:2-3] becomes uprooted from that Divine state of blessing and productivity by one of the voices of Psalm 1:1. The voice that uproots may be that from the “counsel of the un-Godly [lawlessness]” from the “seat of the scornful [legalism]”, or from the “way of the sinner [flagrant rebellion against the way of the *derek* of God as spelled out in His Torah]”. The effect in each case is the same.

The word *sh'mar* is usually translated by Bible translators as “keep” or “observe”⁶, but this is misleading. To *sh'mar* is not to legalistically or ritualistically perform deeds, as our English words “keep” and “observe” have come to imply. To *sh'mar* is to prize, treasure, cling to, stand watch over, and safeguard as a sacred trust.



To *sh'mar* a Word spoken by The Holy One therefore means to prize, treasure, cling to, stand watch over and safeguard as a sacred trust The Holy One's words and instructions for life above everything else – and in defiance of all voices which call us to us at the various exit passageways of the *sh'ma* “flow-chart”.

⁶ The Hebrew word is *shin, mem, resh*, a primitive verb root transliterated into English as *sh'mar*, and pronounced *shaw-mar* [Strong's Hebrew 8104]. It is used over four hundred times in the Hebrew texts of Scripture. The definitions assigned to this word by Strong's include: “to keep, to guard, to observe, to give heed to, to have charge of, to keep watch over [as one would a ward], to celebrate, to attend, to bodyguard, to defend, to hoard, and to act as a watchman concerning something”. For example see Genesis 2:15 [first usage], Exodus 31:13, Leviticus 18:4, Deuteronomy 11:8, Psalm 119:44, and Daniel 9:4. It is almost certainly the Hebrew word *sh'mar* which is translated into Greek as *tereo* [Strong's Greek 5083], transliterated as *tereo*, pronounced *tay-reh-o*, and which is assigned the following meanings by Strong's: “to attend to carefully, to take care of, to guard, to keep one in the state in which he is, to observe, to continue in, to undergo, and to keep watch or guard over, so as to preserve intact, a precious thing”. *Tereo* is the word Greek versions of the Gospel of Yochanan [John] employ when quoting Y'shua to say “If you love me, keep [*tereo* – treasure, cling to, and so forth] the Commandments [mitzvot] as I taught them to you”. John 14:15.

What would it look like if someone we knew *sh'ma*-d and *sh'mar*-d The Holy One's Words in a Hebraic way?

Let's see how these Hebrew concepts would look in real life application today.

To *sh'mar* would mean, among other things, we would prize and treasure the Holy One's words more than we prize and treasure spending time with our friends, more than keeping in fashion or listening to [or playing] music, or watching or participating in sports, or reading business journals or going to or renting or talking about movies, or watching television, or even engaging in satisfying "ministry".



It would mean making His Words the primary focus of one's thought-life, conversation, and goals in life.

Now, let's put the *sh'ma* and *sh'mar* concepts together.

To *sh'ma* would mean doing whatever He has instructed us to do, and not doing whatever He has instructed against.

To do so in accordance with the *sh'mar* concept would mean that our motivation would be pure. In other words, we would do the things He says to do, and refrain from doing the things He says not to do, not in an effort to “win His favor” [we already have that], or in order to achieve “righteousness” in the eyes of man, but out of a mixture of awe and passionate love of Him and in full faith and trust that what He says is good.

We would *sh'ma* because we accept that whatever the Holy One has instructed us to do is the best possible thing we could do, and that whatever Torah formed the foundation of all Messiah’s teaching, let us look at how He viewed and approached Torah.

He has instructed us to avoid or resist is the worst possible thing for us – because, after all, He knows more about us, and what is good [and bad] for us, than we do.

What would be the result of applying the *sh'ma* and *sh'mar* concepts in our lives?

It would mean we would consciously, and daily, put on ourselves, and model for all to see, His “garments of righteousness” [the *mitzvot*⁷ – the so-called commandments and ordinances of Torah].

It would also mean we would begin to participate in His Divine dramas [the *Moed'im* – Biblical festivals which each demonstrate a different aspect of His redemptive plan] in the way He has prescribed in order that the world may observe and understand Him and His goodness.

Ultimately, I believe, it would mean we would be conformed, progressively, over time, into the image of Messiah Y’shua – the embodiment of the Torah.

⁷ The Hebrew concept of *mitzvot* [plural form of the noun *mitzvah*] is badly misunderstood by English-speakers, largely as a result of its frequent translation into our Bibles as “commandments”. The more accurate translation would be instructions, or teachings. The idea being demonstrated is the beneficent education and training of an apprentice by a master – not the legal dictates of a sovereign state. While God’s *mitzvot* are certainly more than “suggestions”, they are more creative and beneficial in purpose and effect than mere laws [a stop-sign for instance, or a speed limit] – and they have no loopholes.

Did Messiah's approach to the Torah demonstrate the *sh'ma* and *sh'mar* concepts?

Since Messiah did not consider the Torah as a finite set of rules to follow – a legal code of conduct. He spoke against all who seek to approach Torah in such a way in biting terms. Matthew 23:1-33. He denounced those who tried to reduce the Torah of God, as given through Moshe, to a legal code, as sons and associates of the serpent, ha-satan. In Matthew 23:33, He called such persons “serpents”, and “sons of serpents”.

Messiah did not consider the Torah to consist of 613 [or two, or any other number]⁸ of rules which, followed to the letter, resulted in righteousness. Messiah approached the Torah instead as something infinite, a tangible “door” to an intangible world. What does that mean, you ask?

Think of Torah as a house containing many rooms, each one expressing an aspect of the heart and personality of the Holy One – as rooms of your home express not only your interests and your values, but also your personality.

Each room in the Father's House has a “door”, or point of entry. That point of entry is the instruction itself – the carefully chosen specific words of the instruction or commandment. The instruction itself is tangible, and capable of literal interpretation and literal performance. This literal level interpretation and performance, however, is not the goal [Greek *telos* – see Matthew 5:17] of the instruction – it is only the doorway, or passageway through which we pass in order to pursue the goal.

⁸ The popular Christian theory that Y'shua somehow replaced the Torah of Moshe with just two commandments [1. Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength; and 2. Love your neighbor as yourself] is just as erroneous as the theory advanced in some circles of Judaism that the Torah can be reduced to 613 commandments. Both theories put God in a box, attempting to make His supernatural teaching and instruction in righteousness “manageable” by human beings. Both “the way of the two” and “the way of the 613” exalt human understanding [the human definition of “love”, on the one hand, and 613 rules defined by humans on the other hand], over the manifold Wisdom of God. His Ways are intentionally made “higher than our ways” [Isaiah 55:8-9], and incomprehensible to the natural man [1 Corinthians 2:1-15], because He – and His Word – are infinite, not finite, or in any way “manageable”. He wants us to *sh'ma* His Words – and let them transform us into their image; out flesh, on the other hand, wants to either ignore the Holy One's words, rebel against them, or reduce them to meaningless, standardless “mush” [the way of the two], or to a checklist of do's and don'ts [the way of the 613] that keeps us so busy that we can ignore the God Who spoke the Word altogether.

Messiah Y'shua considered each Torah instruction such a doorway, with the voice of the Holy One on the other side calling "come in, enter this door, and discover not just a door, but a room behind the door, where you will – if you explore carefully, and seek with all your heart – both find Me and learn My heart and My personality".

So, when Messiah taught Torah in the Sermon on the Mount, He taught us not to just stand in the "doorway" of an instruction like "do not murder", and congratulate ourselves that we have never, to date, personally blotted out the life of another human being.



Messiah taught us to look not just at our actions, but our words, and even to our thoughts⁹, in regard to other people.

⁹ The progression of thought [sin in seed form] to word [sin in sprout form] to action [sin in mature form] is a well-understood Biblical concept. See Genesis 4:7 and James 1:13-15. It is the fact that the Word of the Holy One is infinite, and can therefore deal with sin in seed, sprout, and mature form, and at all stages in between, that makes it so powerful, and proves that It is in face the Word of God, and not mere wisdom literature conceived by men. If the operation of the Torah of God is reduced to dealing only with actions [the way of the 613, as described in the foregoing footnote], or to dealing with only thoughts and motivations [the way of the two, as described in the foregoing footnote], it is robbed of its intended supernatural effect.

Messiah taught us to go inside the room behind each Torah “door”, to the place [which varies from season to season and year to year] where the Holy One’s words shows us the difference between that which is soulish and that which is spiritual in us, and makes us aware of the difference between interacting with the Holy One as we have done and becoming one with Him as He created us to do.

This is why the writer of Hebrews stated:

“The word of the Holy One is alive! It is at work and is sharper than any double-edged sword – it cuts right through to where soul meets spirit and joints meet marrow, and it is quick to judge the inner reflections and attitudes of the heart.” Hebrews 4:12.

Messiah, using the specific *mitzvot* of murder, adultery, divorce and vows as examples, instructed us how to *sh’ma* to the Voice which calls to us from behind each “door” of Torah, “come, My Beloved”.



Messiah taught us not to just stand at the doorway, and read the sign on the door, assume we know the height and depth and breadth of the room, and move on.

He taught us to follow after the Voice, and search out the goal and purpose, and depth, and breadth, and the height, of each particular instruction, to seek an understanding of the reason for it and the implications of it, and thereby to discover the heart of the One who spoke it.

Of course, one can respond to the Voice behind the door in three ways:

- Ignore that Voice,
- Resist that Voice,
- Surrender to His Will, and allow himself to be drawn by that Voice into the secret chambers of The Holy One.

Messiah challenged us to *sh'ma* to that Voice behind the door, and follow It as the sheep follow their shepherd.

If, as Messiah taught, one approaching an instruction of Torah allows oneself to be drawn into that instruction by the Voice of the Holy One, and enters with wide-eyed, child-like wonder into the room beyond the door of the carefully selected wording, and starts looking around at the architecture and the pictures on the wall, each instruction of Torah becomes an infinite realm of Spiritual Ascent into the Presence of the Holy One.



This is because each individual instruction of Torah has something designed into it by the Master Architect, which, if we will *sh'ma* to the Voice behind the “door” of that instruction, and if we will *sh'mar* it, will pierce our soul, and free us from some aspect of souliness.

“You have heard it said ...”, Messiah always began His teaching on specific instructions, “... but I say unto you.”

It is not just what you have heard said [the carefully chosen and eternally true words of the instruction in question], but what He wants to “say unto you” [the revelation of the Holy One’s heart which lies behind the actual words] that will pierce soul and spirit, dividing joint and marrow, and judge the inner reflections and attitudes of the heart.

We are not just to read an instruction as it is written on the page of our Bibles. We are to open the doors of our hearts to that instruction, and surrender to its Author – and then let Him search our hearts and change us.

The Operation of An Ancient Hebrew Concept – Illustrated by a Computer Program?

Many of us who use computers have purchased a software program for our computers called “Norton’s Disc Doctor”. The purpose and function of this program is to search our computer’s hard drive [or any disk we may be using] for “bad blocks” – places on the drive or disk where some damage has occurred that endangers future performance.

If I run this program on my hard drive or a disk, if a “bad block” is present [even if it is not causing any obvious problem at the moment], the program will cause a screen to appear on my monitor describing the problem and asking if I want to “fix” the problem, “continue”, or “quit application”.

This is not unlike what the Spirit of the Holy One does when we run a Torah instruction “program” on our hearts, by not only reading and studying a instruction as it is written, but surrendering to it, and letting it examine our attitudes, motives, priorities, prejudices, thoughts, words, and behavior patterns.

If we allow the Spirit to search our lives long enough, applying against our actions, words, thoughts, motives and attitudes the truth and the reality behind the instruction we are studying, the “bad blocks” in our souls will be discovered. The Spirit, using the instruction in question, will advise us to “fix” the problem – but will give us the choice of continuing or quitting the application. We can, at that point, “quit application” if we wish. No one will know – for now – but the Holy One and ha-satan.

Torah is not Law, but the Teaching of a Caring and Benevolent Master.

Messiah’s teaching and example of how to approach Torah is to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life for us, His *talmidim* [followers and disciples].

The Torah is not to be “law” for us, because every law is finite, and necessarily has loopholes and exceptions. The Torah is infinite. Each instruction in the Torah means what it says – it is literal – but it also means much, much more! The Voice calls us to come closer, to “launch out into the deep” and to enter willingly into the realm of the much, much more.

“Sh’ma, Yisrael!” can therefore appropriately be paraphrased: “Come closer! Come into the King’s chambers!” It is there, in the King’s chambers that the circumcision of the heart, which is the object of the Torah, occurs.

When I say that each instruction is infinite, the “house” analogy as previously described in this article falls a little short, so let me add to it. Imagine that each room in the house has, somewhere in it, a secret passage that leads into an ocean so deep one could never get all the way to the bottom without running out of air and having to return to the surface.

That picture describes, as well as I know how, the infinite aspect of each instruction of Torah.

Do you think Messiah exhausted all the Spiritual Truth behind “you will not kill” in Matthew 5:21-26, or that He explored all the Spiritual Reality underlying “you will not commit adultery” in Matthew 5:27-32?



No, Beloved. He merely scratched the surface, in order to give us a few examples of what we will find in the first few layers of Spiritual Truth and Reality which lay behind the literal wording of those instructions.

You see, each instruction is God-breathed, and is therefore as infinite in scope as is the Spirit of the Holy One.

This means that there is no way humanly possible to “fulfill” any of it. If it were possible for us to fulfill it, a finite legal code of conduct would be all He gave us.

Fortunately, giving us a legal code was never the Holy One’s intention. His intention was not that we utilize the Torah as a master “righteousness checklist”, on which we mark off that which we have performed satisfactorily from our [or someone else’s] human perspective.

He designed the Torah as something infinite to which we will, out of love for Him and trust in His absolute goodness, unconditionally surrender.



Once the surrender takes place, the point is to push through, each time one opens the door of the instruction, the threshold of pain [where the recognition and fixing of “bad blocks” takes place], and begin at that point to let the Spiritual Truth and Reality underlying the instruction do internally whatever creative work the Holy One is then desiring to do.

Can we, or should we worry about, “fulfilling” the instructions of Torah?

No, Beloved. That’s the serpent’s way – the “checklist” mentality of legal codes and organized religion.

“Fulfilling” instructions is Messiah’s business, not yours or mine. We are merely to submit ourselves to each instruction across which our Torah study brings us, and move our pride and our stubborn wills out of His way so He can use each instruction as He designed, as sculptor’s tools to mould us into what He created us to be.

See Jeremiah 18:1-4 and Isaiah 64:8. We won't get there this Torah cycle, or in the one we'll begin on the next *Simchat Torah*, or in any we will ever begin or conclude.

We will not get there, Beloved, because that is not the objective.

The objective is not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge.

The objective is to walk in the Garden with the Holy One, responding to His Voice and fulfilling His purposes as did Adam and Chava [Eve] before the Fall.

May you hear His Voice ...



And may you sh'ma!