

Biblical Counseling Center introduces eCounselor's Weekly guide, to encourage counselors and all believers in discipleship and daily growth.

What is Your "Shema?"

By Dr Ronald Allchin

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. (Dt 6:4-5)

What is a "Shema?"

This OT Scripture is called the Hebrew Shema. The Shema (*shuh MA*) is a confession of faith that Hebrew fathers were commanded by God to teach their children, the creed they were to live by. The obedient father diligently drilled this creed into the heads of his sons and daughters. He repeated this Shema over and over again, until his children could read it, memorize it, meditate on it and most of all, hear it continuously. It was far more than an intellectual assent. "To hear" meant it was now a power in the child's heart, soul and might and that this creed fully integrated in a powerful way into his very conscience. It had an impact on his heart and emotions and so he believed and lived it with all his strength.

Godly Hebrew fathers must have looked like fanatics about this Shema. At any place, at any time, they were responsible to teach the Shema. The Shema was the first thing the child heard when he woke up and the last thing he heard before he went to sleep. At breakfast, lunch, and dinner, when they took their morning and afternoon walks the Shema was taught. On the doorposts of their house, on the gates of their home, everywhere they looked they couldn't escape the reminder to love God.

What impact can a Shema have?

As a child, I was faithfully "sent" to church by my parents every Sunday. At that church I was introduced to a type of Shema that impacted my life more than I ever realized. Sunday after Sunday the entire congregation quoted the Apostles Creed. In our confirmation classes we had to memorize the Apostles Creed, a creed rich in fundamental church doctrine.



Even though I didn't accept Christ as my personal savior in that church, that creed did and still does have a profound effect on what I believe today. It amazed me recently that even after 50 years, I started to say it and it totally came back to me – I was able to quote the entire Creed. As I thought through each line, I realized "This is what I believe today." These were the core doctrines I heard as a child and that continue to guide my life today. It was my Shema.

How is your Shema impacting your life?

A Shema has a powerful impact in a person's life. You might say, "I don't have one." But in reality, everyone has a Shema since everyone functions in life with a core set of beliefs, a worldview. Many live by an unwritten Shema based upon their selfish personal beliefs and desires; others embrace a lifestyle modeled by parents or culture, following a common sense application of how they interpret life. God wants us to develop a Shema based upon the unchanging truths of the Word of God.

If you aren't purposefully living by a Shema, use the one above and build upon it, adding verses like 1 Cor 10:31. Personalize it, memorize it for yourself, meditate on it, become obsessed with it and let it be a powerful force in your Christian walk. If you have children, drill it into their heads and they won't forget it in the years to come.

Counselor's Insight: A personalized Shema can be a powerful daily admonition for a counselee who struggles with strongholds in his heart and life. Help him to develop his own Shema using principles from verses related to his sins, then memorize and meditate upon it fanatically until it becomes a driving force for victory in his life.

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