

MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

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DOCUMENT 185

SHEMA YISRAEL — THE COVENANT DECLARATION OF YAHWEH'S ONENESS

A COVENANT DEEP DIVE INTO DEUTERONOMY 6:4

Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad — A Three-Religion Covenant Response

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The Message is Sent to the World

REACHING JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM

☆ JUDAISM	† CHRISTIANITY	✶ ISLAM
The Shema (hear) of Deuteronomy 6:4 is recited twice daily and at death, and is written in every mezuzah (doorpost scroll), שְׁמָא יִשְׂרָאֵל . It is Judaism's central declaration that Yahweh alone is God.	Jesus cites the Shema as " <i>the first of all the commandments</i> " (Mark 12:29), treating it as foundational rather than superseded.	Surah Al-Ikhlās (112) declares Allah Abad (One). Both echad (one) and abad (one) affirm indivisible divine unity against every rival claim.

DOCTRINAL AUTHORITY — STANDING RULE OF MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

The sole binding authority of Miqdash Bethel Covenant Institution is the *Tanakh* — the written covenant of **Yahweh**. No Talmudic tractate, Church council decree, papal encyclical, hadith collection, or extra-biblical tradition carries doctrinal weight equal to or greater than the written Torah. Where any tradition conflicts with the written covenant, the written covenant governs without exception. The Talmud, New Testament, and Qur'an are cited as historical reference and comparative witness — never as superseding authority. Miqdash Bethel uses the Written Tanakh as its sole source for four reasons: it is the only text Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all recognize as originally given by **Yahweh**; it predates and underlies the Talmud, New Testament, and Qur'an, so testing those traditions against it follows the evidentiary direction of **Deuteronomy 19:15** — the earlier witness governs the later commentary; every later tradition that departs from the Tanakh does so by

addition or reinterpretation, never by overturning the text itself, so the text remains the fixed standard; and **Yahweh**'s own words declare the covenant unchanging (Malachi 3:6; Psalms 119:89), making the written covenant — not evolving institutional interpretation — the only stable ground for doctrine. All three great covenant traditions — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — are addressed simultaneously and equally in every Miqdash Bethel document, because **Yahweh**'s covenant belongs to every nation that will receive it. The **Deuteronomy 19:15** two-or-three-witness evidentiary standard governs all textual claims in this document.

HOW TO READ THIS DOCUMENT

This document applies the sole authority of the written *Tanakh*. **Yahweh** (יהוה) and **Elohim** (אֱלֹהִים) appear in bold throughout. Tanakh books are cited by their English names. Hebrew transliterations appear in *bold italic* with English meaning in parentheses at every occurrence. Scripture references are bold. Three audiences are addressed simultaneously: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Rabbinic commentary, New Testament texts, and the Qur'an are cited as historical and comparative reference — not as binding authority. The Written Tanakh governs all conclusions.

TANAKH BOOKS CITED IN THIS DOCUMENT

DIVISION	BOOKS CITED	PURPOSE IN THIS STUDY
Torah	Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy	Foundation text — covenant framework, the Shema itself, and its liturgical instructions
Nevi'im (Prophets)	Isaiah, Zechariah, Malachi	Prophetic corroboration of Yahweh's exclusive oneness and future universal recognition
Ketuvim (Writings)	Psalms, Proverbs, Chronicles	Liturgical and covenant-renewal witness to the Shema's declaration

I. THE TEXT ITSELF — DEUTERONOMY 6:4

I-A. The Hebrew Text and the Six Words

The *Shema* (שְׁמַע, 'hear!') takes its name from the first word of **Deuteronomy 6:4**: *Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad* (שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד). In the Masoretic Text this reads, word for word: *shema* ('hear'), *Yisrael* ('Israel'), **Yahweh** (the covenant Name, יהוה), *Eloheinu* ('our God'),

Yahweh (repeated), *echad* ('one'). The verse is only six words in the Hebrew, and every Torah scroll enlarges two letters within it — the *ayin* (ע) of *shema* and the *dalet* (ד) of *echad*. These enlarged letters are a scribal tradition preserved in the copying of the scroll; they are not part of the verse's wording, and the Tanakh assigns them no meaning.

I-B. Shema (שמע) — Not Passive Hearing

The verb *shema* (שמע) — Strong's **H8085** — carries a semantic range in Biblical Hebrew that exceeds the English 'hear.' BDB (Brown-Driver-Briggs) defines it to include not merely auditory perception but 'to hear so as to obey, to hear and act upon, to give heed.' The imperative form opening this verse is not a request for auditory attention — it is a covenant summons to obedient response. This is the same root used throughout Deuteronomy for covenant loyalty: to *shema* the voice of **Yahweh** is to submit to and act upon His instruction, not merely to register sound. The command that opens Israel's central confession is therefore a call to covenant obedience before it is a statement of doctrine.

I-C. The Setting — Moses on the Plains of Moab

Deuteronomy 6 is spoken by Moses to the generation of Israel about to cross into the Land, the generation that did not stand at Sinai. The Shema opens the central charge of the book: love and exclusive loyalty to **Yahweh** as the entire foundation for covenant life in the Land. The immediate literary context — **Deuteronomy 6:5–9** — commands that these words be 'on your heart,' taught diligently to children, spoken at home and on the road, bound as a sign on the hand, as frontlets between the eyes, and written on the doorposts (*mezuzot*, doorposts, מְזֻזוֹת) of the house and on the gates. The command to bind and to write is in the text itself. The Jewish practices of *tefillin* (phylacteries), תְּפִלִּין, and the *mezuzah* (doorpost scroll), מְזֻזָּה, are one ancient way of keeping it, but the Tanakh does not describe their form: no boxes, straps, or parchment are named. The same "bind them" language is used elsewhere as a figure for memory: "**Bind them about your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart**" (**Proverbs 3:3**; compare **6:21**; **7:3**). What the text requires is that the words govern the hand, the eyes, the house, and the gate.

II. THE HEBREW VOCABULARY OF ONE — ECHAD (אֶחָד)

II-A. Echad — Lexical Range

The word translated 'one' is *echad* (אֶחָד) — Strong's **H259**, from the root *achad* (אָחָד). It appears more than 950 times across the Tanakh. Its primary lexical senses, per BDB and HALOT, are: (1) the cardinal number 'one'; (2) 'first' as an ordinal; (3) 'only' or 'alone,' as in **Ezekiel 37:19**, where two sticks representing divided Israel become 'one stick'; (4) 'a certain one' or 'each/every,' typically with the definite article. Because *echad* can describe a composite entity functioning as a single unit — **Genesis 2:24** ('one flesh'), **Genesis 34:16** ('one people') — some later interpreters have argued the word inherently signals internal plurality. This claim

requires careful handling; lexical possibility in other contexts does not establish theological meaning in this one. Context, not abstract lexical range, governs the meaning of any Hebrew word in any given verse.

II-B. Three Ways the Verse Has Been Read

Hebrew grammarians and the Jewish Publication Society's own *JPS Torah Commentary* acknowledge that the precise syntax of the four central Hebrew words — *Adonai Eloheinu Adonai echad* — admits more than one grammatically defensible reading, since Biblical Hebrew has no verb 'to be' in the present tense and the words must be joined by the reader:

- (1) "*Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone*" — an exclusive-loyalty reading, emphasizing *echad* as 'alone' rather than a numeral, and closely tied to the demand of **Deuteronomy 6:5** that follows;
- (2) "*Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one*" — the traditional and most widely used rendering, a declaration of absolute unity opposing polytheism and the dualism of surrounding nations;
- (3) a construction some scholars associate with covenant/relational language rather than either strict number or strict exclusivity, in which 'one' functions closer to 'unique' or 'incomparable.' All three readings converge on the same covenant outcome: Yahweh has no rival, no equal, and no partner, and Israel's loyalty belongs to Him exclusively.

II-C. Echad and Yachid (יחידי) — A Necessary Clarification

A second Hebrew word for 'one,' *yachid* (יחידי) — Strong's **H3173** — denotes 'only,' 'solitary,' or 'unique' in an absolute, non-composite sense (e.g., **Genesis 22:2**, Isaac as Abraham's 'only' son). It is sometimes claimed that the Rambam (Maimonides, 1138–1204) substituted *yachid* for *echad* in his Thirteen Principles of Faith specifically to close a door that *echad* allegedly left open for later Trinitarian argument. Per the **Deuteronomy 19:15** evidentiary standard, this claim must be weighed carefully rather than repeated uncritically: the Rambam's own halachic writings (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah, and his laws governing recitation of the Shema itself) continue to employ *echad* for the biblical text of **Deuteronomy 6:4** without alteration — he never edited the verse. His use of *yachid* in the philosophical Thirteen Principles reflects his own Aristotelian-influenced articulation of divine simplicity, not a textual emendation of Moses' words. The written Tanakh itself has never been altered: *echad* stands in **Deuteronomy 6:4** in every Masoretic manuscript tradition. Whatever theological weight is placed on the echad/yachid distinction belongs to post-biblical commentary — not to the covenant text itself, which this Institution holds as sole authority.

III. FIVE COVENANT WITNESSES TO YAHWEH'S EXCLUSIVE ONENESS

Per the **Deuteronomy 19:15** standard, no doctrine may rest on a single text. The following five witnesses corroborate Shema's declaration across the Torah, Nevi'im, and Ketuvim.

Witness One — Deuteronomy 4:35, 39: There Is None Else

"Unto you it was shown, that you might know that Yahweh He is Elohim; there is none else besides Him... know this day, and lay it to your heart, that Yahweh He is Elohim in heaven above and upon the earth beneath; there is none else." Deuteronomy 4:35, 39 — JPS 1985

This is the theological foundation the *Shema* later compresses into six words. Moses states the doctrine explicitly here, before the *Shema* states it liturgically in chapter 6: **no rival power, in heaven or on earth, shares Yahweh's throne.**

Witness Two — Isaiah 44:6, 8: I Am the First and the Last

"Thus says Yahweh, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer Yahweh of hosts: I am the first, and I am the last; and besides Me there is no Elohim... Is there a Elohim besides Me? There is no Rock; I know not any." Isaiah 44:6, 8

The prophet delivers this in direct polemic against Babylonian idolatry — the surrounding chapters mock the manufacture of wooden idols. Yahweh's exclusivity is not an abstract philosophical claim in Isaiah; it is a direct covenant confrontation with the competing gods of empire.

Witness Three — Zechariah 14:9: Yahweh Shall Be One, and His Name One

"And Yahweh shall be King over all the earth; in that day shall Yahweh be echad (אֶחָד), and His name echad." Zechariah 14:9

This eschatological text uses the identical word *echad* from the *Shema* to describe a future universal recognition of Yahweh's kingship — every nation acknowledging the same oneness Israel already confesses. The prophet extends *Shema's* declaration from Israel's confession to the world's future confession.

Witness Four — Malachi 2:10: Have We Not All One Father?

"Have we not all one (*echad*) Father? Has not one Elohim created us?" Malachi 2:10

Malachi applies the *Shema's echad* not only to Yahweh's nature but to the unity it demands among the covenant people. The prophet's rebuke of covenant treachery among Israel is grounded directly in the oneness of the Elohim they share.

Witness Five — Psalms 86:10: You Alone Are God

"For You are great, and do wondrous things; You are Elohim alone." Psalms 86:10

David's prayer applies the *Shema's* confession personally and devotionally — not merely as recited doctrine but as the ground of dependence in crisis. The Psalter absorbs the *Shema* into the covenant community's private prayer life, not only its public liturgy.

IV. THREE-RELIGION AUDIT — HOW EACH TRADITION RECEIVES THE SHEMA

ELEMENT	JUDAISM	CHRISTIANITY	ISLAM
Central Text	Deuteronomy 6:4-9, recited in the Shacharit and Ma'ariv services, at death, and inscribed in mezuzah and tefillin.	Mark 12:29 cites the Shema verbatim as the first of all commandments; the Shema is treated as foundational, not abrogated.	Surah Al-Ikhlās (112): 'Say, He is Allah, the One (Aḥad).' Held to be equal in meaning to one-third of the Qur'an.
Covenant Strength	Affirms exclusive, uncompromising monotheism against every rival power. The two-daily-recitation practice keeps the confession active, not merely historical.	Preserves the Shema as the root of Jesus' own summary of the Law and the greatest commandment, tying love of God directly to the Shema's language in Deuteronomy 6:5.	Tawḥīd (the oneness of Allah) is the foundational pillar of the entire faith; Al-Ikhlās explicitly rejects any offspring, partner, or equal to God, echoing the Shema's exclusivity.
Covenant Departure	Some post-biblical debate (eḥad vs. yaḥīd) risks importing philosophical categories not present in the plain covenant text; the written Torah itself was never altered.	Trinitarian doctrine reads later Greek philosophical categories of essence and person back into eḥad, a claim the plain Hebrew text does not require and Second Temple Judaism did not hold.	While affirming God's oneness, some later Islamic theological schools debate divine attributes in ways that risk their own philosophical overlay onto simple covenant confession.
Covenant Witness	The Shema is Israel's daily act of testimony. Later tradition reads its two enlarged letters, <i>ayin</i> and <i>dalet</i> , as spelling <i>ed</i> (witness): a reflection of commentary, not of the verse's wording.	The command to love God 'with all your heart, soul, and might' (Deuteronomy 6:5) is preserved as the greatest commandment, grounding covenant ethics directly in the	The five daily prayers (ṣalāḥ) and the Shahāda ('there is no god but Allāh') function structurally like the Shema — a repeated, embodied, daily confession of the same core claim.

		prior confession of oneness.	
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V. SEVEN COVENANT DECLARATIONS ON THE SHEMA

#	COVENANT DECLARATION	BASIS
I	Yahweh alone is Elohim . No rival power, in heaven above or on earth beneath, shares His throne or His covenant claim on Israel's loyalty.	Deuteronomy 4:35, 39; 6:4
II	The word <i>echad</i> (יֶחָד) in its plain covenant context declares exclusive, undivided loyalty and unrivaled unity — not a philosophical proof text for or against any doctrine of compound personhood. Context governs meaning; the Tanakh's own repeated exclusivity texts (Isaiah 44:6, 8) govern the <i>Shema's</i> sense.	Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 44:6, 8
III	The <i>Shema</i> is inseparable from its own stated response: total love of Yahweh with heart, soul, and might, and the diligent transmission of His words to the next generation.	Deuteronomy 6:5–7
IV	The command to bind the words on the hand and between the eyes, and to write them on the doorposts and gates, makes the confession a daily, visible memory. The text gives the command; it does not prescribe the physical form later practice gave it.	Deuteronomy 6:8–9; Proverbs 3:3; 7:3
V	Zechariah's prophecy extends the <i>Shema's echad</i> from Israel's present confession to the whole earth's future confession — the oneness declared in the wilderness is the oneness the nations will one day recognize.	Zechariah 14:9
VI	The New Testament's citation of the <i>Shema</i> (Mark 12:29) as the first commandment demonstrates that the earliest messianic movement received the <i>Shema</i> as foundational covenant confession, not as a text to be revised or reinterpreted into a different theology.	Mark 12:29 (comparative reference only)
VII	Islam's Tawhid and the <i>Shema's echad</i> both stand as covenant witnesses against polytheism and against any division of divine sovereignty — a point of genuine convergence between the covenant communities even where their traditions diverge on other doctrines.	Surah Al-Ikhlās 112:1–4 (comparative reference only)

VI. THE COVENANT RESPONSE — WHAT THE SHEMA ASKS OF THE COVENANT COMMUNITY

The *Shema* does not end at **Deuteronomy 6:4**. The declaration of oneness is immediately, in the very next verse, converted into a demand:

"You shall love Yahweh your Elohim with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." Deuteronomy 6:5

The Tanakh never separates theological confession from covenant obedience. To confess **Yahweh** as *echad* and stop there is to recite half a sentence. The covenant community's task is fourfold, drawn directly from the passage itself.

First: Hear and obey — not merely acknowledge. The verb *shema* (שמע) that opens the confession already commits the hearer to action before the content of the confession is even spoken.

Second: Love without division — heart, soul, and might (לֵב, נֶפֶשׁ, וְכֹחַ, me'od) together. The undivided object of worship demands an undivided worshiper. A people who confess one God with a divided heart contradict their own confession.

Third: Transmit diligently. The command to teach these words to children, to speak of them at every ordinary moment of the day, refuses to let the *Shema* remain a liturgical formula recited without formation. Covenant confession that is not taught to the next generation dies with the generation that held it.

Fourth: Bind the confession to daily life — hand, forehead, doorpost, gate. **Yahweh's** oneness is not confined to the sanctuary. It governs the household, the transaction, the threshold crossed each morning and evening.

Saying "Yahweh is one" isn't the finish line — it's the starting line. Right after the *Shema* declares that **Yahweh** alone is **Elohim**, the very next verse turns that belief into a job: love Him with everything you've got — your heart, your soul, your energy. The Tanakh never lets you stop at just believing the right thing. Belief has to turn into action, or it isn't finished.

This passage asks four things of anyone who claims to believe it:

1. Actually do something about it, not just say the words. The Hebrew word for "hear" in "Hear, O Israel" doesn't mean "listen politely." It means "hear and do what you're told." So even before you get to the part about loving Yahweh, the command to "hear" already means you're on the hook to respond, not just nod along.

2. Don't love Yahweh with half a heart. If Yahweh is undivided — one, whole, without rivals — then the person loving Him should be undivided too. You can't claim to worship one Elohim while your loyalty, time,

and affection are actually split between Him and a dozen other things. That's a contradiction: one Elohim, but a divided heart.

3. Pass it on — don't let it stop with you. The passage insists this isn't just something you believe privately. You're supposed to teach it to your kids and talk about it in ordinary, everyday moments — not just in church or synagogue, but at the dinner table, on a walk, before bed. A faith that isn't taught to the next generation simply dies out when the current generation is gone.

4. Let it show up in daily life, not just in your head. Tying words on the hand, wearing them on the forehead, writing them on the doorpost and gate — these were physical reminders built into everyday routines. The point is that believing Yahweh is one isn't supposed to stay locked inside a building or a religious service. It's supposed to shape how you run your household, how you do business, and what you think about every time you walk out your front door.

Bottom line: Believing the right thing about Yahweh isn't the goal — it's the starting point for a life that's completely loyal to Him, taught faithfully to your children, and lived out in ordinary, everyday moments.

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"Hear, O Israel: Yahweh our Elohim, Yahweh is one.

You shall love Yahweh your Elohim with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might."

Deuteronomy 6:4–5 — The Written Covenant of Yahweh

MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

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