

A World of Worship

The Shema: How Much of Me Does God Own?

The young man, still a teenager, performed a number of rituals each day. The first was to deliver the daily newspaper. He got up very early, delivered the papers, and returned home before the rest of the family was even awake. Then, just as the sun was rising, he would wrap the long, black, leather strap of his *tefillin* around his left arm. At the end of the strap was a tiny wooden box, which he positioned so that it pointed to his heart. A second tiny wood box was placed between his eyes and secured with two leather straps tied behind his head. With these in place, and a *yarmulke* covering his head, he put his *talit* over his shoulders. Now he was ready to pray:

Shem'a Yisroel! Adonai Elohenu, Adonai Echad....

The *Shema* (pronounced Sh'MAH): What is this prayer that is recited daily by observant Jews? What is the meaning of these Hebrew words that even the most secular Jew likely remembers from his childhood?

The *Shema* is probably the one aspect of Judaism with which all Jews identify. The *Shema* is from the Torah, found in Deuteronomy 6:4–9. It is not so much a prayer as a statement:

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

Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin calls it a “declaration of faith.”¹ The *Shema* links Jews together. The *Shema* is the most important prayer Jewish people can pray. It can, however, be the statement that keeps them from a relationship with the Messiah when it should be the one that causes them to look for Him.

RECITING THE SHEMA

I was that young man who prayed faithfully each morning. I was less faithful with the evening ritual, even though it is equally important. The Bible says it should be said “when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Dt. 6:7). It is to be recited with great respect. We are talking to the Almighty God, who is not to be taken lightly. Many Jewish people say the prayer with their eyes closed, to concentrate and focus on the King of the universe. The *Encyclopaedia Judaica* tells us that the followers of Rabbi Shammai taught that the *Shema* should be said standing in the morning and lying down in the evening. According to the school of Rabbi Hillel, the man’s position was not important so long as he recited the *Shema* twice a day.² Today most people would agree that what is important is that it is said, without regard to a person’s physical stance while saying it.

The important principle of the *Shema* is that it incorporates the concept of the whole man. Numbers have always held great significance for the Jewish people. Rabbis have added the three words—*el*, *melekh*, and *ne’eman* (God, king, and faithful)—to the existing 245 words of the prayer, bringing the total to 248. According to Jewish tradition, a human being is made up of 248 parts. Thus, the *Shema* is for the whole person.

Reciting the *Shema* is not a problem for most Jewish people because most have it memorized. I knew it in kindergarten. No, reciting it is not the problem. Fulfilling the requirements of the *Shema* is usually more difficult.

REQUIREMENTS OF THE SHEMA

Truly fulfilling the precepts of the *Shema* requires an unparalleled commitment.

...you shall love the LORD your God....

Exodus 21:2–6 tells us that a slave could be set free after six years of service. However, if, for the security of his family or his love for his master, he wanted to stay in service, provision was made to do that. The passage goes on to say that the master would pierce the slave’s ear with an awl, making him his servant for life. The love of this slave for his master was thus shown to be very powerful. When a Jewish person

recites the *Shema*, whether he knows it or not, he is talking about a powerful love. In a sense, it is this picture of slave love, a desire to commit oneself to another for life. The commitment is based on love.

...you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart...

In Hebrew, the word *labab* has the idea of will or intention. In other words, I must love God with all my will.

...soul... The Hebrew word *nepesh* has the idea of life. I must love Him with my life.

...strength... This Hebrew word is *mo'ed*. I must love God with all my strength.

J. McBride, as quoted in the *Theological Word Book of the Old Testament*, said, "The three parts of Deuteronomy 6:5 rather than signifying different spheres of biblical psychology, seem to be semantically concentric. They were chosen to reinforce the absolute devotion to God."

And these words...shall be in your heart.

It is clear, then, that the person who prays this prayer and means what he says would want to give his whole self to God, to hold nothing back. God would own him—body, soul, and spirit. Contrary to an over-used line popular when I was in high school, love does not mean "never having to say you're sorry." Rather, if I have given myself over completely to someone, I would want to ask forgiveness immediately if I hurt that person. Not to do so would mean I have only a passing interest, or none at all.

You shall teach them diligently to your children...

A second requirement of the *Shema* is an undaunted compulsion. Moses said that these words should be taught diligently. The Hebrew word for diligence means to "sharpen." The procedure for sharpening a blade of any kind requires going over it again, and again, and again, and again. When teaching our children about our commitment to God, we are compelled to repeat it time and again, patiently and lovingly.

We should also be talking about our commitment. In Hebrew school

we learned that the Talmud teaches that every person has only so many words to speak. The teacher said that when your words are used up, you are dead. This bothered me, and I said, not to be funny, “If this is so, I would have been dead already!” Our commitment is to be so strong that God is always on our lips.

... and shall talk of them when you sit in your house,...

This instruction refers to our time. We have more leisure time than any other civilization in history. We should be using that time to speak of God and His commands.

...when you walk by the way,...

We do so many things “by the way.” We have our jobs, our families, our sports, our hobbies, and yet we are told that God is the person we should be talking about.

...when you lie down, and when you rise up.

God should be on our lips throughout the day. He is to be taught about and talked about.

You shall bind them [the words] as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

The Jewish person literally binds the Scripture to his arm and head with the leather straps of his *tefillin*. They are a sign of his commitment.

You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

In Jewish households even today, a *mezuzah* (a small metal box containing the *Shema*) is nailed to the doorpost, a sign of the family’s commitment to their Jewish traditions.

REFLECTING ON THE SHEMA

Reciting the requirements of the *Shema* is never enough. We must reflect

on them. Deuteronomy 30:14 tells us that the Word of God is near to them (the Jewish people). This is very true. It is read in the synagogue, it may be bound as a sign, it may be posted on the door, it may even be on a bookshelf in a Jewish household. Most Jewish people know the *Shema*, if nothing else, by heart. But unless they have a personal relationship with the Messiah of Israel, the Word is not in their hearts. The prophets say that the Jewish people have eyes to see, but they don't see; ears to hear, but they don't hear; hearts to understand, but they don't understand (cf. Isa. 6:9; Jer. 5:21; Ezek. 12:2).

Many Jewish people wear a necklace with the Hebrew letter *chai* (life) on it. For the religious person, life means loving God. Loving God means listening to His Word. The apostle Paul wrote in his second letter to the Corinthians that the Word of God is read to this day, yet a veil covers their eyes (2 Cor. 3:14).

What about us, Christian friend? We are taught about God. We have Sunday school, Sunday morning services, Sunday evening services, and mid-week prayer meetings. We talk about what God has done in our lives. Our bookstores bulge with available material. All of this is good.

But there is more! We can learn from our observant Jewish friends and their commitment. They are not ashamed of what they are. They let the world know in a tangible way. Yet they don't have the reality of God. They have the outside, but not the inside. Many of us, however, know the reality of God; our hearts understand, but we don't let the world see. Is your love for God so strong that you will bind His Word and teach, talk, and write about Him for everyone to see? Do your neighbors know from outward signs that you are a Christian, just as we would know an observant Jew if we saw one?

We tell our Jewish friends that if they love God with all their heart, soul, and mind, they should be ready to do what He asks in His Word. We tell our Christian friends that if they love God with all their heart, soul, and mind, they should be ready to put their commitment into action.

Let Him examine our commitment. May we prove worthy for His sake.

A LITTLE SANCTUARY

As a youngster growing up, I can remember two synagogues in our neighborhood. Sitting high on a hill was an imposing, three-story

brick building with beautiful, white stone pillars in the front. It was not called a *synagogue* but, rather, a *temple*, after the Temple in Jerusalem that was destroyed. It was progressive and liberal and considered to be on the cutting edge of Conservative/Reform Judaism. It was the synagogue of choice for the majority of young Jewish families. The other synagogue was physically plain, numerically small, and had an elderly congregation. Its doctrine was Orthodox or traditional. This was the synagogue to which my family belonged, and I still hold many fond memories of that place.

Synagogues can vary in doctrine, size, and membership. The thing they have in common is their purpose—to provide a place for Jewish people to worship and assemble.

Synagogues originated around 586 BC, in Babylon during the years of captivity. After the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70, and the people scattered, a tremendous need arose for Jews to gather with one another, read the Torah, and pray. The word *synagogue* comes from the Greek and means to “assemble.” Such assemblies began to spring up wherever large populations of Jewish people were found around the world.

Synagogues were not designed to take the place of the Temple that stood on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem. There was no priesthood established, and no sacrifices were performed. Synagogues were meeting places for the people. When Herod’s Temple was destroyed, the synagogue became known to many as the “little sanctuary” (Ezek. 11:16).

Three Hebrew names or titles are attributed to the synagogue. First is *Bet ha-Midrash* (house of learning), because it is the focal point for Jewish education. Hebrew school, Sunday or Sabbath school, and individual training for Bar/Bat Mitzvah are offered on a regular basis. Hebrew, Jewish history, and Bible are taught for adults, and seminars are conducted on such topics as marriage, parenting, and current events.

The second title is *Bet ha-K’nesset* (house of assembly). The synagogue is used by its member families to celebrate *simchas* (joys), including wedding receptions, Bar/Bat Mitzvahs, and other special events. Women’s groups (sisterhood) and men’s groups host their meetings there.

The third title is *Bet ha-Tefillah* (house of prayer). The desire to worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as a group is met in the synagogue. A *minyan* is all that is required to conduct a service.

Synagogues are autonomous and independent. They are formed, maintained, and controlled locally by the members. Officers are elected to fill various needs—spiritual, educational, or social. Membership is voluntary but does require a fee, which is established by a board. To accommodate all who wish to join, many synagogues offer a sliding financial scale. Donations come in as memorials for special events or for deceased loved ones. In addition, seats are sold for high holy days, and in some synagogues a once-a-year fundraiser is held. Together, these efforts bring in the funds to meet the budgetary needs of the synagogue. As a rule, offerings are not taken in synagogues.

The *rabbi* (teacher) is the leader of the synagogue. Originally the rabbi was a member of the community who was extremely knowledgeable and pious, but today he is most likely seminary trained and thus able to administrate, educate, and officiate at special events. The presence of a rabbi is not required for the congregation to gather in worship.

Most synagogues have a *hazan*, or cantor, a person who is qualified to lead the congregation in prayer and various Hebrew chants. The *shammas* (sexton, servant) cares for the property and religious objects used in the synagogue. The president oversees the board, and the treasurer writes the checks and directs the distribution of the finances.

Certain standard objects are found inside a synagogue. The *aron kodesh* (holy ark) is a cabinet in which the Torah scrolls are kept. Above the Ark hangs the *ner tamid* (eternal light), as commanded by God in Exodus 27:20–21. The *bema* (raised platform) is the place from which worship is directed and the Torah is read. Most synagogues are built so that the congregation faces east (toward Jerusalem) when they pray.

I encourage Christians to visit a synagogue service. Whether you go on your own or ask a Jewish friend to take you, you will be warmly received. Perhaps as Christians visit synagogues, they will be made aware of the fact that the missing element in Jewish worship is the person of the Messiah Jesus. “But even to this day, when Moses is read, the veil lies on their heart” (2 Cor. 3:15).

DRESSED FOR WORSHIP

THE TALIT

Daily, at first light (except on the Sabbath and high holy days), Orthodox

males (and in some cases, females) don the traditional religious garb, always making sure to put the items in just the right places, in just the right order. Each worship experience serves as an opportunity to identify afresh with their people and their God.

In the Torah we read,

Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners. And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God (Num. 15:38–40).

These tassels were the key element of the unusual yet attractive garb that came to be known as a *talit* (pronounced tah-LEET). Made of wool or linen with blue or black stripes, the *talit* has *tzitziot* (tasseled fringes) hanging from each of its four corners. It is these fringes that are biblical. The *talit* is merely the medium to hold them. Originally worn as an outer garment, today it is primarily worn by men (and women in Reform congregations) as a prayer shawl during public and private worship.

Many observant Jews wear a *talit katan* (small talit) under the shirt, so that the fringes may be displayed at all times. This, they believe, carries out the command, “that you may look upon it.” The *talit* also serves as a memory aid to remember all 613 commandments of the Torah.

How and when a *talit* is worn varies among the different cultures of Jewish people. Most men first don a *talit* at the time of Bar Mitzvah, while a few wait until their wedding day. Some drape it over their heads, believing that it improves concentration during prayer. Others wear it merely as a shawl. Many twirl one of the fringes around a finger, kiss it, and then touch the Torah as it is carried around the synagogue during a worship service. All then recite the prayer, “Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast sanctified us by thy commandments, and hast commanded us to wrap ourselves in the fringed garment.” Many men are wrapped in *talits* for burial. A tear is

then made in one of the fringes, symbolizing the end of their obligation to observe the Law.

Jesus no doubt wore a *talit*, as it was the everyday outer garment common in His day. According to the Gospel writers, many people were healed by touching the “border of his garment [*tzitziot*]” (eg., Mk. 6:56; Lk. 8:44). They were not healed by any supernatural power of the fringes but by the authority of the One wearing them. Some Jewish men have misused this God-given command by enlarging their fringes as a sign of their great spirituality (Mt. 23:5).

Believers are under no obligation to don the *talit* because Jesus Christ fulfilled the Law. Instead, believers are asked to put on several other things, including the new man created in righteousness, the whole armor of God, kindness, humility of mind, meekness, long-suffering, and charity. Paul said it best in Galatians 3:27: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” May we never forget everything He has done for us.

THE TEFILLIN

The *talit* is put on first because it is used most often. The *tefillin* is next in importance and is worn as part of the morning worship, either at home or in the synagogue.

Tefillin (Heb., “prayer”) or *phylacteries* (Gr., “amulet”) consist of two small black leather boxes. Attached to these one- to two-inch cubes are long leather straps two to three feet in length. One of the boxes is placed on the *shel rosh* (forehead), and the other is placed on the *shel yad* (arm).

The *shel yad* contains passages of Scripture written by a scribe on one piece of parchment. These passages, taken from the Torah, are Exodus 13:1–16, and Deuteronomy 6:4–9; 11:13–21.

The *shel rosh* contains the same Scriptures, but they are written on four separate pieces of parchment, the Exodus portion being divided between verses 10 and 11. Each tiny parchment is inserted into one of four separate compartments in the cube.

Interpreting these Torah passages literally, the rabbis of old fashioned the *tefillin* to comply with the command to make them “a sign on your hand and as frontlets between your eyes” (Ex. 13:16). Symbolically, they are to remind worshipers of their commitment and consecration to the God who redeemed His people after four centuries of bondage

in Egypt. They are also a reminder that God owns the worshiper's heart and intellect. For this reason, *shel yad* points to the heart, and *shel rosh* is worn on the head.

The *shel yad* is placed just above the elbow with the box pointed toward the heart, always on the weaker arm. This rule comes from a rabbinic interpretation of Deuteronomy 6:8–9, which teaches that the hand that writes should be the hand that binds.

The leather strap is wrapped around the arm seven times. This practice is based on the seven Hebrew words in Psalm 145:16, "You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing." Ashkenazic (Eastern European ancestry) Jews wrap the strap clockwise; Sephardic (Mediterranean ancestry) Jews wrap it counterclockwise. The strap is then wound three times around the ring and middle fingers, forming the Hebrew letter for *Shaddai*, meaning "Almighty." The three windings recall the passage in Hosea 2:19–20, which contains God's three-fold commitment to Israel: "I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness.... I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness."

Zeal is an attribute that has never been found wanting in Judaism. Indeed, those who adhere to its many traditions do not lack courage or conviction, and Christians can learn a great deal from them. Yet a built-in problem arises whenever the traditions themselves replace the reasons for them. Matthew 23:5 records that flaw as stated by the Lord Himself: "But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments" (*talit*).

The writer to the Hebrews wrote, "But we see Jesus" (Heb. 2:9). Believers are admonished not to dress with outward adornments but to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 13:14) daily.

MEZUZAH: A JEW LIVES HERE

Jewish people who are serious about practicing their Judaism realize that living incognito is not an option for them. Judaism, by its very nature, teaches its people not to be ashamed of their identity. Jewish practice, by its very essence, forces a distinction from neighboring Gentiles. This distinction can be seen clearly by observing Jewish diet, dress, and worship. Consistent with this is the God-given command to display publicly God's Word: "You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Dt. 6:9). Jewish people have taken this

commandment literally, displaying these words for two reasons. First, they serve as a reminder of the individual privileges and responsibilities each Jew has before the living God. Second, they serve to mark out a Jewish home, letting the community know that a Jew lives there.

The name of this distinguishing mark is *mezuzah* (pronounced meh-ZOO-zah), which means “doorpost.” *Mezuzahs* (the Hebrew plural is *mezuzot*) are small oblong boxes made of various materials—often wood or some type of metal, and these days even glass or acrylic. They hold two small portions of God’s Word, Deuteronomy 6:4–9 and Deuteronomy 11:13–21. These verses are penned onto a small piece of *klaf* (parchment) by a scribe, rolled up, and placed inside the container. According to Jewish law, a *mezuzah* must be placed on the lintel of every doorway in the house, except the bathrooms.

Each *mezuzah* must have the name *Shaddai* on the front. This can be accomplished either by placing a hole in the case so that the word is displayed from the carefully rolled-up parchment, or by writing the word on the case itself. *Shaddai* is one of the many names of God recorded in the Jewish Scriptures. It means “almighty” or “sufficient.” Eight times it appears to communicate the truth that God is all-sufficient and almighty. Jewish interpreters believe that three Hebrew letters—*shin*, *daled*, and *yud*—are an acronym of the phrase *shomer delet Israel* (guardian of the door of Israel).

Several points must be considered regarding Jewish law and the *mezuzah*. First, it must contain real parchment made from the skin of a kosher animal. Second, a scribe must pen the verses onto the parchment. Third, before the *mezuzah* is placed on the doorpost, a blessing must be recited: “Blessed art Thou, Lord our God, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to affix *mezuzah*.” Fourth, the *mezuzah* must be affixed with nails, screws, or glue to the right side of the door. It must be placed about a third of the way from the top of the doorpost. Fifth, the *mezuzah* must be tilted 45 degrees at an inward angle—that is, toward the house. Sixth, the parchment must be removed every few years to make sure that it is in good condition.

Perhaps you have seen Jewish people put their fingers to the *mezuzah* and then to their lips as they enter or leave a room. It is customary to touch the *mezuzah* and then kiss the fingers as a demonstration of

respect, love, and devotion to God and to His commandments.

It is not uncommon to see *mezuzahs* in places other than the doorpost. Some people wear small *mezuzahs* around their necks as necklaces or as charms on bracelets. When I was growing up, my parents had a magnetic *mezuzah* mounted on the dashboard of our car. These uses are permissible, as long as they are intended as symbols of the owner's identification with the Jewish people. However, the *mezuzah* should not be used as a talisman or a lucky charm; to use it in this way is considered unworthy.

One thing seems clear. We, as Christian believers, can glean this truth from the *mezuzah*. We may not need an outward, tangible sign, but our attitude and practice should convey clearly to those around us that a Christian lives here.

SIDDUR: THE BOOK OF PRAYER

The distinctiveness of Jewish prayer can be seen through a cursory examination of the *Siddur*, the book of prayer. It contains most, if not all, of the prayers to be recited in a Jewish person's life. The *Siddur*, by its very nature, is a source of unity in Judaism, a religion whose adherents otherwise differ greatly in their beliefs and opinions. Visit any synagogue around the world and you will find essentially the same prayer book, for its contents are a universal entity among Jewish people.

The types and times of prayer are designated by the *Siddur*. Three types of prayers are found. The first type is praise, which is designed to praise God as the Creator of the heavens and the earth. A praise prayer always involves the declaration of God's holiness, kindness, goodness, and power, as well as extolling His very name. A second type of prayer is thanksgiving. This is simply a recognition of the fact that God has poured out abundant blessings upon His people. These prayers express thanks to God for the Torah (God's Word), as well as appreciation for our heritage, history, and the supply of our daily provision. The third type of prayer is supplication. This is how most people view prayer—asking God to meet a need. While this is a definite part of Jewish prayer, it is by no means the part most emphasized. Most of the requests are national in scope, rather than personal. Requests such as peace for the world, a desire for the Messiah to come, and a desire for the Temple to be rebuilt are but a few of the suppliant prayers in the *Siddur*. On a

more personal level, there are prayers for a prosperous and healthy life and for all men to live like brothers.

Once we understand the types of Jewish prayer, we must learn the times when they are to be prayed. Daily prayers are recited every *Shacharit* (morning), *Mincha* (noon), and *Ma'ariv* (evening). This practice undoubtedly came from the example of Daniel, who prayed three times a day, as recorded in Daniel 6:10. The psalmist wrote, “Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice” (Ps. 55:17). According to the Talmud, Abraham instituted the morning prayer, Isaac the afternoon prayer, and Jacob the evening prayer.

Shacharit is the longest of the three daily times of prayer. One prayer is common to all three times of daily prayer—the *Shemoneh Esrei*, which means “18 blessings.” Because the worshiper stands to recite this prayer, it is also known as the *Amida* (standing). The *tefillin* are worn during the morning service.

Mincha takes place in the afternoon, after one o'clock and before sunset. It is the shortest of the daily prayers, yet it is considered the most rewarding because it is difficult to take time out of a business day to recite its liturgy.

Ma'ariv, the evening service, can be prayed anytime after sunset and before sunrise. Included in this service are the *Shema* (Dt. 6:4), *Shemoneh Esrei*, and *Aleinu*.

Those of us who believe that Jesus is our Messiah can pray from a book or from the heart without learning a special language. Our emphasis should be to “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thes. 5:17) and, like our Jewish friends, to be in awe of the privilege of personal communication with the Creator of the universe.

TZEDAKAH: IT IS MORE BLESSED TO GIVE

A story is told of the rabbi of Nemirov. His followers, all Hasidim, stated emphatically that every night their rabbi went up to heaven. Another Jewish group, *Mitnaggedim* (opponents), ridiculed the Hasidim about this belief. One particular *Mitnagged* thought the idea so preposterous that one night he decided to hide under the rabbi's bed to confirm firsthand the impossibility of such a thing. At about 2 a.m., the rabbi arose, put on his coat, and took an axe in his hand. The frightened but well-hidden doubter followed the rabbi into the forest. Keeping his

distance, he watched as the rabbi began to chop down trees then cut the wood into logs suitable for burning. He marveled as he saw the rabbi deliver his secret offering to the widows and the infirm in the town. The next morning in synagogue, when the Hasidim spoke of their rabbi going to heaven, the former nonbeliever surprised his group of followers and said, “Yes—to heaven, if not even higher.”

This wonderful but little-known story eloquently captures the essence of the Jewish idea of charity or giving. Because there is no literal Hebrew word for charity, the word *tzedakah* (pronounced tse-DOCK-a), meaning righteousness, is used. Synonyms for *tzedakah* are justice, truth, and kindness, making clear the importance of the redeeming qualities of giving within Judaism.

The Bible has much to say about giving. Numbers 7 alone devotes all of its 89 verses, almost 2,000 words, to giving. The Torah contains a variety of laws applying to the poor. Tithes for the poor (*ma'aser ani*), the gleaning of the field (*leket*), the year of release (*shemittah*), and the field corner to be reaped by the poor (*peah*) all relate to the Jewish idea of giving as justice. At the same time, compassion is also an integral part of giving. Deuteronomy 15:7–11 states that because there would always be poor people in the land of Israel, the Israelites were to stretch their hands out wide to those poor brethren around them and give without evil in their hearts. Proverbs 19:17 says that giving to the poor is like lending to the Lord.

Maimonides made a list of different kinds of contributions to charity. From the least kind of giving to the greatest kind of giving, his ranking reads:

8. He who doesn't give enough and even that unwillingly, and in bad grace.
7. He who doesn't give enough (according to his means) but what he does give he donates with good grace.
6. He who gives after he is asked.
5. He who gives before he is asked (both parties knowing each other).
4. He who “casts among the poor,” meaning that the recipient knows who gave, but the donor doesn't know who received.
3. He who knows who is to get the money but sees to it that this person does not learn who gave it and thus avoids any

- embarrassment on his part.
2. He who gives charity without knowing who is to receive it and without the recipient being told who gave it.
 1. He who helps someone save his business or get a job so that it will not become necessary for this person to become dependent on charity.

Other examples of the place charity holds in Jewish literature abound:

- ✧ Charity equals all the other commandments.
- ✧ A penny for the poor will obtain a view of the Shekinah.
- ✧ Whom God loves He sends a golden opportunity for charity.
- ✧ By benevolence man rises to a height where he meets God.
- ✧ What you give to charity in health is gold, what you give in sickness is silver, and what you give after death is copper.

Other well-used statements on giving in Judaism are:

- ✧ For your purposes it is more important to give often than to give much.
- ✧ When you remember yourself, be sure to remember others.
- ✧ One never asks questions when people want food, even if they are complete strangers.

It seems evident that, biblically and talmudically, giving is an integral part of Jewish life. Therefore, it is not surprising that Jewish people are very generous. They are key players in the leadership of charitable organizations, especially those involving education (religious and secular), health care, and the arts. To what can we attribute this generosity? An old Yiddish proverb states, “The longest road in the world is the one that leads from your pocketbook.” Understanding the truth behind the humor in that adage, Judaism begins teaching about giving while its people are very young. As a child, I was taught various ways of giving, most of which centered around the synagogue. Funds for Israel, education, and immigration were usually raised by pledges. An old but effective way of developing habitual giving involved something called a *pushke*, which is a small collection box kept in the home. Various charitable groups will supply the *pushke*, have the family keep it for

a period of time (usually a week), and pick it up before the Sabbath. Families collect money for any number of charities—trees for Israel, homes for senior citizens, widows, various brotherhoods, sponsoring passage to Israel for those who wish to migrate but cannot afford it, buying food for the hungry, etc.

We can learn much from observing our Jewish friends in the area of giving. Scripturally based, Judaism demonstrates that intertwined with its relationship to the Almighty is a compassionate and heartfelt eye on those of humble means. Our family has adopted the use of a *pushke* to collect money for various causes. We sit down together and talk about where we want to contribute this money.

Christianity, which was born from Judaism, differs, not in the importance of giving, but in the motivation to give. Nothing we do can make us righteous, but the Messiah's followers will give and do so joyously because they have been given the greatest gift of all—salvation!

THE CALL OF THE SHOFAR

Throughout Jewish history, we find a record of a particular sound that prompts a certain action, like the response to a siren. This sound, not especially pleasing to the ear, is recognized by the Jewish people in much the same way as a Scotsman or Irishman responds to bagpipes. The source of this unique sound comes from the oldest wind instrument in the world. It is called a *shofar*.

The *shofar* is a ram's horn. It is very difficult to blow and is done in a way similar to, but not exactly like, a trumpet. In fact, the word *shofar* is often translated *trumpet* in Scripture. The *shofar* is most often linked to the account in Genesis 22, in which Isaac was to be offered as a sacrifice. The Angel of the Lord interceded just as Abraham drew his knife to kill Isaac. In Isaac's stead, a ram—caught in a thicket by his horns—was sacrificed. As one rabbi explained, we blow the shofar because "The Holy One, blessed be He, said, 'Sound before me a ram's horn so that I may remember on your behalf the binding of Isaac the son of Abraham and account it to you as if you had bound yourselves before me.'"

The Jewish Scriptures record numerous times on which the *shofar* sounded. The first time was in Exodus 19:16, when its blast acknowledged the presence of God before His people. Leviticus 25:9–10

records that it was sounded to herald the year of Jubilee, signaling the release of slaves and debt, to “proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants.” You may recognize this verse as engraved on America’s famous Liberty Bell. Joshua 6 records the *shofar* sounding just before the walls of Jericho came tumbling down. Ehud blew the *shofar* to call the Israelites to battle against the Moabites (Jud. 3:27). The sound of the *shofar* was heard as the people went to the fortified cities in Jeremiah 4:5. It was blown to warn of danger as enemies tried to stop the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem: “Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally there to us. Our God will fight for us” (Neh. 4:20). When a new king took the throne, the *shofar* would sound a loud blast (1 Ki. 1:5–39).

Bible prophecy states that the sound of the *shofar* will be heard when the Messiah comes (Zech. 9:14), as it will when the Jewish people return to their land (Isa. 27:13).

Moving forward in history, the *shofar* continued to hold great significance for the Jewish people, even as it came to be used for other occasions. During the Middle Ages, it was sounded to announce deaths and to mark the beginning of the Sabbath. The *shofar* served as a reminder of God’s giving of the Law at Sinai, the belief being that when Moses received the Ten Commandments the second time, he blew the ram’s horn to remind the people not to sin, as they had done when they built the golden calf. At this time, too, began the ritual of sounding the *shofar* on each day during Elul, the Hebrew month preceding Rosh Hashanah.³ It was to be a daily reminder of God’s sovereignty and mankind’s need to repent.

The *shofar*’s jubilant sound was heard in 1967 when Israeli paratroopers captured East Jerusalem and properly restored the capital of Israel. It was blown at the Western Wall by the chief rabbi of Israel. Today the *shofar* is sounded in Israel to inaugurate new presidents and prime ministers, reminiscent of the days when the nation had kings.

One of the sages of Israel listed 10 reasons to sound the *shofar* today:

1. To proclaim the sovereignty of God, because it was used at the coronation of kings.
2. To herald the beginning of the Ten Days of Awe (the time between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur).
3. As a reminder of the giving of the Law and the need for

faithfulness.

4. As a reminder of the prophets who loudly sounded their voices to a world that needed to hear.
5. As a reminder of the destruction of the Temple.
6. As a reminder of the *Akedah* (“substitute” for Isaac).
7. To inspire awe.
8. As a summons to the heavenly court on the Day of Judgment.
9. As a call to the Jewish remnant to come home.
10. As a reminder of the resurrection.

Maimonides said, concerning the sounding of the *shofar*, “Awake, O sleepers, from your sleep, O slumberers, arouse ye from your slumbers and examine your deeds. Return in repentance and remember your creator.”

Three sounds are basic to the blowing of the *shofar*. *Tekiah* is a short blast that ends abruptly. This is described (though not by name) in Numbers 10:5–8, as is the second type, *teruah*, which consists of nine staccato blasts. *Shevarim* is three short blasts. One long, sustained sound is called *tekiah gedolah*, or the *great tekiah*. On Rosh Hashanah, the sounds are called out in a particular order:

Tekiah—shevarim—teruah—tekiah—tekiah—shevarim—tekiah—tekiah—teruah—tekiah gedolah.

Unless it is the Sabbath, when the *shofar* is silent, most congregations will hear 100 blasts from the *shofar* on each of the two days of Rosh Hashanah. The reason is given in Psalm 89:15: “Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound!” Because hearing the sound of the *shofar* is a blessing, one can expect to hear 100 blasts as the Day of Atonement approaches.

It is required that the person who blows the *shofar* must be of sound religious and pietistic character. He should be familiar with the laws and traditions surrounding his awesome task.

Two blessings are recited over the blowing of the *shofar*. The first is said as a reminder of the command to hear the sound, and the second is to thank God for being present at the time of the blowing.

The greatest sounding of the *shofar* is yet to come, “at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible,

and we shall be changed” (1 Cor. 15:52). The *shofar* will blast as Messiah Jesus calls His saints (the church) to meet Him in the air. For us, as believers, it won’t be the shrill warning of the siren, but the call to go and be with our Lord forevermore.