

# Torah Observant "SHOMER MITZVOT"

שׁוֹמֵר מִצְוֹת

A Series on Practical Messianic Living and Apologetics (halakhah)  
By Torah Teacher Ariel ben-Lyman HaNaviy

## ***EXPLORING THE SHEMA (pt. 1): God is One***

(Note: all quotations are taken from the Complete Jewish Bible, translation by David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., unless otherwise noted)

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I want to give my opinion on the Ineffable Truth of the Oneness of HaShem, couched in the Revelation that the Son of God and the Spirit of God share the same Essential Nature as God the Father. This somewhat ongoing study (updated as need arises) will take various turns along the way. The commentaries will range from raw data (Scriptural citations), to rabbinic Midrash (known in Christian circles as homiletic discourse), to apologetics (critical reasoning), to possible polemics (theology on the offense against heresy). As a by-standing reader (and at times a participating one) I don't want anyone to walk away without warning.

I am not infallible. Moreover, I am not above correction. Please consider this commentary set as an attempt to uncover Truth, but consider that my weakness is also your weakness: personal opinion and personal conviction.

This particular topic is not a trivial undertaking. But it certainly produces many mixed emotions among its adherents. As a Torah Teacher, I am personally impassioned about this particular topic. Folks are usually fairly convicted one way or another as to the decision of whether or not Yeshua is YHVH veiled in flesh or not. And they rightfully should be! For in my opinion this conviction of necessity becomes a salvific issue (one related to salvation) for believers. After reading the second installment of my commentary you will understand why I make such a statement.

I would like to begin with a quote from Kevin J. Conner, author of 'The Tabernacle of David', 'The Temple of Solomon', and a very noticeable influence in the Eddie Chumney work 'The Seven Festivals of the Messiah'. Here is my quote:

'Truth must be seen in all of its glorious facets as one related whole. One of the hardest things to maintain in all of these various facets of truth is that God is bringing to the Church is BALANCE! It is a point worthy of recognition that heresy in its many forms originated in truth. In fact, it is impossible to have heresy apart from truth. There can never be the counterfeit without the genuine

article first. The counterfeit is never the original. The original comes first; the imitation follows. So it is with truth and error. Truth existed before error. Error uses truth to launch out upon, build upon. What is heresy? Heresy is simply an aspect of truth taken to an extreme and pushed out of proportion with the whole body of truth. It creates party-spirit in those that respond to it.

'It is because TRUTH is not seen as one related whole that this happens. No one facet of truth can be used to contradict or distort another facet of truth, or otherwise heresy begins. Taking one facet of truth and majoring on it alone to the neglect or violation of other truth brings discord; hence, the need for balance in every emphasis that is being brought to the Church today. Balance is harmony, and harmony is having all parts combined in an orderly and pleasing arrangement.'

This is the first installment in my personal ongoing study into the subject of the Incarnation. I want to share with you what I believe the "Shema" (basically a quote from Deuteronomy 6:4) can be hinting at, using the typical Jewish answer first, and then going on to explain how a non-Jewish believer can better "arm" himself against such an answer. This is simply an exercise designed to explain to some why many Jewish People are unwilling to give up their monotheism. This commentary set is not to be used as a standard witnessing technique among my people, but if the material proves helpful in explaining the difficult topic to unbelievers and anti-missionaries, then the commentary will have served its purposes.

"God is ONE. There is no other god (or God) worthy of worship aside from YHVH." This is a typical, monotheistic answer, based on a traditional Jewish view of Deut. 6:4, aka, the Shema.

This subject will continue to baffle many Jews and Christians alike: how can God be "One" and yet somehow "three". The matter is really made clear when Christians explain that correct Christianity does not believe in three gods! We believe in ONE God who expresses himself in a "unity of three".

God is one. The Shema affirms this. The characters of the Scriptures, both "Old and New Testaments" confirm this. The Shema is the "watchword of Jewish monotheism". The Shema is foundation. The word "shema" means "hear", "listen intently". It is a Hebrew imperative that carries the notion of an action-oriented command. In other words, "Now that you have heard, go and do something about it!" The Shema introduces the difficult concept of the "tri-unity" of our unexplainable God. The ancients called HaShem "Eyn-Sof", a term which quite literally means "without borders". Our God is infinitely unknowable. Yet because of our finite minds, he has chosen to express himself in ways that we can perceive. However we shall have to wait to gain a fuller perception of him, once we put off this corruptible flesh and our eyes are able to see through this mirror clearly instead of darkly.

The "trinity" is a doctrine that has long been characterized by misunderstanding, both among my people, as well as a few Christians. I believe that most of the confusion actually stems from the language that we choose to use when describing the unified nature of our somewhat incomprehensible God. However, the Torah does not expect us to label God and stuff him in box. Nor are we so smart that our systematic theological viewpoints of him will ever fully describe his wonderful glory. Yet the revelation that has been graciously granted to us is a complete one, in that, all that we need to know to maintain a right-standing relationship with HaShem is found within the pages of his Word, and most specifically, in the person of his only and unique Son Yeshua our Messiah.

I will single out just one passage and comment on it. To be sure, it is the most famous passage in the Torah: the "Shema" of Deuteronomy 6:4.

**“Sh’ma Yisra’el, ADONAI Eloheinu, ADONAI echad” [Hear, Isra’el! ADONAI our God, ADONAI is one].”**

Anyone with some knowledge of the Hebrew text will realize that the word translated ADONAI is the four-letter name for HaShem, YHVH, also known as the "Tetragrammaton." The Jewish people use this name only in a very sacred and personal way. To be sure, today Torah-observant Jews, in reverential fear of misuse never speak it. Because of the understanding that the Shema "defines" the oneness of YHVH (which is what the Hebrew word **echad** implies), many Jews are fiercely monotheistic. After all, is this not what the plain sense (**p'shat**) of the verse in Deuteronomy is teaching?

The word "echad" teaches us that God is the ONLY God that we are to serve. To be sure, some translations render this verse as, "Hear Isra'el, the LORD is our God, the LORD alone." This is the primary meaning conveyed by the use of this word "echad". That God is our only God is paramount to correctly understanding any revelation of him in his Word.

The TaNaKH is full of instances where God appeared in "less than familiar" form. God has appeared as his Angelic Messenger, as a Flame, as a Man with two angelic hosts, as Light, and as a Thick Cloud. All of these revelations are uniquely and completely God! Yet all were for the sake of the one being visited. God of necessity must "veil" his glory so that we as frail men are not consumed in his holiness!

Yet, the Renewed Covenant teaches us that Yeshua is the final and most complete revelation of God that the world has ever known! To look at Yeshua is to see the Father in flesh! Such a revelation requires a metamorphosis of the heart of a man! A natural man cannot understand the incarnation; only a man with a renewed spirit can understand this revelation. In a crude way you could liken seeing Yeshua like beholding someone in a mirror: the image in the mirror exactly resembles that which the mirror is reflecting, but in actuality you are beholding the mirror image! Such is Yeshua! To look at him is to gaze at the exact mirror image of the Father without actually beholding the Father himself! Yeshua is the "veil" by which the Father covered himself when walking

among mankind. Yet Yeshua is more than that! In his own words, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." (Read John 14:8, 9)

According to some scholars every instance when a mortal encountered the divine God they were in some way beholding Yeshua! In this understanding Yeshua is the common factor in every single revelation of God in the Scriptures. To be sure, they declare that "No one has ever seen God; but the only and unique Son, who is identical with God and is at the Father's side," (read John 1:18).

Yet Yeshua is also uniquely the Son of Man. Yeshua is NOT the Father, nor is God Yeshua. Rather, and I'm stretching human language to its limits to explain this, Yeshua is the Word made flesh, the Word which was WITH God, and the Word which WAS God! It is not as if Yeshua became God somehow. It is rather that God the Word became a human being and we beheld such glory in the person and work of the Messiah named Yeshua. Such profundity!

But, by understanding what the B'rit Chadashah (New Covenant) teaches believers about the unity of Yeshua and the Father (John 10:30), we are given the ability to interpret the Shema in a more theologically correct light. ADONAI is echad.... Yet, according to Yeshua's own testimony, He and the Father also constitute an echad. Is HaShem more than one?! No! Is Yeshua "meshugga" (Yiddish for "crazy")? Of course not! This relationship of the Father to the Son has long since been a problem for my people to grasp.

It also continues to baffle anyone attempting to put God in a neat, theological box.

Do we believe in three gods? No. That is the heresy called "Tritheism". Do we believe in one God who simply wears three different "masks" to interact with mankind? No. That is the heresy called "Modalism". What we believe in is ONE God who expresses himself in a "unity of three". The mystery is that each expression is uniquely God and yet uniquely single. Ontology is defined as: "a branch of metaphysics concerned with the nature and relations of being; a particular theory about the nature of being or the kinds of existents". The ontological implications of the very words, names, and "titles" used in the Scriptures help us to relate to God himself. Observe: All of what the word "God" implies is not exhausted in the use of the words "his Son"; all of what the name "Yeshua" implies is not exhausted in the term "the Father"; all of what the term "Ruach HaKodesh" implies is not exhausted in "the Man Yeshua" and so on and so forth. We cannot logically collapse each name, phrase, and title into the others without doing damage to the import of the Scriptural references. Indeed to attempt to do so is to approach the Scriptures from an incorrect mind set. Historically, the Hebraists thought of God in concepts of "this" and "that"; conversely, the historic Greek mindset approached God in concepts of "this" or "that". Some scholars refer to this as "Hebrew tension".

Yeshua is God veiled in flesh and the Spirit of God is God himself. The matter of authority comes into play when I examine the roles of each deity. The role of God is as

head over Yeshua and the role of the Ruach is as witness to Yeshua. Yet the role of Yeshua is as witness of the Father and the role of the Spirit is as active agent of the Father as well. The part that brings it all together is when we remember that true worship belongs to God and God alone! As such, whenever Yeshua or the Ruach is also worshipped we catch a glimpse of the "oneness" of the "three-ness" of God.

The Trinity is not easy to understand; in fact, it is an ineffable truth, not graspable by the human mind. How many heresies in Christian history have arisen because people attempted to detract from the mystery of the Trinity, coming up with doctrines that were more easily "digested" by the human mind. No, the doctrine of Trinity cannot be reduced to the pale categories of human reason.

It is arrogant for anyone to think that he or she can grasp the mystery of the Godhead! So the fact that the doctrine of the Trinity is not readily understandable in terms of human reason should not worry us. This is what the proper Christian's response should be to any polemic against the doctrine of the Trinity. We, in all humility and submission to God can only say this: God has revealed himself as Trinity, i.e. the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We do not rationally understand this; any explanation that we come up with will be flawed. But since God has revealed himself as Trinity, we submit to Him as Trinity even if we do not completely understand how he can be Trinity! It is blasphemy to "reduce" God to something we can understand. The purpose of theology is not to "cut God down" to the size of human reason but to elevate human reason to the contemplation of the Divine Mystery -- the Mystery that teaches us that the One God -- ineffably, incomprehensibly -- exists in a unity of "Three".

Are you confused yet? The historic Greek mind would be! But the historic Hebrew mind lives with these tensions as foundational Biblical truths! And yet some skeptics will always twist and distort the Truth into something it was not meant to be! I even imagine someone may eventually make this very article say something that I did not intend for it to say. But with language failing to fully describe the unknowable Eyn-Sof I shall have to rely on this "best approximation" for now. One day this glass that I see through dimly shall be made clear!

**Torah Teacher Ariel ben-Lyman HaNaviy [yeshua613@hotmail.com](mailto:yeshua613@hotmail.com)**