

Chamudei Shai on the Torah and Holidays

Chizukei Shai

Faith & Resilience: Our Jewish story – past, present and future



**Including the Mitzvah of Reciting the Shema,
Mitzvah of Tefillin and the Mitzvah of Tzitzit**

*For the Elevation of the Souls of the Holy Candles Whose Flames Ascended in a
Heavenly Storm on the First Candle of Chanukah 5786/2025, the Victims of the
Horrific Massacre in Sydney, Australia, May Hashem Avenge Their Blood.*

**By
Shlomo Yosef Geliebter**

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Lawrence, N.Y.

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חיזוקי שי

מהדורה מיוחדת

על ענייני

מצוות קריאת שמע,

מצוות תפילין ומצוות

ציצית

לעילוי נשמות

הנרות הקדושות שלהבותיהם עלו בסערה השמימה
בנר א' דחנוכה תשפ"ו

קרבות הטבח הנורא בסידני אוסטרליה הי"ד

מאת

שלמה יוסף געליבטער

לורנס נ. י.

חיזוקי שי הוא חלק מסדרת חמודי שי
ההסכמות לספרי חמודי שי נדפסו בסוף הקונטרס

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Introduction

**Shema Yisrael, Tzitzit, and Tefillin:
Faith, Identity, and Jewish Resilience**

**Strengthening Jewish Identity as
Our Response to Antisemitism**

Shema Yisrael “Hear, O Israel” is our declaration of Jewish faith. Its opening verse affirms the unity of Hashem and the absolute core of Jewish belief. The Shema has preserved Jewish identity and resilience throughout the ages.

Strengthening Jewish identity is our most powerful response to and protection from antisemitism. It is how we have endured throughout the ages, and it is how we will continue to endure.

The 25th of *Tevet* marks one month after the beginning of Chanukah, the 25th of *Kislev*. This date also coincides with the *shloshim*, the thirty-day mourning period, following the horrific terror attack on the first night of Chanukah in Sydney, Australia, in which Jews were targeted simply for being Jews.

In response, Yizkereim initiated a campaign beginning on *Asarah B'Tevet*, a traditional day of fasting, introspection, and *teshuvah* (repentance). The goal of this campaign is to strengthen our commitment to the recitation of *kriat Shema*, the daily declaration of Jewish faith, reciting it with intention (*kavanah*). For those who have never recited it before, we encouraged at least saying the opening verse:

שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד

“Hear, O Israel: the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is One.”

Shema Yisrael: A Declaration That Has Saved Lives

The Shema is not only part of the Jewish liturgy; it has been a lifeline throughout Jewish history. After the Holocaust, many

Jewish children who had been hidden or placed in Christian convents or orphanages were unable to be identified. Great rabbis devised a remarkable solution: they softly recited Shema Yisrael at the children's bedsides. Buried memories suddenly reawakened. Children cried out, "Mommy! Tatty!" remembering how their parents had put them to sleep with these sacred words.

Shema Yisrael: Its Meaning and Role in Jewish Faith

The opening verse "Shema Yisrael" is our acceptance of G-d's absolute sovereignty. The Shema continues with three paragraphs, each expressing a fundamental dimension of Jewish faith. The first paragraph calls for love and devotion to Hashem with "all your heart, soul, and might." The second paragraph affirms acceptance of the mitzvot and personal responsibility for living in accordance with them. The third paragraph introduces the mitzvah of *tzitzit*, reminding us of all the mitzvot and commanding daily remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt.

Through the recitation of the Shema, a Jew reaffirms commitment to Hashem and to

living as part of the community of *Am Yisrael* and brings great light into the world.

Tzitzit: A Constant Reminder of Our Mission

As part of this initiative, we emphasized the mitzvah of *tzitzit*, the ritual fringes worn by Jewish men and boys. Beyond the physical act of wearing them, we stressed the importance of intention when reciting the third paragraph of the Shema, *parashat haTzitzit*. This paragraph reminds us of all the mitzvot, commands us daily to remember the Exodus from Egypt, and affirms that Hashem desires us to accept Him as our G-d.

Tefillin: Binding Faith to Heart and Mind

Tefillin is now another mitzvah that is part of this initiative. This mitzvah is inseparable from the Shema itself, as it is included explicitly in both the first and second paragraphs:

וְקָשַׁרְתָּם לְאוֹת עַל יָדְךָ וְהָיָו לְטוֹטְפֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ

“You shall bind them as a sign upon your

arm, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.”

The pair of tefillin are placed on the arm, close to the heart, and on the head, symbolizing the binding of our emotions, actions, and intellect to Divine service. Observing this mitzvah releases great spiritual light into the world and into our personal lives. This light cannot be extinguished and confronts the darkness of evil.

Jewish Pride and Continuity

The Jewish people, *Am Yisrael*, remain a distinct nation only when we preserve our Jewish identity. The aim of antisemites and terrorists is to instill fear: fear of being Jewish, fear of practicing Judaism, fear of public Jewish expression. We, in turn, must not be afraid to show our Jewish pride and identity. This is a campaign to further our positive affirmation of Jewish life, faith, and pride.

In Memory of the Kedoshim of Sydney

The Rabbi Leib Geliebter Memorial Foundation/ Yizkerein dedicates this Shema-Tzitzit-Tefillin Campaign, on the day of the *shloshim* to the memory of those murdered *al kiddush Hashem*, sanctifying G-d's Name, in Sydney, Australia. Among them is Rabbi Eli Schlanger, z"l, who devoted his life to strengthening Jewish connection and observance, together with the other holy souls taken in that attack.

A Blessing for the Future

If we live as proud Jews, we bring blessing to ourselves, our families, and our people. May we soon hear *besorot tovo*, good tidings, together with *yeshuot* (salvation) and *nechamot* (consolation). And may we merit to gather together in the rebuilt Yerushalayim, speedily in our days. Amen.

Joseph Geliebter

24 Tevet 5786

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Shomer Yisrael

שׁוֹמֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל
שׁוֹמֵר שְׂאֵרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְאֵל יֵאבֹד יִשְׂרָאֵל
הָאֲמֹרִים שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל.

Tachanun and *selichot* conclude with a beautiful and moving *piyut* that opens with: שׁוֹמֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל, *Shomer Yisrael*, 'O Guardian of Yisrael,' *shemor she'eris Yisrael*, 'protect the remnant of Yisrael,' *ve'al yovad Yisrael*, 'let not Yisrael be destroyed,' *ha'omrim Shema Yisrael*, 'those who proclaim *Shema Yisrael*.' The *piyut* develops upon this theme, referring to Hashem as our *Shomer*, our guardian. *Shomer Yisrael* is followed by *Shomer goy echad* and *Shomer goy kadosh*.

We do not know who composed this *piyut*, but it is clearly very old, written

centuries ago. We can infer from the words that it was composed during times of persecution, when Jews feared annihilation. This can be implied from the reference of *she'arit Yisrael*, the remnant of Yisrael and the plea for protection from destruction. The author implies that Klal Yisrael had few little merits to offer other than their recitation of the *Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad*. This verse, affirming *emunah* and allegiance to *Hashem*, is presented as the ultimate merit of *Klal Yisrael*.

The Meaning of *Ve'al Yovad*

Ve'al yovad Yisrael, pleading that Hashem 'do not let *Yisrael* be destroyed,' is ominous language that the author chose. This likely reflects the challenging times when the *tefilla* was composed. Upon reflection about the word *yovad*, an alternate interpretation came to mind. The root **יבד** can also mean 'lost.' Thus, the phrase may also be understood: 'O Guardian of Yisrael do not let *Yisrael* become lost.' How does this happen? One path of the Jewish people becoming lost is assimilation among the nations.

The Analogy to Hilchos Shomrim

This *tefillah* addresses Hashem as *Shomer Yisrael* the guardian of His people. In thinking of our request that we not become lost, I recalled the *halachos* of *shomrim*. A *shomer chinam* watches without payment, as a favor. The *shomer chinam* is not liable if an item is lost unless negligent. A *shomer sachar*, one who is paid, bears responsibility for loss of the object. Applying these *halachos* of *Shomer*, we can interpret the *Shomer Yisrael* prayer in the following way.

We cry out: Hashem, You are our *Shomer Yisrael*. *Shemor she'eris Yisrael*. Watch over the remnants of *Yisrael*. *Ve'al yovad Yisrael*, do not let us become lost. You are responsible for us. Though we may have few merits or *mitzvos*, we believe in You, we still proclaim *Shema Yisrael*. That is our payment. You are thus like a *shomer sachar* and are responsible to protect us.

The *Shema* is the foundation of Jewish faith. On the merit of this prayer, we ask *Hashem* to ensure that our Jewish identity is preserved and not lost. The Jewish religion is premised on faith in One G-d and is based

on tenets of the *Shema*. Every Jew, even the most distant, can connect to the *Shema*.

Inspirational Stories of the Power of Shema

There are many moving stories about how the *Shema* plays a critical role in Jewish survival. The most poignant ones that came to mind while I said this *tefillah* of *Shomer Yisrael* were those of children hidden during the Holocaust. Parents entrusted them to Christian families or convents in desperate attempts to save them. After the war, orphaned and lost, many could not be identified. Great rabbis, among them, Rabbi Eliezer Silver, Rabbi Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman, Rabbi Yitzchak Herzog, and Dayan Grunfeld, searched for these children. Denied access, they would return at bedtime and recite *Shema Yisrael*. Some children cried out, 'Mommy, Tati!' in Yiddish recalling their last memory of parents putting them to bed with *Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad*. Through *Shema*, they were found. So too, countless martyrs died al *kiddush Hashem* with *Shema Yisrael* as their final words. The *Shema* is what keeps the Jew's spiritual life

eternal. (Note: The stories are attributed to several different rabbis. Probably one rabbi discovered the key to the solution of locating the missing children and shared it with the others.)

Halacha teaches that a lost object can only be reclaimed through a *siman*, an identifying mark as proof of ownership. The highest form is a *siman muvhak*, unique or distinctive features as indisputable proof of ownership.

The *Shema* is the *siman muvhak* of a Jew.

We beseech Hashem, *Shomer Yisrael*,
ve'al yovad Yisrael, ha'omrim Shema Yisrael.

נֹשֵׁמֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
שֹׁמֵר שְׂאֵרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְאֵל יֵאבֹד יִשְׂרָאֵל
הַאֲמֹרִים שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל.

Don't let us get lost. We believe in You, *Hashem*. Do not let us get lost into exile, taken hostage, or be forced to convert. We still say *Shema*, have a Jewish identity. This is how I interpreted the word *ve'al yovad* "lost" as an alternate to "destroyed." After writing

this, I found support for this interpretation based on a verse in the Torah.

***Oveid*: Destroyed or Lost?**

This alternate reading of *yovad* as 'lost' finds support in the verse Arami *oveid* avi (Devarim 26:5). There is a dispute about how to interpret a similar word in a famous *pasuk* of *Parshas Bikkurim*. דְּבָרִים כו, ה) אֶרְמִי אֶבֶד אֲבִי.

Rashi on this verse follows the *Midrash* and Onkelos, and explains *oveid* as 'destroyed,' teaching that Lavan sought to uproot and annihilate everything. The *Haggadah* later adopts this interpretation as the standard explanation when reciting the verse at the Seder. However, the *Ibn Ezra* and *Chizkuni* disagree with Rashi's approach. They explain that *oveid* here should be understood in its plain sense as אֶבֶד, 'lost.' According to their reading, the verse refers to Yaakov Avinu himself, who was impoverished, wandering, and vulnerable in Aram. Thus, *oveid* can bear two meanings: 'destroyed' in the Midrashic and Rashi/*Haggadah* tradition, or 'lost' in the *peshat* reading of *Ibn Ezra* and *Chizkuni*. This duality strengthens the interpretation of *ve'al yovad*

Yisrael as not only 'do not let *Yisrael* be destroyed,' but also 'do not let *Yisrael* become lost.'

The Final Plea: *Avinu Malkeinu*

The *piyut* concludes with the last words of *Avinu Malkeinu*:

אָבִינוּ מֶלְכֵנוּ חַנּוּנוּ וְעַנּוּנוּ כִּי אֵין בָּנוּ מַעֲשִׂים יְעֲשֶׂה עִמָּנוּ צְדָקָה
וְחַסְדֵּךָ וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ

Our Father, our King, be gracious with us and answer us, though we have no worthy deeds. Treat us with charity and kindness and save us. Using the example of a *Shomer*, I believe this plea is one of desperation where we have no payments to offer. We are not saying the *Shema*, we're almost the point of disappearing—we don't have any merits. We beseech *Hashem*: We have nothing to pay You to watch over us. You are a *shomer chinam*. Go above and beyond of what the *halacha* is. Please save us out of mercy, out of *tzedakah*, out of *chesed*, and save us, *v'hoshieinu*.

An Uplifting Prayer

Though recited in *Tachanun* and *selichot*, moments of supplication, this *piyut* is not meant to be sad. It is profoundly uplifting. It affirms that we still believe, still cry out to Hashem, and that very act of *tefillah* is itself our merit. We tell Hashem not to give up hope for us, because we are not giving up hope. The fact that we are still saying *Tachanun*, even though we go through such trials and tribulations, and we ask for *hatzalah*, we ask for *kapparah*. After our pleas during *Tachanun*, we become more confident to resume our *tefillah*, because we know that we will be saved and protected. We are confident in our survival and the eternity of our people because we have a *Shomer Yisrael* who always watches us, for He is the שומר עמו . ישראל לעד .

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Yaakov Avinu and the *Shema*

**Why did Yaakov recite the *Shema*
when he saw Yosef after their
twenty-two years of separation?**

The Torah states:

כט. וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹיוּ וַיִּפֹּל עַל-צַוְאָרְיוֹ וַיִּבְכֶּה עַל-
צַוְאָרְיוֹ עוֹד:

(בראשית מו:כט)

29. And Yosef appeared to [Yaakov], and [Yosef] fell upon [Yaakov's] neck, and [Yosef] wept upon his neck for a long time.

(*Bereishis* 46:29)

Rashi comments:

But Yaakov did not fall upon Yosef's neck, and he did not kiss him. Our Sages said, [this is because] he was reciting the *Shema*.

Many great sages have strived to understand these extraordinary words of Rashi. Why did Yaakov choose to recite the *Shema* specifically at the very moment that he met his beloved, precious son to whom his own soul was bound? Was this the time to recite the *Shema*? Couldn't he have first hugged and kissed him and relieved his heart's infinite yearnings, and afterwards recited the *Shema*?

The Ramban interprets this verse differently, based in part on the fact that "and he appeared to him" is superfluous. The Ramban says that it was the other way around; that it was Yaakov who cried on Yosef's neck.

But how may Rashi's words be understood?

Twenty-two years earlier, after Yosef was sold, his brothers brought his striped, blood-soaked coat to Yaakov, following which "he refused to be consoled" despite his

children's oft-repeated attempts to comfort him. Rashi explains that this was because there is a heavenly decree upon a person who dies that after a period of time he will be sufficiently forgotten by the mourners for their pain to subside. Since Yosef was alive, however, Yaakov could not forget him.

Yaakov was unsure whether to accept his sons' words

Yaakov was steeped in worry and anguish because of a number of doubts he harbored. Should he have believed his sons that Yosef had been torn apart and was dead? When he saw that he was unable to accept consolation, that was apparently a sign that Yosef was still alive. Nevertheless, even if Yosef was alive, how could Yaakov know that Yosef's holiness hadn't been impaired, and he wasn't spiritually lost forever? Yaakov was consumed by doubt and anguish because of these questions and, consequently, Divine inspiration did not rest upon him for the next twenty-two years.

And then, when his granddaughter Serach and afterwards his sons, informed Yaakov that Yosef was still alive, "his heart

weakened, because he did not believe them" (*Bereishis* 45:26). Yaakov felt bad that he couldn't believe his sons when they reported Yosef's words to him. Only when he saw the carriages that Yosef sent "was his spirit revived"—i.e., Divine inspiration rested upon him again. What changed when Yaakov saw the carriages? Physically seeing the carriages, beyond relying upon his sons' testimony, verified for Yaakov that Yosef was indeed alive.

Yaakov's second concern was that perhaps Yosef hadn't maintained the supernal state of holiness fitting for him. But after Yaakov saw the carriages, when his sons testified that "Yosef is still alive" (*ibid.*), he understood—as the *midrash* states—that although Yosef was in a debauched land, he was still "alive" both spiritually and physically.

It was then that "Yisrael said, 'It is enough; my son Yosef is still alive. I will go and see him before I die'" (*Bereishis* 45:28). And Rashi explains: "I am filled with joy and gladness because Yosef my son is still alive."

**The Holy One, blessed be He,
appeared to Yaakov only at night,
because he had not yet regained
full prophecy**

Yaakov had not yet returned to his full greatness as a prophet; Hashem therefore spoke to Him in a night vision.

ג. ...אֵל תִּירָא מִרְדָּה מִצְרַיִם כִּי לַגּוֹי
גָּדוֹל אֲשִׁימָךְ שָׁם:

ד. אֲנֹכִי אֶרְדַּ עִמָּךְ מִצְרַיִם וְאֲנֹכִי אֶעֱלֶךְ גַּם
עָלַי וְיוֹסֵף יָשִׁית יָדוֹ עַל עֵינֶיךָ:

(בראשית מו:ג-ד)

3. ..."Do not fear going down to Egypt, because I will make you into a great nation there.
4. "I will descend with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up, and Yosef shall place his hand on your eyes."

(Bereishis 46:3-4)

The *midrash* relates that the Holy One, blessed be He, told Yaakov that Yosef would attend to him after he died, closing his eyes

after his soul left his body. But how is this a reason for Yaakov not to fear going down to Egypt? We also need to understand more fully the nature of Yaakov's fears.

Perhaps it could be suggested that Yaakov had two concerns: 1) he was still afraid that Yosef's descent to Egypt had prevented him from rising to his proper state of holiness; 2) he feared that he himself might be harmed by the impure and debauched atmosphere of Egypt. Hashem therefore told him, "Do not fear going down to Egypt"—regarding your holiness. "I will go down with you to Egypt"—you will always cling to Me. "And I will also bring you up"—even after you die, you will cling to Me. And a sign for this is that you will be buried in the Me'aras HaMachpelah in the Holy Land. And regarding your worry that the impure, debauched atmosphere of the land of Egypt will harm you, "Yosef will place his hand on your eyes (*einechah*)," as understood by the Rashbam that Yosef will attend to all of Yaakov's affairs (*inyanechah*).

Hashem reassured Yaakov regarding his two concerns

The Sforno writes:

[Hashem told Yaakov:]

You will not [even] need to open your eyes to attain what you desire, because Yosef will bring it to you without your supervision. And you will not need to involve yourself with Egyptians who are unfit to approach you.

The *midrash's* statement that Yosef would attend to Yaakov when he died and would close Yaakov's eyes after his soul left does not contradict the statements of the Rashbam and the Sforno. Rather, it adds to what they wrote: Yosef would attend to his father throughout his sojourn in Egypt, even after his death.

The fact that Yosef was fit to attend to Yaakov's burial teaches us that Yosef had attained great holiness

However, the *midrash* is also communicating something beyond this. The Sages teach that "righteous people are greater in their death than in their lifetime" (*Chullin 7b*). Indeed, righteous people are very strict about the spiritual level of those who will attend to their bodies after their death. Here Hashem informed Yaakov that Yosef had attained the peak of righteousness and holiness, that he would outlive Yaakov and serve as the intermediary between the brothers and Yaakov, and that he alone was worthy of attending to Yaakov after his passing.

With that, Yaakov was assured that he had nothing to fear regarding a diminution of his own spiritual level in Egypt, and, furthermore, that Yosef's holiness was as elevated now as it had been when he was still with Yaakov. And with that, Yaakov was consoled for the twenty-two years he suffered during Yosef's absence.

"And he appeared to him"— with a penetrating inner gaze

When Yaakov and Yosef met, the Torah states that "[Yosef] appeared to [Yaakov]" — not in the sense that Yaakov saw him physically, but that Yaakov gazed at his inner being to determine: Is this the same Yosef who left his home as a person sanctified to Hashem? As we find elsewhere, great Torah personalities can look at a person and see whether his deeds are holy or the opposite. That is the meaning of "he appeared to him." It is not speaking of the body, but of an inner contemplation of the soul: Is Yosef "alive" in terms of his holiness and righteousness? (And that answers the question raised by the Ramban that this phrase seems to be superfluous.)

This understanding is supported by Targum Onkelos. When the Torah writes, "he appeared" in the context of a person appearing to another person, Onkelos translates it as "*ve'ischazi*." But when the Torah writes "He appeared" in the context of Hashem appearing to a prophet, Onkelos translates it as "*ve'isgali*." And here Onkelos

translates "and he appeared" as "*ve'isgali*."
(See also *Sefer Shaarei Aharon*.)

"*Ve'isgali*" refers to full prophecy in a fully awake state and not merely in a dream

One may also say that Onkelos's translation, "*ve'isgali*," teaches us that when Yosef met Yaakov, Hashem appeared to Yaakov in a fully awake state of prophecy (and not merely in a dream), in keeping with His promise, "I will descend with you to Egypt." Yaakov was thus filled with joy: not only had he found his son Yosef, but the Divine Presence was revealed to him in a waking state, as a result of which he experienced the highest level of revealed closeness to the Divine Presence. As a result, Yaakov felt the need to recite the *Shema* at that elevated moment.

When Yaakov saw his son Yosef before him, and he saw that Yosef was spiritually whole and unblemished, a heavenly spirit descended upon him. What can compare to the great and elevated state of a father when he sees his beloved and dear son remaining firm in the ways of his forefathers?

Immediately, Yaakov recited the *Shema*, because now, after so many years, the Divine Presence was revealed to him, and he needed to greet and acknowledge his Creator with the highest declaration of faith and holiness.

Hashem hinted to Yaakov that he would attain such supernal holiness that Yosef would not be able to look upon him

When Yosef met his father, he saw the great holiness that rested upon him. Yaakov was on the level of the Kohen Gadol during the Kohen Gadol's blessing of the people. When the Kohanim bestow blessing upon the people, they are at that moment so holy that it is forbidden to gaze upon them. Yosef thus placed his hand upon his father's eyes so that he would not gaze upon his father's extraordinary holiness.

And that is what Hashem had indicated to Yaakov in his dream: "Do not fear going down to Egypt; Yosef will place his hand upon your eyes" – meaning, as soon as you come to Egypt, you will attain such holiness that Yosef will need to place his hand over your eyes so as not to look into

them. I would suggest that this may be where our universal and ancient custom to cover our eyes when we say the first verse of the *Shema* has originated from.