WHAT TO PRAY: SET PRAYERS: SHEMA

SHEMA: MENTAL PREPARATION

Shema: Mental Preparation

When saying the *shema*, focus on the idea that God is:

- Everywhere,
- Infinite,
- Unique,
- Present now and always.

Witness to God's Uniqueness

We are witnesses to the fact that God is unique, as alluded to in the word "eid"--made up of the "ayin" of *shema* and the "dalet" of echad.

Love God

We are required to love God with our:

- **Hearts** (Good Inclination--yetzer ha'tov--and Evil Inclination--yetzer ha'ra),
- **Souls** (regardless of whether we are happy with *Hashem*'s decrees or not), and
- **"Much-ness"** (interpreted to mean with all of our material belongings).

SHEMA: WHAT TO WEAR

What To Wear for Shema in Shacharit

Men should wear a *talit katan* (for married men, also wear a *talit gadol*) and *tefilin* in order to say *shema* in *shacharit*. However, if none are available, say the *shema* without them.

SHEMA: WHAT TO SAY

Men and Shema in Shacharit

Men must say *shema* in *shacharit* and the blessings before and after.

Women and Shema in Shacharit

Women are not required to say the full *shema* or the blessings before it. Even if women do not say the whole *shema*, it is proper for them to say the first line of the *shema* and *baruch shem kevod malchuto l'olam va'ed*.

NOTE If women say entire *shema*, even though they are not required to do so, it is a *mitzva*.

Amen before Shema

Some say the pre-*shema* blessing in *shacharit* or *ma'ariv* with the leader. Best is to finish the blessing before the leader does and then reply *amen* when he finishes saying the blessing.

Baruch Hu before Shema

Don't say *baruch hu u'varuch shemo* in response to a prayer leader saying the two pre-*shema* blessings.

Starting Shema before Prayer Leader Says

If you are late to *shacharit* or *ma'ariv minyan* and start the *shema* before the prayer leader has finished saying "*emet*" at the end of the *shema*, do not say *El melech ne'eman*.

SHEMA: HOW TO SAY

Covering Eyes for First Line of Shema

Cover your eyes with either hand when saying the first line of *shema*. This is to help prevent distraction. There is no need to remove your glasses first.

NOTE Covering your eyes for the *shema* is a widespread custom, not a *halacha*.

"Stretching Out" Echad in Shema

Stretch out the first line of the *shema* by pausing after saying "*echad*" and before saying *Baruch shem kevod malchuto l'olam va'ed*.

NOTE

- It is incorrect to stretch out the "*chet*" + vowel sound *(chaaaaaad*).
- It is incorrect (and much worse) to say a vowel sound after the "*dalet*" *(echadihhh!)*, since that changes the word and by doing so, you are not saying the *shema*.
- The *"dalet"* stops the sound and should not be pronounced as a syllable.

Kissing Tzitziyot in Shema

Kiss all four *tzitziyot* in a *talit gadol* when saying the *shema*. Just kiss the front two *tzitziyot* if you only wear a *talit katan*. Doing either one is a non-binding custom, not a *halacha*.

GA'AL YISRAEL/ HAMELECH BI'CHVODO

Saying Ga'al Yisrael with Leader or Amen

The prayer leader should say out loud the blessing preceding the *amida (ga'al yisrael* for *shacharit; ha'melech bi'chvodo* for *ma'ariv*). If you:

- Are up to where he is in the prayers, say the last blessing with him (and don't say *amen* but do say *amen* in *ma'ariv*).
- Pray slowly and will not be able to join the *minyan* for saying the *amida*, you should start earlier than the *minyan* and catch up at *ga'al yisrael*.

© Copyright 2026 Richard B. Aiken | www.practicalhalacha.com