

The Six Idioms of the Shema

from Harav Yitzchak Ginsburgh

The *Shema* is the essential statement of Jewish faith, "Hear O' Israel, *Havayah* is our God, *Havayah* is One." The first word of the *Shema*, "hear" (שָׁמַע, *shema*), has 3 letters, which can be permuted in six different ways. Each of these permutations alludes to either part of a verse or to a Rabbinical idiom. Let us write these out:

שמע – "Raise your eyes upwards" (שָׂאוּ מְרוֹם עֵינֶיכֶם), a phrase from Isaiah 40:26.

שעמ – "A flame rising on its own" (שָׁלַח בָּת עוֹלָה מֵאֵלֶיהָ), a Rabbinic idiom from *Shabbat* 21a (see also *Rashi* to Exodus 27:20).

מעש – "Who has ascended to the heavens?" (מִי עָלָה שָׁמַיִם), a phrase from Proverbs 30:4.

משע – "The Place of the World" (מְקוֹמוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם), a Rabbinic connotation for the Creator.

See in length in the [article](#) on our website.

עשמ – "Above all You have placed Your abode" (עָלִיוֹן שְׁמַתְּ מְעוֹנָךְ), a phrase from Psalms 91:9.

עמש – "The yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven" (עוֹל מְלָכוּת שָׁמַיִם), a Rabbinic idiom specifically related to the intent of the *Shema*, i.e., taking on the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven. See *Berachot* 13a.

Now, let us further explore this topic by introducing Kabbalistic permutation theory.

Kabbalistic Permutation Theory

Kabbalistic writings discuss the secrets of permutation,¹ or, as we would call it in more modern terms, permutation theory. The goal of Kabbalistic permutation theory is to correctly correspond any three elements, let us call them a, b, and c, to the six emotive *sefirot*, from loving-kindness to foundation.

Given 3 distinct elements, a, b, and c, clearly, there are six possible permutations: abc, acb, bca, bac, cab, cba. Using a very basic mathematical transformation rule,² these six permutations correspond to the six attributes of the heart in the following manner:



might		loving-kindness
bca		abc
	beauty	
	cab	
acknowledgment		victory
bac		acb
	foundation	
	cba	

This is the bare-bones correspondence and is very straightforward. However, now let us note that given any three terms, their identification as a, b, and c is not arbitrary. Rather, Kabbalistic permutation theory requires that the three terms correctly correspond to the three intellectual *sefirot*: wisdom (a), understanding (b), and knowledge (c).

Correctly identifying which of the three terms corresponds to which of the intellectual *sefirot* is the crux of the issue and requires that one have a great deal of experience with this topic (i.e., having studied how this is done for many 3-letter roots) and a great deal of Kabbalistic intuition (something that obviously cannot be taught).³

The Idioms and the Sefirot

Returning to the first word of the *Shema*, **שמע**, our first step is to identify to which of the three intellectual *sefirot* each letter of the word corresponds. Based on our teachings elsewhere, the correspondence is:

ש – wisdom

מ – understanding

ע – knowledge

Which gives us the following chart,

might שעמ שְׁלֵהֶבֶת עוֹלָה מֵאֵלֶיהָ		loving-kindness משע מְקוֹמוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם
	beauty עמש עוֹל מְלֻכּוֹת שָׁמַיִם	
acknowledgment שמע שָׂאוּ מְרוֹם עֵינֵיכֶם		victory מעש מִי עֲלָה שָׁמַיִם
	foundation עשמ עֲלִיזוֹן שְׁמֵת מְעוֹנָךְ	

1. See our Hebrew volume *Sod Hashem Leyerei'av*, pp. ??? for a more in depth explanation of this topic.

2. It is left for the reader to find the rule for this transformation. Once the rule is found, notice that it parallels the left hand and right hand rules in vector algebra. More specifically, the transformation used for loving-kindness, might, and beauty corresponds to the left-hand rule, resulting in a negative z-axis vector, indicating that these 3 *sefirot* are pointed inwards. The transformation for victory, acknowledgment, and foundation corresponds to the right-hand rule, resulting in a positive z-axis vector and indicating that these 3 *sefirot* point outwards.

3. Now, let us rewrite the above correspondence using more traditional Kabbalistic notation. For a, b, and c we use the three unique letters of God's essential Name, *Havayah*, י (*yud*), ה (*hei*), and ו (*vav*), which themselves correspond to wisdom, understanding, and knowledge, respectively. In addition, we will now note the correspondence of the letters י, ה, and ו, to the *sefirot* as well, including the three heads of the *sefirah* of crown.

	the unknowable head י	
	the head of nothingness ה	
	the head of patience ו	
understanding ה		Wisdom י
	Knowledge ו	
might הוי		loving-kindness יהו
	Beauty ויה	
acknowledgment היו		Victory ויה
	Foundation ההי	
	Kingdom ה	