

Important Instant Insight:

The idea of an “עול—yoke,” as in the concept of “עול מלכות שמים—accepting the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven,” seems to carry an image of mitzvos being a heavy, difficult burden that we shlep around on our backs our whole life. True, at times mitzvos seem “heavy” and difficult, and we are obligated to persevere.

But the choice of the term עול carries a profound message. As I heard from Rav Matisyahu Solomon, shlita, a yoke is simply a tool that allows the animal to do its job in the most efficient and easy way possible. How else could it pull the wagon if it did not have a yoke? So too, when we proclaim the Shema and publicly accept עול מלכות שמים, the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, we must realize that the mitzvos are perfectly crafted, precise tools that allow us to do OUR job here on earth! How would we manage without them?

Instant Insight:

The letters of the word ע-ש-מ are the same as the letters that begin עול מלכות שמים but backward! The message is that even when Torah laws and values seem “backward” to us—as if they make no sense—nevertheless we accept that in truth they are **the** tools for our success.

Instant Insight:

In the Torah, the pasuk of the Shema has the letters ע and ו (which spell עד—witness) enlarged. The very miracle of our survival—that after all these years Jews all over the world are united in their proclamation of the Shema—is witness to the truth of the Torah!

OK, I'll Do It!

קריאת שמע—עול מלכות שמים

שמע / ברוך שם / ואהבת / והיה / ויאמר

There are many levels of meaning to this crucial pasuk that we should have in mind as we proclaim the essence of our belief. Here we will present two of the most basic concepts one should have in mind when reciting the Shema.

If you are davening without a minyan, add the following three words:

אל מלך נאמן

Hashem is a merciful, fair, and trustworthy King.

שִׁמְעַיִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד:

בלחש: ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד:

שִׁמְעַיִשְׂרָאֵל—As a proud member of Bnei Yisrael, I publicly proclaim; that יְהוָה—the Eternal God, Who always was, is, and will be; אֱלֹהֵינוּ—I accept as our personal, all-powerful God (*with all the responsibilities that come with that!*); יְהוָה—and that God, Who controls all aspects of my life and of the universe; is אֶחָד—the One and Only controlling power.

In addition, one should have in mind:

שִׁמְעַיִשְׂרָאֵל—As a proud member of Bnei Yisrael, I publicly proclaim; that יְהוָה—the Name that represents God's attribute of mercy; אֱלֹהֵינוּ—is the same God as Elokim, the Name that represents His attribute of strict judgment; אֶחָד יְהוָה—it is all the same God; all is merciful, since all that He does is for our good (*just that sometimes the “medicine” is bitter*).

Quietly:

ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו—May the perception of Hashem's Presence and rulership be increased (*so all humans will recognize His existence and power*); לעולם ועד—forever and ever.

Next, the Torah describes the obligation of each individual:

וְאָהַבְתָּ אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְבְּךָ—And you must love Hashem with your whole heart; וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ—and dedicate all your talents, your unique personality, all your

וְאָהַבְתָּ אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל מְאֹדְךָ וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוְנֶךָ הַיּוֹם עַל