

Tefilati – Shema and V'ahavta

Topic

Prayer, *Shema* and *V'ahavta*

Grade Level(s)

8th – 12th

Big Ideas

Modern interpretations of traditional prayers can offer new avenues for connection.

Learning Targets

Students will:

1. Learn modern interpretations of the *Shema* and *V'ahavta*
2. Compare and contrast the traditional and modern meanings of the *Shema* and *V'ahavta*
3. Create personal meaning using multiple ways of expression

Relevant Vocabulary

תְּפִלָּתִי (<i>Tefilati</i>)	My Prayer
שְׁמַע (<i>Shema</i>)	Hear
וְאַהֲבָתְךָ (<i>V'ahavta</i>)	You Should Love
עֵד (<i>Eid</i>)	Witness
דְּבָרִים (<i>Devarim</i>)	Deuteronomy
סִידוּר / סִידוּרִים (<i>Siddur / Siddurim</i>)	Prayer Book(s)

Materials / Technology Needed

- [Shma Israel Elohai Song](#)
- [“Shema” by Primo Levi](#)
- [Translated article from Kikar](#)
- [Poll Everywhere](#)
- [Nearpod](#) Code J9X58
- iPads, iPhones, Macs, or Chromebooks (for students)

Background for Teachers

Shema and V'ahavta

Shema is one of the most central elements of Jewish prayer. Traditionally the full version consists of three paragraphs which are recited in the morning and at night (*Mishnah Berachot* 1:1 – 2, *Mishneh Torah* Laws of Reading the *Shema* 1:2). The source of the first paragraph is *Devarim* 6:4-9. This first paragraph is also traditionally recited before bed. The first line is the last thing recited as part of the confession that one says before dying. The 2nd century *Rabbi Akiva* recited it as he was tortured to death by the Romans (*Tractate Berachot* 61b) and since then it has become the common prayer to say especially during self-sacrifice (*al kiddush HaShem*).

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The six words of the *Shema* are followed by a paragraph called *V'ahavta* (*Devarim* 6:4 – 9), in which instructions are given for how to love God.

This activity focuses on the *Shema* and *V'ahavta* only as it appears in the biblical source and not as it appears in *siddurim*. As traditionally recited, there is usually a line, *בְּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מְלֻכּוֹתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד*, right after the first verse of this prayer. However, this line will not be part of this activity.

Shema Israel Elohai Song

The song *Shema Israel Elohai*, also known as “*K'shehalev Bocheh* (When the Heart Cries),” was written by Yossi Gispán and Arlet Tzfadia after the lynching of two Israeli soldiers in Ramallah in 2000. (Sarit Hadad sings the song in the YouTube link included in this activity.) This song accompanies many soldiers from the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and Israeli students who visit the Nazi extermination camps in Europe. These trips, sponsored by the Israel Ministry of Education, are an attempt to educate young people on the tragic history of once vibrant Jewish communities. This song is sung in many official *Yom Hazikaron* military ceremonies throughout IDF bases and educational facilities all over Israel.

Please note that the line from the Torah refers to “God as ours” while this song refers to “God as mine.” Discuss with learners the difference between crying out to God personally and crying out as part of a community.

Shema – Poem by Primo Levi

Primo Levi was an Italian Jewish chemist, partisan, Holocaust survivor, and writer. He wrote the poem “*Shema*” in 1946 as the Nuremberg trials were getting underway. The poem was originally titled “Psalm.” The poem has three different sections, bearing a stylistic similarity with the three paragraphs of the *Shema*. The first one is a description of the post-war environment. The middle one is a description of the Holocaust. The last section invokes the most important prayer in Judaism, the *Shema*, which is also the title of the poem. Levi puts forth a powerful admonition and warning to future generations to educate their children about the lessons of the Holocaust.

Description of Activities

- Poll students – ask them what is:
 - 1) The most important prayer to them
 - 2) The most important prayer to the community as a whole
 - 3) The prayer they have the most difficulty understanding

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After reading the poll results, take the opportunity to discuss what learners think about what is meaningful personally in comparison to what is important communally and seeing how much they are similar and/or different in this case.

- Go to Nearpod.com, type the code J9X58 to access the lesson and the interactive activities. With Nearpod teachers can:
 - Engage learners in interactive activities with any device, any system, and iOS or Android.
 - Share interactive activities in the physical classroom, hybrid settings, or virtually.
- How to Join Nearpod with a Code?
 - Learners go to nearpod.com/student, or open the Android or iOS app, and enter the five-character code provided by the teacher.
 - Once learners enter the code or click on a link to join an activity, they will see the screen below and enter their name (no nicknames) to join the lesson.

Differentiation Options

Knowing that students learn in a variety of ways and modalities, the following options are provided to adjust the above lesson to meet the unique needs of your learners.

For learners who need more assistance

- Learners illustrate the *Shema* and *V'ahavta* by creating a photo collage using photos or pictures from magazines. Alternatively, learners create a digital collage using online pictures or photos.
- Learners do a web search for renditions of *Shema* and *V'ahavta*. (Choose the one you like best and explain what you like about the rendition.)

For learners who need extension opportunities

- Learners research the life of [Primo Levi](#).
- Learners write their own *Shema* poem or *Shema* song.