



Why Does SAM Choose to Use the Shema and Hebrew Prayers?

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We are having an influx of guests and new members which is leading to some very good questions! This one came up recently, about the reason for using Hebrew prayers and the Shema. It is especially poignant because some new members have expressed concerns about getting caught up into Talmudic practices. As I recall, I believe that was a concern for me in the early years, too, though I think it took a while before I understood it as an issue with Talmud.

Since the basis for many traditional "Jewish prayers" comes from Rabbinic Judaism, it seems wise to add this bit of history. At the time of the destruction of the Temple, after Messiah Yeshua's death and resurrection, and the dispersion of the people, there was concern over how to maintain the faith. Rabbinic teachers came into ascent at this time. Rabbinic Judaism believes and teaches that at least TWO Torah's were given on Mount Sinai: the written One that essentially is the "Old Testament" --Genesis through Deuteronomy--as Christians view it, and the Oral one: which were more basic or specific instructions that YHWH was believed to have given Moses that were not written down but passed on orally. When the destruction of the Temple led to concern as to how to maintain the faith, the oral tradition was written down; the Mishnah and the two Talmuds. It was at this time, too, that the prayers of malediction (essentially cursing) toward those who believed that Yeshua was Messiah were added. Some even believe that a third "Torah" was given which was hidden and only later revealed through the Zohar. A common struggle among those who want to honor both the Written and the Living Torah--both of which we see in Messiah Yeshua--is whether to honor the Oral Traditions at all. If they are to be honored, a second struggle follows to determine how much of these Oral traditions later written down, are to be honored to the same degree as the Written Torah. It is our conclusion thus far, that even if there were instructions given to Moses that he was not to write down, and even if we could be certain that these instructions remained accurate without interpretation, they would be of secondary importance. We do not support the Rabbinic Judaism focus on Talmud that often overshadows and re interprets Torah but we do want to honor the Hebraic focus we understand from the Written Torah.

We have declared in SAM that our intent is to walk the road of YHWH, and Messiah, the Living Torah, as closely as we comprehend --to avoid falling into the ditches on either side: the one being the Christian traditions we have come from that are outside Scriptures and the other

being the Rabbinic Judaism/Talmudic traditions that were added to Torah observance. We do not want to offend our brother Judah/Jewish ways, but affirm also that we do not need to become Judah/Jewish and that our first concern is to honor YHWH and His Word. We understand that we are grafted in as our Abba knows as part of the whole commonwealth of Israel, and thus our identity is with all Israel. One day, we understand that Judah will take their place as the leader of praise, but we do not think that will occur until they, as a whole, look on the One Who was Pierced, and receive Him. We are always learning and remain teachable should something come forward to cause us to change this stance.

So let's begin with the Shema:

"Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one" Deuteronomy 6:4

The Shema is Scriptural...a declaration essentially, from a Hebraic standpoint, and it is a blessing. It is known by all those who honor the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all over the world. It relates to His Kingship and is a sort of declaration of faith. The melody is singular and also known all over the world. In this sense, it is part of our identity as those who honor the God of Israel, of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to sing the Shema, which calls us to honor Him, the One True God.

Rabbinic Judaism teaches that the YHWH, Tetragramaton, is the ineffable Name of God, so should not be spoken, substituting "Adonai." This concern about misusing the Name is a concern to be acknowledged, however the substitutions of Adonai/Lord or HaShem/The Name came from a Babylonian practice they picked up during the dispersion. Our articles on "[How Shall We Call Him?](#)" offer a little more detail there, but suffice it to say for now that it is our understanding that our Elohim has called us in His Word to call on His covenant Name so we do not use the substitution. It is considered offensive to most Jewish people to do so and would perhaps even cause them to question genuine belief. It is not our intent to be offensive to our Jewish brothers and sisters, however, we find it important to honor the direction we find in the Word.

"Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever"

This is the second line of the form of the Shema we usually use as a **Call to Worship**. It is a Rabbinic addition, but relates to Psalm 72: 19 so again, is Scriptural:

"Blessed be his glorious name"

It was not originally spoken out loud, but as a murmured response to the first line. There are some slight translation differences as well. We understand it as "Blessed be His Name [and] His glorious kingdom which is forever and ever." This seems to be a common issue we have observed: the tendency to confuse the nation of Israel or the Kingdom with the Person of YHWH/Maschiach.

We used to laugh about trying to find others who were also interested in Hebraic/Messianic Torah and I remember one man suggesting that he had thought of just whistling the tune at work one day to see who might recognize it....

We also have a recorded Shema that has an additional verse, specifically naming Messiah Yeshua, that would not be used in an Orthodox gathering for sure!

Yeshua, He is the Messiah, He is Lord forever.

Let's move on to consider Hebrew prayers:

Generally, our Shabbat gatherings do not include a great deal of liturgy other than the Shema and Blessings Before and After reading the Torah. Yom haKipperim is sometimes an exception when it has seemed apropos to use more liturgical prayers. We have a Messianic siddur which we draw from which was adapted by Tim Hegg of Torah Resources.

We have spent a great deal of time over the years considering what is just tradition and what is commanded. And of whatever is tradition, is it still honoring to our Elohim or does it draw people away from Him and into something we don't consider "holy?" Holy-- which is the Hebrew word, *Kadosh*, usually translated as "holy" but we understand it is more accurately meaning being "Set apart" for a special purpose. It is important what one is set apart TO, since it could be for a good or a not good purpose. For instance, temple prostitutes of pagan gods were "set apart" to that pagan god, and people are set apart to honor the Baal's. We choose to be set apart/holy to our Elohim, YHWH, and Yeshua.

If something is traditional, but we can see a purpose and a place for it, without it leading anyone astray, we have not avoided it. On the other hand, some traditions are simply just that, traditions and sometimes, as in Talmud, even superstition, witchcraft and occult in nature. So those we stay clear of to the best of our understanding!

I used the term "liturgy" with which some may not be familiar.

When you go to a church such as Lutheran or Catholic, there is a prescribed order of prayers, readings, songs, etc. that you can expect will be followed by any of these churches. In Lutheran sense, it is about order and therefore, being able to come together as a people praising Him: first, we acknowledge and praise our God. Then we come to Him with our needs. Then we hear from His Word, which is Him coming to us, and close again in praise. That is a close representation from what I recall! It is tradition, but it is drawn from Scripture or scriptural understanding. For some people liturgy is very meaningful, and reliable...a rock to count on in storms of life that brings comfort to them to honor it as they seek Messiah. Sometimes, the downside, is that it becomes rote and people go through it with little to no thought or heart intent. Yet this can happen to just about anything if one's heart is not right.

Hebraic practice, continued by Rabbinic Judaism in some cases, also includes liturgy. Specific prayers and orders of readings, psalms, songs, etc. Jewish people/Rabbi's tend to explain such things as being "commandments" of Yah, where we would often differ and see that they are NOT commanded in Torah, but elsewhere, as in from Talmud for instance. or historical tradition. While we don't generally use "liturgy" we do have that Messianic Siddur, which is an adapted form of the Hebrew/Judaism Siddur. Siddur means "order" and is a listing of daily prayers and readings, and services for various Moedim gatherings. I think all of us also have a hard cover Siddur for those occasions when we draw from it. For some reason, Yom haKipperim is usually about the only Feast Day that we use an extended specific order, unless you also count the Pesach/Passover Haggadah. This is similar in that it is an "order" to help us recount the memory of all that our Elohim did in delivering His people from Egypt. In our case, we also rehearse the Marriage Feast of the Lamb, seeing Passover as a kind of betrothal ceremony, too.

We generally are not liturgical in a strict Hebraic sense, but we do honor the God of Israel, Who chose the Hebrew language and culture to be a kingdom of priests to Him, for Yeshua Messiah to be born through that culture. We do understand that we have been grafted in to the family of Yah by our faith in Messiah Yeshua...and that the Jew will also have to be re-grafted into their own tree by faith in Yeshua.

Hebrew language is then considered holy, set apart. "*lashon kodesh*" or "language holy/set apart" so we honor Him by learning to speak His chosen set apart language, and by adopting the appropriate daily prayers. I know some Messianic people do adopt the practice of prayer at the specified times of day and they use many of the written prayers. In Jewish culture there is a prayer for just about anything imaginable! As in the joke in the movie, **Fiddler on the Roof**: Is there a blessing for the Czar? (The one who was persecuting the Jews.) The local rabbi thinks for a moment and finally says, May God bless and keep the Czar.....far away from us!

I don't think that anyone in our local SAM community has made this a regular personal practice, but it is not a problem if so. We are more focused on personal spontaneous prayer as well as praying His Word back to Him as we seek His Face and His Hand in our concerns. We have done training on both personal prayer and corporate prayer to help all grow in this privilege and discipline...and a reason that we do a prayer lottery, which is based on a practice in the Temple, per Joe Good's teaching, to determine who Yah chooses to lead our community prayer time weekly. We think that this is an honor and a privilege to be called on in this way, so it is good for all to have an opportunity to learn how to lead in prayer in community. Sometimes, particularly at *mikveh* gatherings, I have written prayers for us all to speak together, which is usually a form of declaration of something important that we all choose to stand together in.

While we take the stance that we do not want to put Judah/Jews on a pedestal and try to become Jews, or play at being Jewish, since they have not yet received Messiah, neither do we want to demean or belittle them as they are the roots for our faith...Paul spoke of this in Romans, telling us not to boast against the branches! Unfortunately, that is what all too many traditional Christians have done...exactly that...boasting against the root!

do not boast over the [broken] branches and exalt yourself at their expense. If you do boast and feel superior, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root that supports you.

Romans 11:18 Amplified Bible

So we have seen no danger in using the traditional prayers before and after reading of the Torah or study, and do see value in that it emphasizes that this is a special set apart time in which we are going to Him through His Word and we DO want to hear back from Him.