

# ***Deuteronomy***

## ***Lesson #5***

***Love the Lord, your God***

***(6: 1-25)***

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# Review

Lesson #4 began Moses' 2<sup>nd</sup> Discourse, which sprawls across Deuteronomy 4: 44 – 29: 1, a expansive body of teaching that forms the core of Deuteronomy. As we learned, *torah* is not simply the Pentateuch, or the five books of Moses, but rather God's comprehensive, all encompassing teaching, a teaching that—if followed—enables God's covenant people to live life fully and abundantly in the Promised Land.

We also learned that if Israel adheres steadfastly to *torah*, she will be a “light to the nations,” a model of fulfilled human potential for all people.

The Decalogue, or the Ten Commandments, comprise the heart of *torah*, and we found that Deuteronomy stresses the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment—to observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy. By rigorously observing the Sabbath—week after week, month after month, year after year—each Israelite would remain centered in God and experience “rest,” a profound sense of completeness and human fulfillment.

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# Preview

Deuteronomy 6-11 introduces the expansive body of statutes and ordinances contained in chapters 12-26, and it does so by reemphasizing and expanding upon the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment, that YHWH alone is Israel's God, a God who invites Israel into an intimate, covenant relationship with himself.

As a covenant people, it follows, then, that Israel is to love the Lord their God with all their heart, being and strength.

Deuteronomy 6: 4-9—traditionally called the “Shema”—is Israel's foundational statement of faith, its credo. Jesus calls it “*the greatest and the first commandment,*” containing within itself the whole law of God (Matthew 22: 37-38).

In Lesson #5 we examine the Shema closely, and we learn its implications.



**In Deuteronomy 6: 1-3 Moses introduces Israel's great statement of faith, the Shema.**

**He does so by reminding the Israelites of the ten commandments just given to them, and of their obligation to obey those commandments and to teach them to their children and grandchildren, generation after generation.**

**Only by doing so will the Israelites live a long and prosperous life in the land they are about to possess.**

“This then is the commandment, the statutes and the ordinances, which the Lord, your God, has commanded that you be taught to observe in the land you are about to cross into to possess, so that you, that is, you, your child, and your grandchild, may fear the Lord, your God, by keeping, as long as you live, all his statutes and commandments which I enjoin on you, and thus have long life. Hear then, Israel, and be careful to observe them, that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly; for the Lord, the God of your ancestors, promised you a land flowing with milk and honey.”

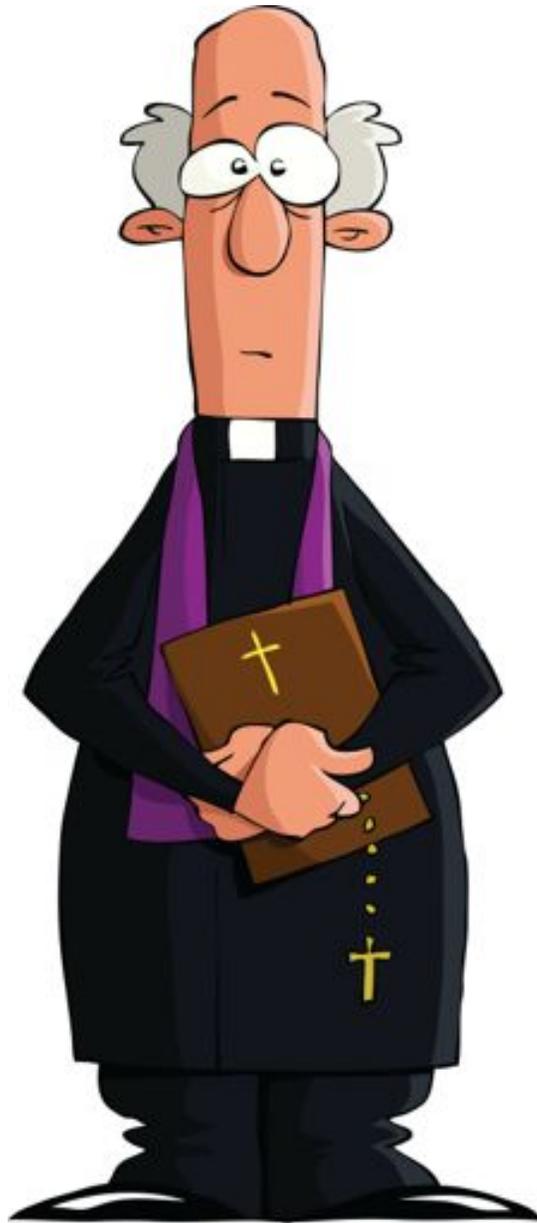
(6: 1-3)

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**Deuteronomy repeatedly stresses the causal link between fidelity to God and prospering in the land. This link is the driving principle behind Scripture's understanding of history.**

**If Israel obeys God, they will prosper; if they don't, they won't.**



**Love for God should be our motive for obeying his commands, statutes and ordinances, yet Moses reminds the Israelites to “fear the Lord” if they wish to “have a long life” and prosper in the land.**

**This is not the first time we’ve read about the “fear of the Lord,” so we need to take a close look at the phrase.**



The Hebrew word translated “fear” is *yare* [yah-ray’]. It occurs 422 times in 373 verses of the Hebrew Scriptures, and its use ranges widely.

When used in the phrase as a noun, “fear of the Lord,” or as a verb, “fear God,” it has a specific meaning, one associated with the *numinous*, a word coined by the German theologian Rudolf Otto in *The Idea of the Holy* (1917).

C.S. Lewis describes it best:

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**C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)  
Christian Apologist and  
Professor of Medieval and Renaissance  
Literature, Magdalene College, Cambridge.**

**“Suppose you were told there was a tiger in the next room: you would know that you were in danger and would probably feel fear. But if you were told ‘There is a ghost in the next room,’ and believed it, you would feel, indeed, what is often called fear, but of a different kind . . . . It is ‘uncanny’ rather than dangerous, and the special kind of fear it excites may be called Dread. With the Uncanny one has reached the fringes of the Numinous . . . .**

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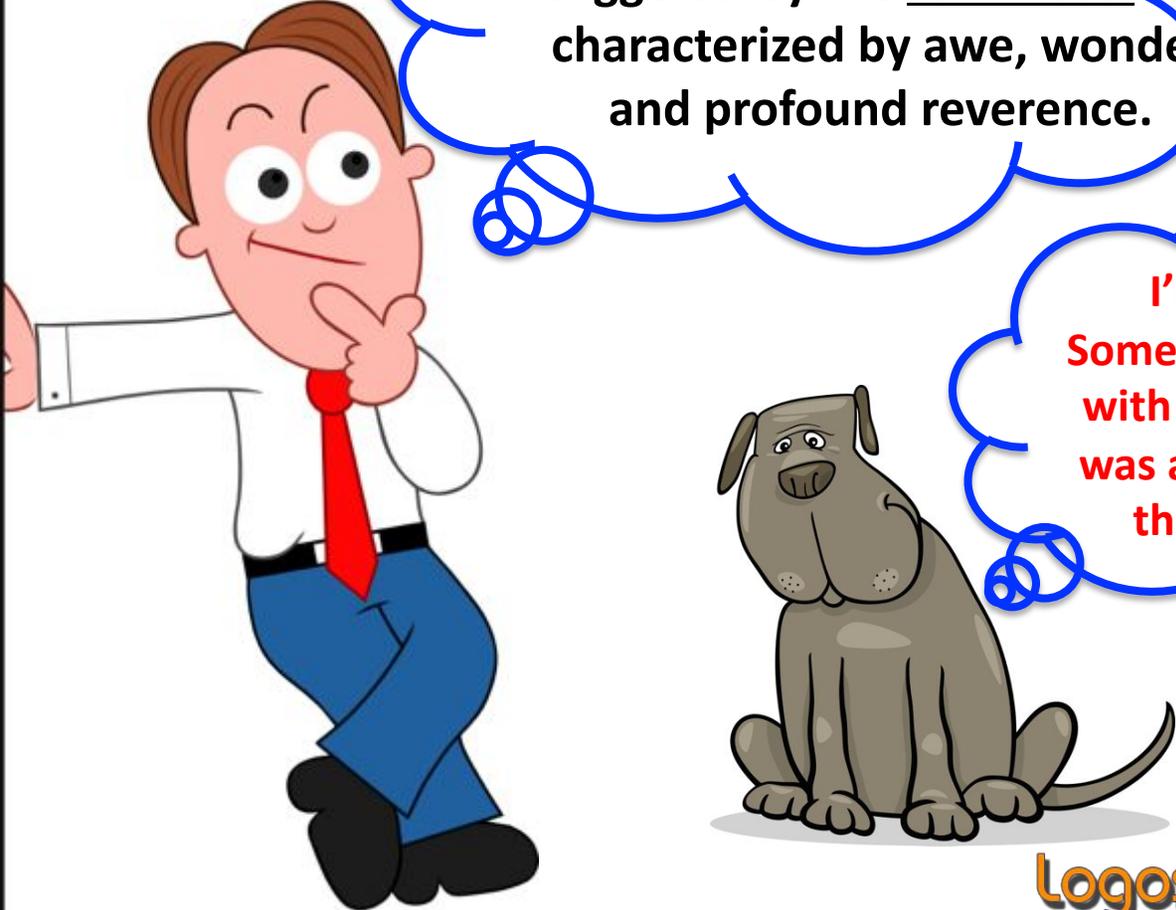


C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)  
Christian Apologist and  
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Now suppose that you were told simply ‘There is a mighty spirit in the room,’ and believed it. Your feelings would then be even less like the mere fear of danger: but the disturbance would be profound. You would feel wonder and a certain shrinking—a sense of inadequacy to cope with such a visitant and of prostration before it—an emotion which might be expressed in Shakespeare’s words ‘Under it my genius is rebuked’. This feeling may be described as awe, and the object which excites it is the Numinous.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*The Problem of Pain* (New York: Harper Collins Ebooks, 2009), pp. 6-7.

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So the “fear of God” isn’t something triggered by danger or the fear of punishment; rather, it is triggered by the numinous and characterized by awe, wonder and profound reverence.

I’m glad of that!  
Someone tried to hit me with a stick once, and I was afraid. I didn’t like that feeling at all!

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**So, a better understanding of the “fear of the Lord” leads us to a better understanding of the “Shema,” Israel’s foundational statement of faith, its credo.**

## The Shema

“Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord [is one]! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength. Take to heart these words which I command you today. Keep repeating them to your children. Recite them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them on your arm as a sign and let them be as a pendant on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates.

(6: 4-9)



No English translation can capture the stark beauty and precision of the Shema's opening verse.

In Hebrew it is only 6 words long:

**Sh'ma Yisra'el YHWH Eloheinu YHWH Ehad.**

Sh'ma Listen, hear and do

Yisra'el Israel, in the sense of the people as a covenant community

YHWH YHWH is never spoken; read *Adonai*  
Eloheinu plural, 1<sup>st</sup> person possessive, *our* God, *us* as a covenant community

YHWH *Adonai*

Ehad the cardinal number "one"

Notice that not even a verb distracts from the opening verse's crystal-clear ring!

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Scribes who produce beautiful manuscripts of the Hebrew Scriptures often “frame” the Shema’s opening verse by enlarging two letters in the first and last words of the verse:

← **Read**

שְׁמַע | יִשְׂרָאֵל, \* יְהוָה | אֱלֹהֵינוּ, יְהוָה | אֶחָד \*:

— In an undertone כבוד שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד.

וְאֶהְבֶּתָּ \* אֶת יְהוָה | אֱלֹהֶיךָ, בְּכַל-לִבְבְּךָ, וּבְכַל-נַפְשְׁךָ,  
 וּבְכַל-מְאֹדְךָ: וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, אֲשֶׁר | אָנֹכִי  
 מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם, \* עַל-לִבְבְּךָ: וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבִנְיָיִךָ, וּדְבַרְתָּ בָּם, בְּשַׁבְּתֶךָ  
 בְּבֵיתְךָ, וּבְלִבְתֶּךָ בְּדֶרֶךְ, וּבְשַׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמָה: Touch the arm-tefillin at ... and the head-tefillin at ...  
 וְקִשַּׁרְתָּם \* לְאוֹת | עַל-יָדְךָ, וְהָיוּ לְטָטְפֹת ... then kiss your fingertips.  
 בֵּין | עֵינֶיךָ: וּכְתַבְתָּם | עַל-מְזוּזוֹת בֵּיתְךָ, וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ:

Splicing the two enlarged letters together forms the Hebrew word for “testimony” or “witness.” The Shema is a witness to the fundamental nature of God and of Israel’s relationship to him.



The key Hebrew word in the Shema is 'ehad, "one."

Sh'ma Yisra'el YHWH Eloheinu YHWH **Ehad.**

As Robert Alter points out:

*"Some translators render 'ehad, 'one,' as 'alone,' but the evidence that this common Hebrew numeral term ever meant that is questionable. The statement stands, then, as it has been traditionally construed, as a ringing declaration of monotheism."<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>2</sup> *The Five Books of Moses, a Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), p. 912.

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As Steven L. Cook observes, to say that God is “one” speaks of his all-encompassing “wholeness,” of his dominion in which each sphere of existence is integral to the whole of life, in stark contrast to the polytheism of Israel’s surrounding cultures.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Reading Deuteronomy, a Literary and Theological Commentary.* (Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys Publishers, Inc., 2015), p. 73.

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To say that God is “one” declares his one ineffable, unspeakably transcendent name, YHWH—a name repeated *twice* in the six words of the Shema’s opening verse.

And that name will tolerate no rivals. When the Israelites enter the land, they are to:

*“Destroy entirely all the places where the nations you are to dispossess serve their gods, on the high mountains, on the hills, and under every green tree. Tear down their altars, smash their sacred pillars, burn up their asherahs, and chop down the idols of their gods, that you may destroy the very name of them from that place.”*

(12: 2-3)

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God's name will reign in one land, with one people, who will worship in one place; in Josiah's day and in post-Babylonian Israel, that one place is the Temple in Jerusalem.

And because God is one and has assembled his people together as one community; because of the "wholeness" of God:

*"You shall love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength."*

(6: 5)

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- This new injunction to “*love the Lord, your God,*” is the proper response to God entering into an intimate, exclusive relationship with Israel, to God “betrothing” her.

- And that love is to be expressed with Israel’s:

- **whole heart**—the seat of both understanding and emotions in biblical physiology;
- **whole being**—the Hebrew *nefesh*, the “life-breath”; and
- **whole strength**—all your might.

Like three concentric circles, “heart,” “being” and “strength” build upon each other and result in an absolute, all-consuming and singular devotion to God.

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**These words must never be forgotten:**

***“Keep repeating them to your children. Recite them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up.”***

**(6: 5)**



•As Robert Alter observes, the Hebrew word translated “keep repeating” is *shinen*, a variant of *shanah*, “to repeat”; elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures it carries the sense of “sharp.”<sup>4</sup>

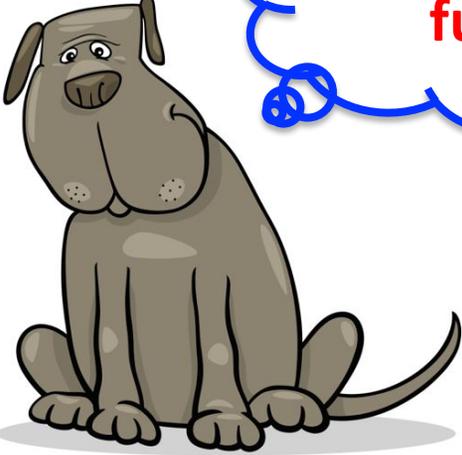
Perhaps here it might be rendered nicely as “teach incisively” or “rehearse with incisive effect.”

•In traditional Jewish homes, once a child begins to speak, his or her parents teach them, in Hebrew, the Shema, one word at a time.

<sup>4</sup> *The Five Books of Moses*, p. 912.



Steven L. Cook points out that the older New American Bible (NAB) translation reads *“drill them into your children,”* commenting wryly that “drill” shares the same Hebrew root as “tooth”!



Now that's funny!

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Ha, ha, ha!



Jews are also commanded to ***“bind them on your arm as a sign and let them be as a pendant on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates”*** (6: 8-9).

The words are figurative, of course, but Jewish tradition has made them literal.

In Roman times—and today—Jewish men wear “phylacteries” (or *tefillin*) during morning prayer, black leather boxes tied to their arm and forehead, boxes containing tiny vellum or parchment scrolls with the words of the Shema written on them.

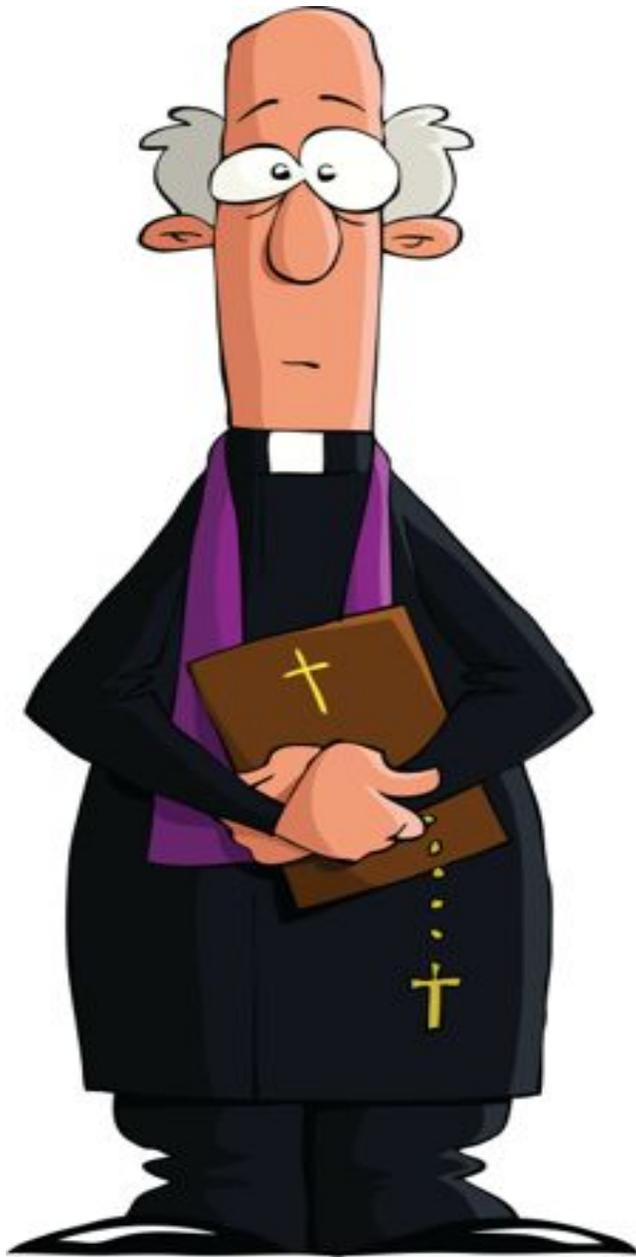


**An IDF soldier wearing phylacteries while praying.**



**Vellum scroll inside a tefillah.  
The Shema is written on it.**

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In Matthew's gospel, Jesus launches scathing criticism at the religious leaders in Jerusalem who *"widen their phylacteries and lengthen their tassels"* as a show of pompous piety. *"All their works,"* he says, *"are performed to be seen"* (23: 5). Hypocrites, all!

Yet, a man of his time, Jesus also practiced such religious customs. When in Matthew's gospel the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years saw Jesus, she *"came up behind him and touched the tassel on his cloak. She said to herself, 'If I can touch his cloak, I shall be cured'"* (9: 22-23).

The Greek word translated "tassel" is κράσπεδον [krah'-spe-don]; the Hebrew word is *tzizit*.



**“Woman with a Hemorrhage,”**  
*Très Riches Heures de duc de Berry*  
 (Tempera on vellum, Ms. 65), c. 1411-1416.  
 Musée Condé, Chantilly.



**“The tassel on his cloak” (Matthew 9: 20).**  
 The tzitzit on the hem of a tallit.  
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Jews are also commanded to “*write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates*” (6: 9), which led to the custom of attaching a *mezuzah* to a city gate and to the doorpost of a home.

The *mezuzah* is a vellum scroll on which is written the Shema. To be valid, the *mezuzah* must be written by a *sofer*, a specially trained scribe, and it is affixed to the right side of the doorpost, about shoulder height, at a slight angle, with the top pointing inward.

The case containing the mezuzah can be quite simple or very ornate.



Limited edition Marc Chigall *mezzuah*—  
VERY EXPENSIVE!

***Mezuzah* on the Jaffa Gate of the Old City, Jerusalem.**

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**As we observed, Deuteronomy repeatedly stresses the causal link between fidelity to God and prospering in the land.**

**If Israel obeys God, they will prosper; if they don't, they won't.**

**But with prosperity comes complacency, a grave danger for the Israelites—or for anyone else, for that matter!**

“When the Lord, your God, brings you into the land which he swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that he would give you, a land with fine, large cities that you did not build, with houses full of goods of all sorts that you did not garner, with cisterns that you did not dig, with vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant; and when, therefore, you eat and are satisfied, be careful not to forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that house of slavery. The Lord, your God, shall you fear; him shall you serve, and by his name shall you swear. You shall not go after other gods, any of the gods of the surrounding peoples—for the Lord, your God who is in your midst is a passionate God—lest the anger of the Lord, your God, flare up against you and he destroy you from upon the land.”

(6: 10-15)

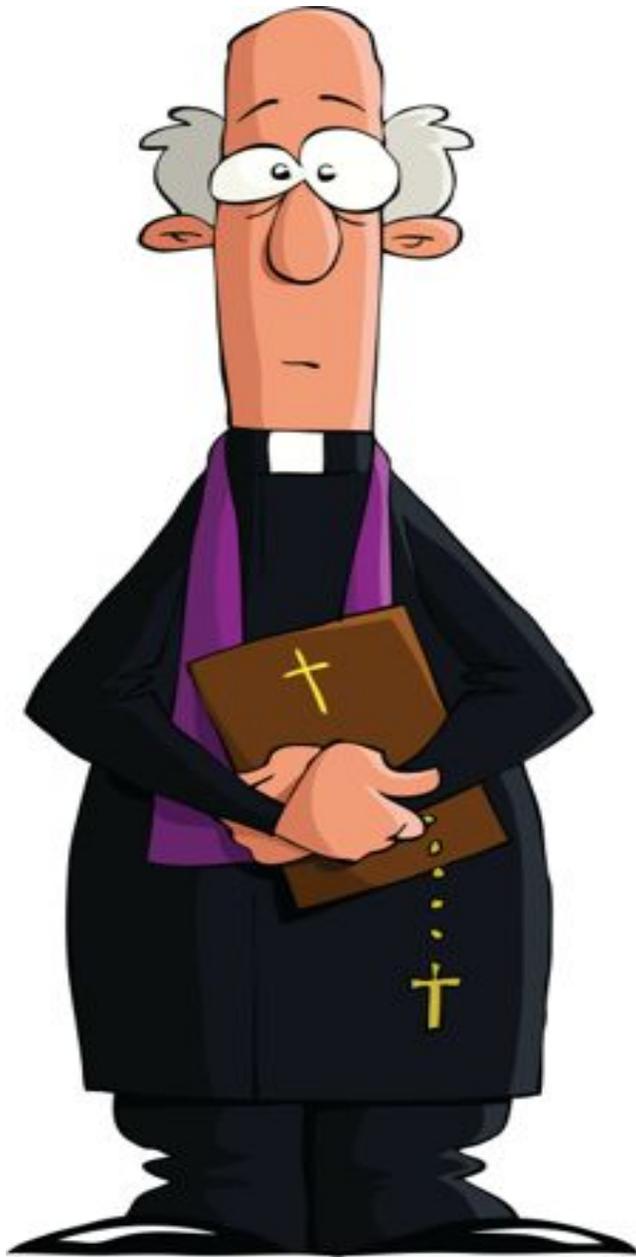
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**When the Israelites conquer the land of Canaan—the “Promised Land,” they will suddenly acquire considerable wealth and property they never earned.**

**They will be walking into cities they did not build, houses they did not buy and goods they did not garner; they will settle on land they did not farm, with olive trees and vineyards they did not plant and cisterns they did not dig.**

**Once settled in the land, the Israelites face the grave danger of forgetting God, of coveting their possessions and of becoming arrogant and self-satisfied.**



In the “Lord’s Prayer,” Jesus understands this. Teaching us to pray, he says:

*“Give us today our **daily bread**;  
and forgive us our debts,  
as we forgive our debtors;  
And do not subject us to the final test,  
but deliver us from the evil one.”*

(Matthew 6: 11-13)

Jesus’ prayer echoes the sayings of Agur in Proverbs:

*“Put falsehood and lying far from me,  
give me neither poverty nor riches;  
provide me only with the food I need;  
Lest, being full, I deny you,  
saying, ‘Who is the Lord?’  
Or, being in want, I steal,  
and profane the name of my God.”*

(Proverbs 30: 8-9)

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In Isaiah's scathing courtroom drama (Isaiah 1-35), God points at Israel in the docket and thunders:

*"The daughters of Zion are haughty,  
and walk with necks outstretched,  
ogling and mincing as they go,  
their anklets tinkling with every step."*

(Isaiah 3: 16)

And Proverbs tells us that God "hates" seven things:

*"There are six things the Lord hates,  
yes, seven are an abomination to him:  
haughty eyes, a lying tongue,  
hands that shed innocent blood,  
a heart that plots wicked schemes,  
feet that are quick to turn to evil,  
the false witness who utters lies,  
and the one who sows discord among kindred."*

(6: 16-19)

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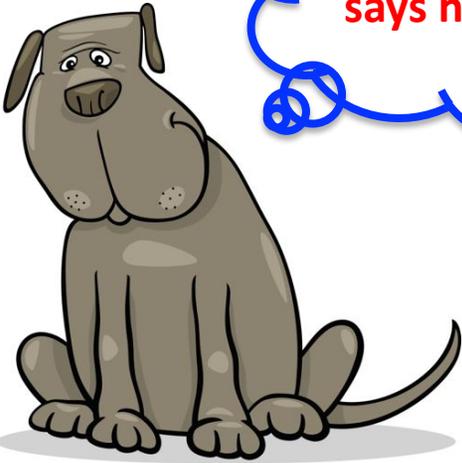
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A cartoon illustration of a man with brown hair, wearing a white shirt, a red tie, and blue pants. He is leaning against a vertical line on the left, with his hand to his chin in a thinking pose. A blue thought bubble is connected to his head.

Well, I'll be darned! I didn't know that God hated anything! It turns out he hates 7 things!

A cartoon illustration of a grey dog sitting on the ground, looking towards the man. A blue thought bubble is connected to the dog's head.

Actually, he hates 8. In Malachi 1: 3, God says he hates Esau, too!

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“You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test, as you did at Massah. But keep the commandments of the Lord, your God, and the decrees and the statutes he has commanded you. Do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord, that it may go well with you, and you may enter in and possess the good land which the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors, driving all your enemies out of your way, as the Lord has promised.”

(6: 16-19)

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**“You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the **test**, as you did at Massah . . .”**

Verses 16-19 address a threat closely related to self-sufficiency, that of the human craving for *control*, for living life on our own terms, rather than on God’s.

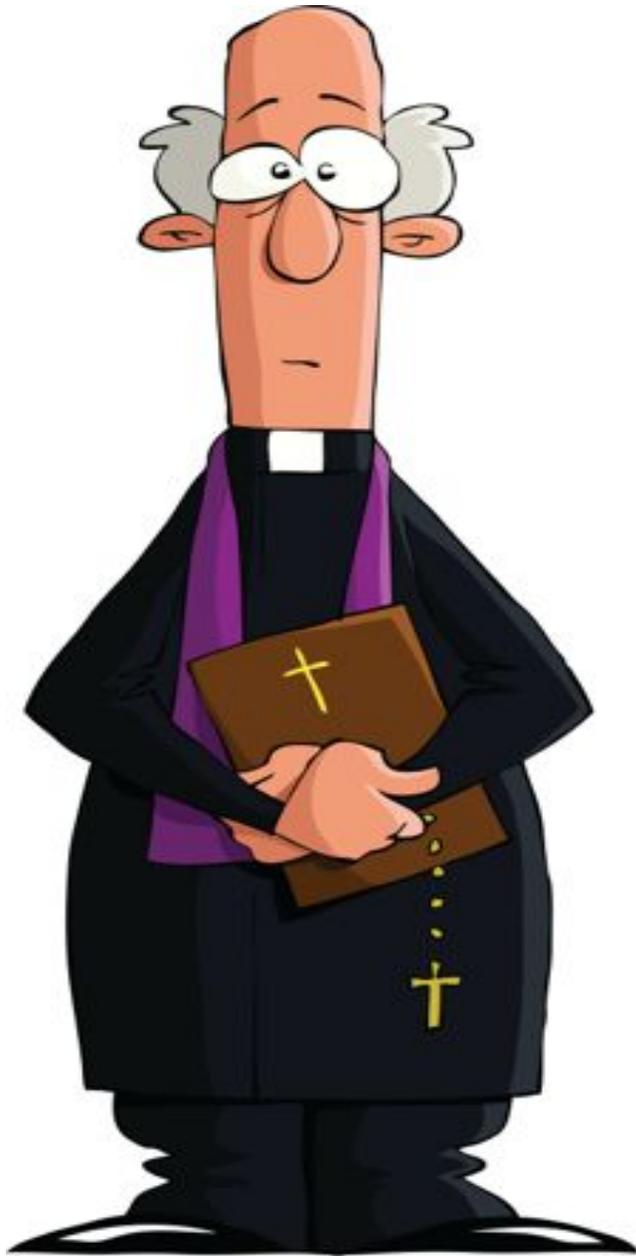
The Hebrew word “test” is *nacha* [nah-saw’], and it means to “prove,” “test,” or “assay.” At the flinty rocks of Rephidim the people desperately needed water. God told Moses to “speak” to the rock, and it would provide water. Frustrated and angry, Moses *struck* the rock twice, and water gushed out.

We’re told that *“The place was named Massah . . . because the Israelites [and Moses] quarreled there and **tested** the Lord”* (Exodus 17: 1-7).

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**Bartolomé Esteban Murillo. *Moses Striking the Rock* (oil on canvas), c. 1666.  
Private collection, anonymous (sold at auction at Christie's, London, August 2, 1968, Lot 36).**



For the Israelites, “testing” God negates the “oneness” of God, in which all of life coheres together in a single unified whole: God, people and land.

Demanding to live life on our own terms— “testing God”—disconnects us from this larger integrated reality, much like a leaf on a tree demanding to live apart from the tree.

To live life fully, to achieve our human potential as God’s sons and daughters, means being fully integrated into the “oneness” of God, to participating in *his* life, to honoring other community members and to responsible stewardship of the land.



That certainly flies in the face of today's culture, where we place the individual above the community, our own needs above others, and our economic prosperity above responsible stewardship of the environment.



Today, we like to do things "our way," not "God's way!"

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**Chapter 6 concludes by returning to the theme of teaching future generations what God has done for them, teaching them *torah*, and integrating them into a common societal structure prescribed by God.**

**Individual people with individual identities, individual values, and individual priorities do not constitute a society, even less, a community. To live life fully—as God intended—they must be integrated into a common vision, rooted in the past and projected into the future.**

**This trajectory—this vision—must be taught to each generation, for a people ignorant or forgetful of the past, has but a tenuous hold on the future.**

“Later on, when your son asks you, ‘What do these decrees and statutes and ordinances mean?’ which the Lord, our God, has enjoined on you, you shall say to your son, ‘We were once slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand and wrought before our eyes signs and wonders, great and dire, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and his whole house. He brought us from there to bring us in and give us the land he had promised on oath to our ancestors. The Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes in fear of the Lord, our God, that we may always have as good a life as we have today. This is our justice before the Lord, our God: to observe carefully this whole commandment he has enjoined on us.’”

(6: 20-25)

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# Questions for discussion and thought

1. What does Scripture mean by “fear of the Lord”?
2. How do we move from “fear of the Lord” to loving the Lord with all your heart, being and strength?
3. What does it mean when we read that “The Lord is our God, the Lord is one?”
4. How does an observant Jew live out the Shema in day-to-day life?
5. According to Deuteronomy, what is the single greatest danger of prosperity?

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