

We all know the most famous verse from the Torah: *Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Ehad*. *Adonai Eloheinu*, tells us that we have our own God who is completely different from any of the gods worshiped by the tribes at the time of our ancestors. *Adonai Ehad*, makes it clear that unlike the gods of all other tribes, our God is One. When we think about the *Shema*, the central statement of Jewish belief, these are the four words we tend to focus on. These are the words we create interpretations about.

We tend to ignore the first two words, *Shema Yisrael*. When we translate them, we say them in a bland kind of way 'Listen Israel...' But these words are anything but bland when we understand them in their context.

In today's parlance they would be translated into, 'Listen up Israel' or 'Pay attention Israel!' It's a wake up call said by Moshe but actually coming from God. In this week's portion, unlike the other times these two words are used in our Torah, there is an additional word that intensifies the message. *Hashkeit!* Silence! Now listen up Israel!

Moshe wanted to make sure everybody heard the declaration '*Hayom hazeh niyaita la'am IAdonai elohekha*' 'Today you have become the people of *Adonai*, your God.' This is certainly an important announcement for the Israelites to hear. But we have to ask...hadn't they been a people for many years before this? What made this moment so important?

The Israelites were not really a people until they came to the end of their journey through the desert. Until they stood across the Jordan River from the city of Jericho, about to enter the land.

Moshe wanted the Israelites to pay very close attention to the fact that they had finally become God's people, that they were about to enter the land and fulfill the prophecy God made 40 years before, when the Israelites received the Ten Commandments; that they would become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. This prophecy comes true in this week's portion.

What was it that finally made this group of tribes, one people, one single unit. We know the Israelites went through a lot together. Four hundred years of slavery in Egypt. Forty years in the wilderness. The deaths of all the people who were slaves. Wars with other tribes, rebellions among themselves, hunger and thirst. Was it only their suffering that made them a people.

In the Torah we hear only about the difficulties that the Israelites experienced. We don't hear about the many births, weddings and holiday celebrations in the desert. These celebrations certainly bring people together to create community just as much as the difficulties do.

Today as a community we are celebrating Anna who is becoming a Bat Mitzvah, a full adult member of our Jewish community. As wonderful as that is, she is helping us celebrate so much more than that. For the last 105 years we have come together as a community celebrating our joyous events. Today is one more of those days.

Tonight Anna and her family are not just celebrating the creation of another Jewish adult; they are also reminding us of all the other teens who have become adults in our synagogue. They are reminding us how important it is to be an active part of this community. Think about what a very different experience this would be if our entire community was not celebrating this together. Anna would not have had as

much motivation to master the Friday night and Shabbat services. She would not have had an image in her mind of what this day would be like had she not witnessed many other teenagers becoming Bnai Mitzvah before her.

For Anna and for all the children who will stand on this *Bima*, lead the services, read from the Torah, joyful and proud, feeling the appreciation and respect of their community. For all the couples that will be married on this *bima*. For all the babies that will be named here, let us renew our efforts to both give to and receive from this community.

When we say the *Shema*, tonight, tomorrow and any time in the future, let's remember that these were the words Moshe used to get the attention of the Israelites in the desert. He used these words not just to tell them about God's Oneness but to announce that they had finally become a people. We can use the *Shema* in our lives to help us remember that message. We are a people. We are a community. Let's continue to appreciate what our community gives to us and continue to give to back to it in return. It has been, is and can continue to be an important part of our lives.

*Shabbat Shalom.*