

Mind-Stretching Takes On the Shema

1) ...The meaning of “*b’chol levavcha*,” is not “with all your heart” as most people interpret it. Rather, one [comes to] know that every feeling that is within a person is nothing other than the life energy (*chayut*) of the Blessed One... And this is the meaning of “YHVH is One”: it goes beyond that there is just one God, rather it is that God is one and *there is nothing else* (*ein od*)-- every single thing that exists is truly that One’s life energy (*chayut*), only this is hidden... Thus the love of the Blessed One should be in every feeling within a person – that is the meaning of “*b’chol levavcha*.”

-*Sefat Emet*, R. Yehudah Leib Alter of Ger (Poland, 1847-1905). RJ translation.

2) ה'אלהינו ה'/YHVH eloheynu YHVH

The 3 divine names standing at the center of the Shema form the subject of many interpretations in the Zohar [the great medieval text of Kabbalah] and elsewhere. Here is my reading of them...The first YHVH represents *keter* [the highest of the sefirot], the most sublime and unknowable mystery. That primal state of Being is often called *ayin*, “the No-thing,” because it is utterly beyond our understanding. Some Kabbalists also call it “the air that cannot be grasped.” This is YHVH in its conjugation as EHYEH, “I am what I am,” or “I shall be whatever I shall be.” We stand before this mystery in silent, aware of its presence but unable to respond.

But then we discover *eloheynu*, **our** God, the presence of the One within us, around us, filling our hearts as it fills all that is. We allow it to become one with our own souls, which are only a mirror of its light. In doing this, we give to the One the only gift we have to offer, that of our own humanity. *Va-ani tefillati*,¹ as the Baal Shem Tov understood it: “I **am** my prayer.” All of our frailty and mortality, but also the opening of our hearts to love and joy

¹ Psalm 69:14, but more commonly known to us from service of taking out the Torah on Jewish holidays; it follows the chanting of the 13 attributes.

are here joined to *shechinah*, the Presence that dwells within. In this opening we help to give birth to a new YHVH, this time as *kudsha berich hu* [the Holy Blessed One], the projected Parent, Ruler, Lover, Friend to whom we can relate in devotion and intimacy.

-Rabbi Arthur Green, *Well of Living Insight: Comments on the Siddur*, page 103.