# Understanding the Shema Israel

The Shulchan Arukh clearly writes that **the kavana** (usually translated as attention, or focus) **we are required to have when we pray** consists primarily in understanding the meaning of the words we are pronouncing.

If we are not fluent in Hebrew, **we should make the effort to understand the meaning of the words we pronounce.** In the following weeks, B'H, we are going to explain the words of the Shema Israel and the ideas behind it.

When we pray, we should know first **the simple meaning of a word**. But then, we should also **delve into the ideas behind the words.** For example: the word ATA, means in Hebrew "YOU". And the idea behind "YOU" is that **we are addressing God in the second person!** When we say *baruch ata*, after we understand that ATA means "YOU", **we must also realize and bring ourselves to think and feel that we are standing directly in front of Him. That God Almighty is present here and now.**

Let us explore now the first word: *shema'*.

"*shema*" means "listen", in the imperative form. In addition, and same as in English when in opposition to "hear", "shema" means: **listening while paying close attention**. The rabbis mentioned that in this sense,**"listen" precisely implies "understand"** (*bekhol lashon sheata shomea)*.

Our rabbis explained that the word "*shema*" also indicates that **when we read the Shema Israel we need to be completely focused on it.** It is obviously forbidden to **talk** and even to make **a sound or a body signal**, even **to greet someone**. We must reach a state of **total concentration** while reciting the Shema Israel.

In sum: *“shema israel”* means: **You, members of the Jewish Nation, pay close attention, focus and understand** the following crucial statement: “Hashem is our God, HaShem is one”.

ISRAEL TODAY

*Israel and the apartheid slander, by Richard J. Goldstone*