The First Two Words

Previously, we explained why it is important to recite the Tefilot, prayers, in Hebrew, and at the same time it is necessary to understand what we say.
Today we will begin explaining the meaning of the first two words of the Shema Israel.
□□□: "Listen, Israel."
Technically, the Shema Israel is not a prayer. It is a text that contains three paragraphs of the Tora. Briefly, the first verse "shema" contains our declaration of faith in the existence and unity of God. The first paragraph continues with "veahabta" that teaches us how to love God. The second text "vehaya" refers to Divine justice. And the third, "vayomer" to behave with sanctity.
The words of Shema Israel are NOT a praise to HaShem. In these texts we are not thanking God and we are not asking Him to fulfill our needs.
The first word "Shema" which means "Listen carefully" already indicates that we should concentrate on what we are saying, and avoid any distraction. That's why when we say the first two verses, "shema" and "Baruch Shem" we cover our eyes.
We will compare briefly the Shema Israel with the Amida, the most important prayer, which is said standing and in silence.
1. In the Amida we address HaShem, we praise Him (=recognize Him), we thank Him and we ask Him to help us. In the Shema Israel we are not addressing God; God is addressing us.
2. At the beginning of the Amida, our lips and our mouth are called into action, we ask HaShem to open our lips and grant us eloquence to address and praise Him. In the Shema Israel, our ears and our hearts are called into action, not our lips. The Shema Israel does not begin with a reference to direct our words to HaShem, but with an invitation to listen and understand His words.
3. The Amida is recited after the Shema Israel and it is the prayer par excellence. In the Amidah, we talk to him and ask him to listen to us. In the Shema Israel we listen to HaShem, devoting our utmost attention to His words. In this way the Shema and the Amida establish a constant dialogue with HaShem. This dialogue is the essence of Jewish spiritually.
The Shema Israel contains the most important principles of the

Torah. It is the declaration of Jewish principles, a testimony of loyalty, a “Pledge of Allegiance” to HaShem, our God and His covenant.

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The word ISRAEL defines us as a people. Originally, Israel is the name of our third patriarch, Ya’aqob Abinu. When we say “Israel” we should realize that we are the recipients of this divine message.

And while (I believe) this is not something we should think about when we say the Shema, I would like to show the “magic” of our name Israel.

If we read it carefully we will find in this name the initials of our three patriarchs and four matriarchs.

The first letter YOD is the initial of Yitzhaq and Ya’aqob.

The second letter, SHIN, is the initial of the name of our first matriarch Sara.

The RESH corresponds to the first letter of Rahel and Rivka.

The letter ALEF is the initial of Abraham.

The letter LAMED is the first letter of our matriarch Leah.

ISRAEL is the perfect name for our people, since it includes our three patriarchs and four matriarchs.