

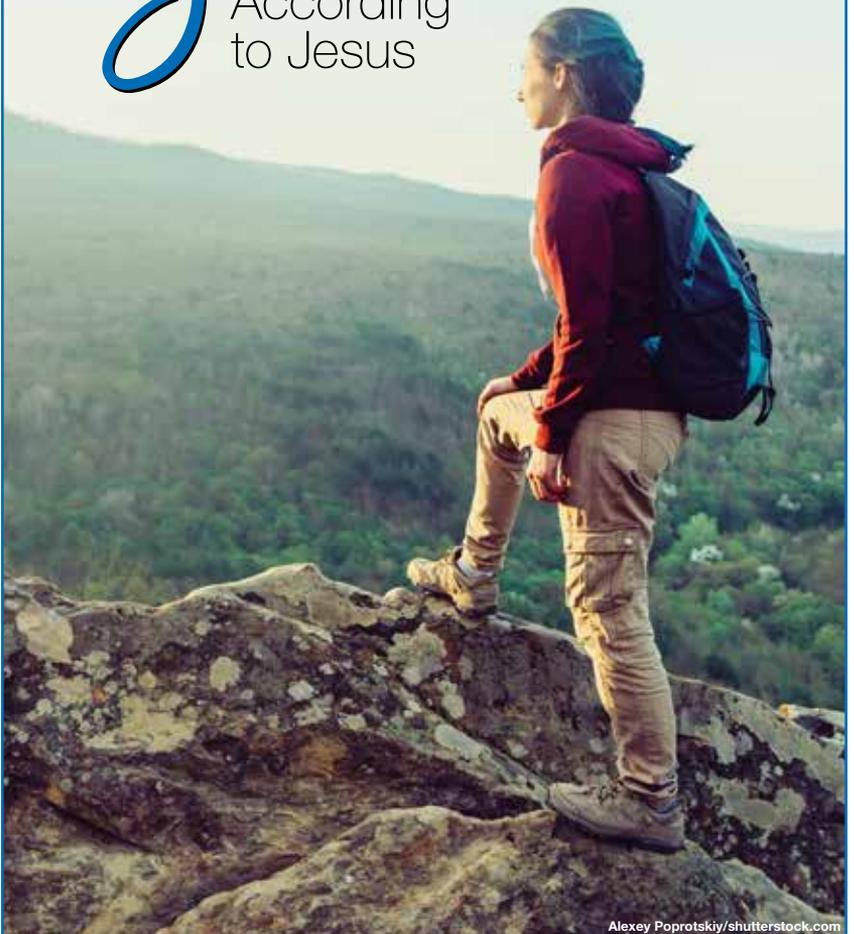
ISRAEL Teaching Letter

www.bridgesforpeace.com

Vol. # 771018 • October 2018

Success

According
to Jesus



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By Rev. Rebecca J. Brimmer, *International President and CEO*

Bridges for Peace...Your Israel Connection[®]



I want to share with you the keys to success in life, which are available to every believer. Your life can be meaningful, significant and impactful. I can say this with confidence because Jesus (Yeshua) gave us the keys to success in the Bible. We call them the greatest commandments of Jesus and they are found in Mark 12:28–33 and Matthew 22:36–40. If you ask any Christian believer, he or she will tell you that the greatest commandments are to love God and to love others. But there is more to what Jesus said. Let's read the two passages.

"Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, 'Which is the first commandment of all?' Jesus answered him, 'The first of all the commandments is: "Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.' So, the scribe said to Him, 'Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices'" (Mark 12:28–33).

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?' Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 22:36–40).

There are a number of elements in these two passages that are important for us to understand in order to walk successfully through the life God has planned for each of us.

Shema

The first thing Jesus (Yeshua) quoted in both these passages is the most famous Jewish affirmation of faith called the *Shema*. The name stems from the first word of the affirmation in Hebrew, which is *shema*. “Hear (shema), O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:4–5).

The word *shema* is found 1,159 times in the *Tanakh* (OT). Strong’s Concordance explains that *shema* means to hear (as in perceive sound), to listen in order to consent or give heed and to obey. We could thus describe it simply by saying *shema* entails listening carefully in order to obey.

“Then it shall come to pass, **because you listen (shema)** to these judgments, and keep and do them, that the LORD your God will keep with you the covenant and the mercy which He swore to your fathers” (Deut. 7:12 emphasis added). The word *shema* appears in the book of Deuteronomy 92 times. It doesn’t just mean hear or listen, but also to heed, to pay attention to, to obey and to understand. In fact, every time we find the word obey in the *Tanakh* (OT), it is actually *shema*. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks explains, “God wants us to understand the laws He has commanded us. He wants us to reflect on why this law, not that. He wants us to listen, to reflect, to seek to understand, to internalize and to respond. He wants us to become a listening people... It follows that in Judaism, listening is a deeply spiritual act. To listen to God is to be open to God. That is what Moses is saying throughout Deuteronomy: ‘If only you would listen.’”

We find the same word again later in Deuteronomy 11:13 (NASB emphasis added), “And it shall come about, **if you listen obediently** (shema) to my commandments which I am commanding you today, to love the LORD your God and serve Him with all your heart and all your soul...” In this verse the concept of listening and obeying becomes very clear.

Jesus (Yeshua) started the passages known today as the greatest commandments with a statement of faith in the one true God. If you want to have an abundant life, you need to start with understanding, acknowledging and giving allegiance to the God of Israel. The first step is to listen with a desire to understand, internalize and obey.

This is what Jesus was talking about in Mark 12. When asked what the greatest commandment was, He immediately said the *shema* (v. 29). The greatest thing is to acknowledge God and to listen to and obey Him. We will discuss the commandment to love Him in more detail later on.



Jewish Thought and Identity

The *Shema* is the central prayer of Jewish liturgy. It is woven into every part of Jewish being. In Mark 12, Jesus (Yeshua) gave it the same centrality and importance for His followers of all generations.

To this day, the *Shema* is an integral part of the daily prayer service in the synagogue. Devout Jews pray this prayer twice a day (morning and evening) for their entire lives. Parents pray this prayer with their children at bedtime. It is the first prayer taught to Jewish children, and it is the last words on the lips of a dying Jew.

Roi Klein was an officer in the Israel Defense Forces. During the Second Lebanon War, he was with two of his fellow soldiers when his unit was ambushed and a hand grenade thrown at them. Klein shouted "Grenade!" before sacrificially diving on top of the live weapon, muffling the deadly explosion with his body and saving his friends' lives. His last words were "*Shema Yisrael.*"

In the midst of horror, tragedy and martyrdom, Jewish people have for thousands of years chosen to acknowledge and swear allegiance to God with their dying breaths. For instance, during the Holocaust, as Jewish men, women and children were marched to their death in the Nazi gas chambers, they declared, "*Shema Yisrael!*"

Rabbi Avi Geller tells the following story about the search for hidden Jewish children in Europe in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

"I can identify all the Jewish children in two minutes," proclaimed Rabbi Eliezer Silver. His long beard and crisp, new army uniform were an odd sight in the Krakow [Poland] monastery. "In two minutes? Impossible!" declared Father Hugo. "These children came to us as infants and do not have the slightest hint that they are Jewish. If you can identify them, you may take them!"

With a grin on his face, the good rabbi continued, "Then you will allow me two minutes tomorrow at lunch time?"

"No problem," replied Father Hugo. And the rabbi was gone.

Rabbi Silver had arrived in Poland immediately at the end of World War II, determined to somehow locate and extract the hundreds (if not thousands) of Jewish children in monasteries across Europe. Their parents had placed them with non-Jewish families, who then decided to minimize their risk by sending them to monasteries.

In Krakow, Rabbi Silver had information that 30 Jewish children were in one particular monastery, and he was determined to obtain their release.

The following day at noon, he stood in the dining room of the monastery, facing 100 children in the middle of lunch, gazing at him curiously. The rabbi put his hand over his eyes and cried out the words of the *Shema*. "*Hear O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one!*"

Immediately, 30 little children began crying, "Mama! Mama!" What the rabbi knew (but the priest didn't) was that the last memory these children had of their mother was reciting together with them the most famous Jewish prayer.

"These are the Jewish children," proclaimed the rabbi. "You may take them," replied the father. And another 30 children were then reunited to their heritage."

A photograph showing the silhouettes of two people sitting on a large rock. The person on the left is sitting cross-legged, and the person on the right is sitting with their back to the camera. The background is a sunset with a bright sun low on the horizon, casting a warm glow over the scene. The sky transitions from a deep orange near the sun to a dark blue at the top.

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength

Deuteronomy 6:5

Loving God

Jesus (Yeshua) said the greatest commandment is to love God with our whole being. This is not mild affection. This is not admiration. This is all of our being fully engaged in loving Him, the one true God.

As I think about loving someone, it is clear to me that you do not love someone you don't know. You may admire them for their fame or appearance. You may read about them and find much to be lauded. But, until you know them, you will not really love them. The more we know the Lord and He reveals Himself, His nature and His love for us, the more we should grow to love Him.

This begs the question: how do we get to know Him? As in any relationship, we must spend time with Him. We must learn everything we can about Him. We must talk to Him and listen when He speaks. True love loves others as they are, not as we wish they were. The Bible is full of information about God. Unfortunately we often view God from one side of His personality or character, generally the parts we particularly like. For instance, God is love and God is also a judge. Most of us would rather choose to focus on the love part. Yet God isn't a God of love in the Writings of the Apostles (NT) and a God of judgment in the *Tanakh* (OT). He is a God of love throughout the Bible and a judge in the entirety of Scripture.

In Exodus 34:6–7 God described Himself to Moses. *“And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation.’”*

A photograph of a person's hand with a black and red watch, resting on a ledge and overlooking a vast, hazy valley. The text is overlaid on the upper portion of the image.

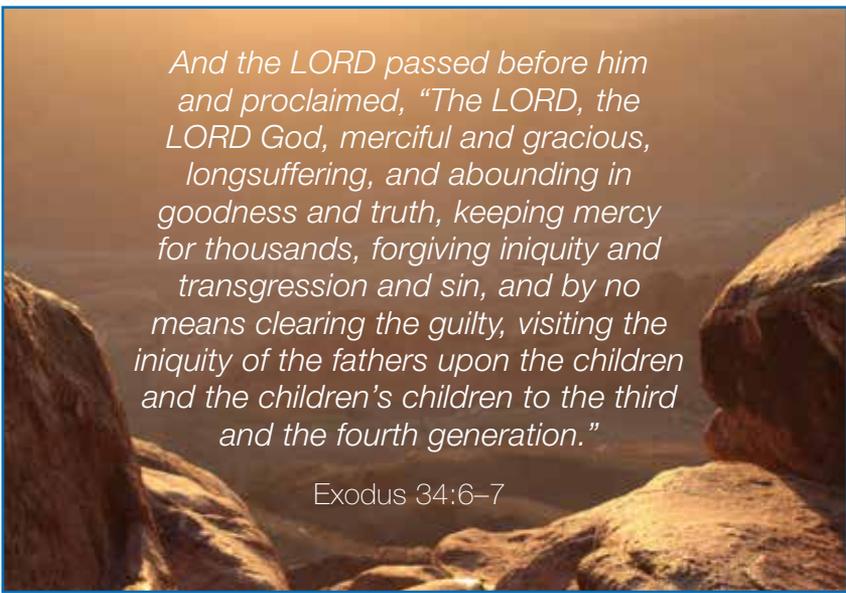
*Hear, O Israel: The
LORD our God, the
LORD is one!*

Deuteronomy 6:4

A hand with a watch is visible on the left side, pointing towards the text. The background is a blurred cityscape. At the top, there are two horizontal blue bars.

Shema

Hear, O Israel



And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

Exodus 34:6–7

In this passage where God defines Himself, we see both love and judgment. Jewish sources say there are 13 attributes of God's mercy in these verses. (Our September 2010 teaching letter "Knowing and Loving God" offers a detailed discussion of each of these 13 attributes.) Some of the major characteristics God ascribes to Himself are merciful, gracious, slow to anger, lovingkindness, truth, cleansing the repentant soul and forgiving sin, rebellion and error. This is how God describes Himself. These attributes are meant to be imitated. In Galatians 5:22–23 we read of the fruit of the Spirit, the attributes a person who is growing in Christian maturity will exhibit. Some of these fruits, like love, long-suffering, faith and kindness, are the same attributes of God we find in Exodus 34:6–7.

Loving Others

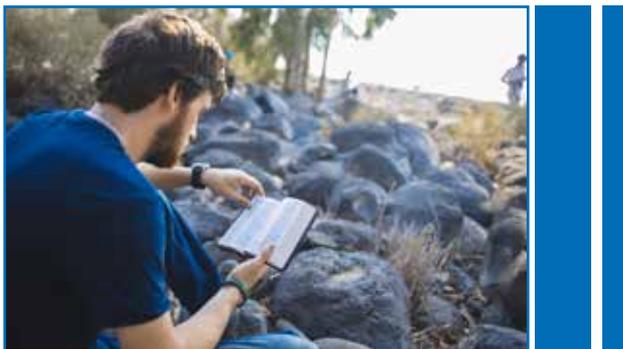
The second commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus (Yeshua) was quoting from the second half of Leviticus 19:18, which says, "*You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD*" (emphasis added).

In Luke 10 we read of an encounter Jesus had with a lawyer. As part of the conversation, the lawyer quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, the very passages we are discussing here. The lawyer then asked Jesus "*and who is my neighbor?*" (Luke 10:29). Jesus responded by telling the story of the Good Samaritan, ending with the words, "*So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?*" (v. 36). The lawyer answered, "*He who showed mercy on him*" (v. 37). The story concluded with the words, "*Go and do likewise*" (v. 37).

It is clear to me that Jesus expects us to treat others as a neighbor, not just those who live next door or in our part of the city. We are to show love, mercy and care to all our neighbors. We live in a world of diversity. Does God want us to share our love only with those who are like us? Certainly not. The Samaritans were viewed as the "other" in Jesus's time. They were certainly not the expected recipients of neighborly love. In

fact, it was rare for the Jewish people to even mix with the Samaritans. By using this shocking (to the original hearers) example of a “neighbor,” I believe Jesus was showing us that all other human beings are our neighbors.

I am asking God to help me treat others in the same way that God so graciously and mercifully treats us. In 1 John 4:7–8 the apostle exhorts, “*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.*”



The Law and the Prophets

In Matthew 22:40 Jesus (Yeshua) said, “*On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.*” In using this phrase, He followed a common rabbinical practice: using a few words to allude to the entire *Tanakh* (OT). This was also a way for Jesus to affirm the Holy Scriptures. Remember that the Scripture in Jesus and the apostles’ time was the *Tanakh* and that the process of canonization of the Writings of the Apostles (NT) only occurred between AD 325–400. So, when the apostle Paul exhorts Timothy about the Scripture, what does he mean? “*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*” (2 Tim. 3:16). The apostle referred to the *Tanakh*. In order to have true success as a follower of Jesus, we too have to love, respect and heed these Scriptures.

Do you believe that Scripture is inspired by God? What do you think: did God inspire ideas or did He inspire words? How you answer this question is important. Bible translators generally work from one of these two philosophies or a combination of the two. Either they translate literally word for word (as much as possible), or they translate ideas as they believe they will be received by today’s audience. That is why there are so many differences between the various translations of the same Scriptures. I believe that God inspired the actual words the writers wrote in the Bible. For this reason, I encourage you to look for a literal translation rather than a dynamic translation. If you use a paraphrase like *The Message*, you need to understand that in many ways it is commentary on the Bible, rather than the words that God inspired the apostle Paul and others to transmit to us.

Why did Jesus say “*On these two commandments hang all of the Law and the Prophets*” (Matt. 22:40)? I believe the answer is simple: when we love God and when we love others, we automatically fulfill the rest of the Scripture. If we love someone, we won’t steal from them, covet their possessions or their wife, lie to them or abuse, sexually assault

or murder them. We will rejoice with others in their good fortune and honor them in every way because we love them. Similarly, we won't worship other gods if we love God with our entire being. We won't become idolatrous. We will seek to follow God's path and direction because we truly, deeply love Him.



Loving Others with His Love

If you truly want to be successful in God's eyes and in His kingdom, you now have the keys to success: acknowledge God, the only true God; listen with intent to obey; love Him with your whole being; love others as much as you love yourself; and choose to live your life by the Scripture—the inspired Word of God.

At Bridges for Peace, we are Christians who love Jesus (Yeshua). We read His words carefully with the understanding that He is giving us all an important message. We have chosen to love God with all our hearts, minds, soul and strength. We also love others—unbelievers or believers. We love our Christian brothers and sisters of every color and tribe from around the world. He has given us a special call to love the Jewish people with unconditional love. This love is expressed through feeding the hungry and caring for children, Holocaust survivors and immigrants. We help Jewish people come to Israel, welcoming them with gifts for their homes and sponsoring them for a year. We repair homes for the needy, come to their assistance in times of crisis—like the current fire arson attacks—and help restore much-needed bomb shelters. Everything is done by Christians to show our love to the Jewish people.

I encourage you to immerse yourself in the Scriptures, God's love letter to you. Ask for a revelation of who He is and His great love for you. Then ask Him to give you His love for others. Thank you for supporting Bridges for Peace. Together we are reaching out with the love of Jesus (Yeshua) in Israel.

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Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God's chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or OT) – *Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Neviim* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- Writings of the Apostles (New Testament or NT)
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)



God has called us to demonstrate His love through deeds of love and compassion. We feed the needy, repair homes for the elderly, comfort those who mourn and help Jewish people come home to Israel. Our service is an outpouring of the character of true Christianity.



Thank you for standing with and supporting Israel. Thank you for partnering with Bridges for Peace. Together we are doing great things for the Lord and Israel. Your generous donation will help us change the lives of more Israelis as we touch them with the love of God.

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