

Sonoma 9/11 Commemoration
9/11/02
By Neal Ross Atkinson

I'm Neal Ross Atkinson, a pre-rabbinical student and lay leader at Congregation Shir Shalom, and first I'd like to ask for a show of hands – On this day last year, how many people felt somewhat unable to get through the day, let alone the coming year?

On that Tuesday afternoon, I put an American flag on my car antenna as a sign of mourning. I'm removing it tomorrow, and I'd like to tell you why.

Jewish tradition recognizes the first year of mourning as an important stage of grief. During that year, we say a special memorial prayer every day. But at the close of the year, we stop – and only say it on each anniversary of the death thereafter.

This doesn't mean we stop thinking about the person who has died – just as none of us here tonight will stop thinking about what happened a year ago. It means that we have integrated the person's death, and our own grief, into our lives. We have *not* put the person behind us. What we *have* put behind us is the first year of grieving. In effect, we have closed one door and are ready to open another.

The central statement of Jewish faith, which the Torah commands us to say twice daily, is called the Shema. The word "Shema" means "listen," and the first six words in Hebrew are "*Sh'ma Yisroel, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad.*" My favorite interpretation is, "Listen, you who wrestle with the Divine and with yourselves. G-d is simply G-d. G-d is One."

I'm going to recite the first six words of the Shema, just as we recite it in synagogue – feel free to join me if you know it. As the echoes of *this* Shema die away, let's take a few moments to *listen* – to our hearts, to the sound of our own breathing and that of those here with us – listen to the sound of the future through the open door before us all.

"Sh'ma Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad..."