

## Wholistic Education and the Shema Creed (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

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### Abstract

This article sought to examine the shema creed in relation to principles of wholistic education. It concludes that while wholistic education includes emphasis on the development of the mental, physical, social, and spiritual dimensions of life, the shema suggests the inculcation of knowledge through various dimensions of life, using various methods and settings, and developing the entire being. The article also suggests that the shema reveals lessons that can be applied to our educational system today. The creed, whose outline includes the love for Yahweh, the transmission of the words of Yahweh, and the preservation of the words of Yahweh, teaches that we should love the Lord God wholeheartedly and transmit that love to our children diligently using every setting and medium. Applying these to our educational system today, we ought to make sure that the basis of our curricular is in God, our teachers are totally committed to the love of God and they teach diligently, knowledge is transmitted at all times in every setting, and our lessons are inculcated into students using all the dimensions of life: physical, intellectual, social and spiritual.

**Keywords:** Wholistic Education, Shema creed, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Adventist Education.

### 1. Introduction

The Seventh-day Adventist church subscribes to an almost unique system of Education. The church believes that true education must include the development of the mental, psycho-social, spiritual, and physical dimensions of life. The mission statement of Valley View University, a Seventh-day Adventist institution of higher learning, includes the fact that they place emphasis on “academic, vocational, and technological excellence in a context which promotes intellectual, spiritual, psycho-social and physical dimensions of life for service to God and humanity” (Valley View University, 2005, p. 7). This kind of education is often described as wholistic education. This means that education must involve the development of the whole person. It must be “comprehensive and wholistic, involving every human faculty” (Choi, 2009, p. 117).

This philosophy of education seems to be taken from the comments of Ellen White. According to her:

In order for men and women to have well-balanced minds, all the powers of the being should be called into use and developed. There are in this world many who are one-sided because only one set of faculties has been cultivated, while others are dwarfed from inaction. The education of many youth is a failure. They overstudy, while they neglect that which pertains to the practical life. That the balance of the mind may be maintained, a judicious system of physical work should be combined with mental work, that there may be a harmonious development of all the powers (White, 1945, pp. 295, 296).

Interestingly, the Bible also seems to give some ideas of the wholistic nature of education. The Shema creed in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 is an example of a Bible text that makes the concept of wholistic education clearer. Many interpreters have used the shema creed to explain the concept of God, transmission of information, religious practice, etc. Also, several educationists have tried to use different sources to explain their educational concepts. Choi (2009) and Taylor (1999) have made attempts to relate the shema with Christian education. It appears little has been done about drawing direct implications of the creed for the practice of wholistic education. This paper seeks to glean from the shema creed elements of transmission and preservation that relate with wholistic education. We shall discuss the shema creed in its context and move to draw links that this creed may have with wholistic education. Finally, we shall review the implications of these linkages to our educational systems today.

### 2. The Shema creed

The term shema is often used in reference to Moses' words in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 because the word shema (“hear”) is the first Hebrew word in the section (Hill and Walton, 2000, p. 135). This section in the Old Testament is regarded as the classic confession of Hebrew faith (Revell, 1990). It is “a declaration of faith, a pledge of allegiance to One God” (Choi, 2009, p. 115). In fact, before the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, the oldest extant Hebrew manuscript of any part of the Old Testament was the Nash Papyrus which contained the

Decalogue and Deuteronomy 6:4,5 (Nichol, 1953). The section appears in the New King James Version as follows:

" 4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! 5 "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. 6 " And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. 7 "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. 8 "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 "You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Apart from Deuteronomy 6:4-9, other passages that are noted to compose the shema are Numbers 15:37-41 and Deuteronomy 11:13-21 (Revell, 1990). In the Deuteronomy passage, Moses, the lawgiver of Israel, was speaking to the second generation of Israelites shortly before his death. Within the book of Deuteronomy, Moses tries to give a broad perspective on the events of the previous generation and a renewal of the covenant with the people. The outline of the book of Deuteronomy provided by Hill and Walton (2000) suggests three important speeches of Moses. In the first speech, he presents a historical prologue (1:6-3:29) and an introduction to stipulations, with an exhortation to obey the Law (1 – 4:43). The second speech includes stipulations (5:6-26:19), a document clause (27:1-10), and a section of curses and blessings (27:11-28:68). The third speech is simply a final charge (29-30). The last section of the book (chapters 31-34) includes the last words and death of Moses. The shema is found in the second speech where Moses was giving the stipulations. This section can also be outlined as follows:

- The Decalogue (5:6-21)
- Response of the People (5:22-33)
- Elaboration of the Decalogue (6:1-26:15)
- Concluding Exhortation (26:16-19)

It is observed that the shema is found at the beginning of the elaborations. It appears Moses is instructing the people on how they are to relate with the elaborations that follow and how they should transmit them. The creed begins by describing the nature of God, and proceeds to invite the hearer or reader to love the Lord with all his heart, soul, and might. Finally, he gives explicit instruction on how these “words” (stipulations) should be transmitted to the next generation. According to Gleason Archer, it is located in a section labeled the Decalogue and the love of God to be taught for posterity (Archer, 1964). Butrick (1953) also suggests that its context shows the author has a deep ethical interest. The authors of this article believe that the instruction on how much one should love the Lord and how one should transmit and preserve the stipulations suggest education. The wholistic nature of such transmission also suggests a form of wholistic education. The next section of this paper looks at the shema creed in detail.

### 3. Literary Analysis of the Text

As indicated already, this paper focuses on the shema as found in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. The first part of this passage (verse 4) whose first word determines the name given to the entire section seems to teach a doctrine of monotheism. The passage literarily reads: Hear, O Israel, Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one. According to the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, the Israelites used this in striking contrast to the nations around who were polytheistic (Nichol, 1953). It seems to stand as the basis of the entire creed. The repetition of the divine name seems to suggest emphasis and to make Him the basis of what follows. In the words of Butrick (1953):

The object of Israel’s exclusive attention, affection, and worship (cf. vs. 5) is not diffuse but single. It is not a pantheon of gods, each of whose personalities has a disconcerting way of being split up by rival adherents and sanctuaries, so that the attention of the worshipper cannot be concentrated. Israel’s attention is undivided; it is confined to one definite being whose name is Yahweh (Butrick, 1953, pp. 372-373).

The next verse expresses what is normally referred to as the greatest commandment (cf. Matthew 22:36-40; Mark 12:29-34; Luke 10:27-28). This is the commandment that Jesus quoted in his interaction with the man who came asking for the greatest commandment. The verse is a command to love Yahweh completely: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." The description given here suggests total commitment on the part of the believer. After establishing that Yahweh, his God is one, the believer is commanded to love Him wholeheartedly: With all his heart, soul, and strength. The use of heart (Hebrew *levav*) implies the mind, will and the inner being of the individual; Soul (*Nephesh*) suggests the emotions, passion, and desire of the person; and strength (*meod*) is an adverb that imply abundance, muchness, and force (Brown, Driver, and Briggs, 1906). The heart in Hebrew psychology is primarily the seat of the mind and will, with a whole variety of psychical emotions. The soul is the source of vitality. The two words, therefore, mean that one is to love God with his whole being (Butrick, 1953). These, together with the strength, communicate a message of total commitment to the love of Yahweh on the part of the hearer/reader. Despite attempts to link these body parts with meaning, Gaebelein (1992) states that the mention of these parts of the

body “is not a study in faculty psychology. It is rather a gathering of terms to indicate the totality of a person’s commitment of self in the purest and noblest intentions of trust and obedience toward God” (Gaebelein, 1992, p. 64). Further emphasis is made in verse six where it is added that the words must be kept in the heart. God is saying the people must commit themselves wholeheartedly to the words He is commanding them.

In verse seven, a further step is to be taken regarding transmission. The people are commanded to teach the words diligently to their children. By the command in verse seven, we can infer that the previous verses are to the teacher. Hence, the teacher, before teaching, must love Yahweh with all his heart, soul, and strength. Our attention here shall be on how the teaching is commanded to be done. The adjective used here is diligently. The Hebrew word from which it is translated is shanan. Interestingly, the pi’el form is used. It means to repeat something, or to say it again and again since the pi’el suggests an intensive or repetitive action (Brown, Driver and Briggs, 1906; Kautzsch and Cowley, 1909). This means the teacher is not to give up teaching. This is possible if the first part of the command is followed- total commitment to the love of Yahweh. One who loves Yahweh wholeheartedly will diligently teach the words that Yahweh has commanded.

There is a further level of the command within the verse that suggests the times and places of transmission: “... and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.” (verse 7). Four postures are identified here and the words of Yahweh are supposed to be repeated at it each instance:

- “when you sit in your house”
- “when you walk by the way”
- “when you lie down”, and
- “when you rise up”

These postures indicate that teaching should take place at all times, places and occasions. The teacher is supposed to teach at home, on the streets, everywhere and every time. This makes education all encompassing. Teaching can take place when one is in the house, on the streets, lying down, or standing up. There is no limit to the transmission of the love of God. This is also based on the fact that the teacher is also wholistically committed. That is, he should love the Lord wholeheartedly.

The last part of the creed also implies that a wholistic attention be given to the transmission of the love and commandments of God. In verses 8 and 9, the command is for the people to bind the words of Yahweh on their hand, use them as frontlets between their eyes, and write them on the doorposts of their houses and on their gates. Here, there is a move away from posture to the place of preservation. In it, it can be concluded that the teacher is supposed to make sure the students get the lessons from all angles and aspects. So that, if the student misses the one on the forehead, he will see the one on the doorpost, or the one on the hand, or the gate. The commands of Yahweh must be wholly part of the people. Butrick says:

To the Jew it is the symbol of faith. It opens the synagogue service; it is said twice each day; written on parchment, it is worn in the phylactery; it is inscribed on the doorpost. Originating in the urge to distinguish Yahweh from the baals and astral deities, it became the rallying point for monotheism everywhere – for the Jew first, and for all who ever were influenced by Judaism (Butrick, 1953, p. 373).

The shema may be outlined as follows:

- The nature of Yahweh: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! (verse 4)
- Wholehearted love for Yahweh: You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. (Verses 5, 6)
- Wholistic transmission of the words of Yahweh: You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. (Verse 7)
- Wholistic preservation of the words of Yahweh: You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Verse 8, 9)

From this outline, it is clear that the teacher/parent should love the Lord, transmit, and preserve His words. The transmission and preservation does not have to be in part, but wholly. The inculcation and the teaching of the word of Yahweh should be meticulously done. In the words of Ellen White, “the education of the Israelites included all their habits of life” (White, 1903, p. 38). She also emphasizes the recreational aspect of education:

“The student who with limited time and means is struggling to gain an education should realize that time spent in physical exercise is not lost. He who continually pores over his books will find, after a time, that the mind has lost its freshness. Those who give proper attention to physical development will make greater advancement in literary lines than they would if their entire time were devoted to study” (White, 1903, p. 208).

This means that there should be a balanced education. Students should not spend the whole time poring over books and spending little time in the open air. When the brain is over-working, while the other organs are

left inactive, there is a loss of physical and mental strength. Physically, the powers are robbed of their healthy tone, and mentally freshness and vigour is lost. Our educational system must include the use of all the faculties of the body and all the dimensions of life; physical, mental, social, spiritual. This is what the authors believe to be wholistic education. The next section attempts to relate the elements of wholistic education with the love of Yahweh, the transmission, and preservation of His words as stipulated in the shema creed.

#### **4. The Shema and Wholistic Education**

Throughout the creed, one finds elements of wholistic education. That is, it is realized that from the command to love Yahweh wholeheartedly to the transmission and preservation of the commandments of Yahweh, every dimension of the person is engaged. In the rabbinic period, however, the words of the creed were taken literally, “hence there came phylacteries for the arm and head, in which the shema or some other word from Exodus or Deuteronomy would be physically bound to the person of the pious” (Butrick, 1953, p. 374). However, it would be better to take the counsel figuratively as that is what the author seems to have intended (Butrick, 1953). When this is done, a sound principle is revealed: the people are to exert from scripture a stirring truth, to translate it into everyday life, to be constantly aware of it in their walk, talk, lying down and rising up. Butrick’s conclusion paves the way for a figurative approach to the shema.

Though Gaebelein (1992) thinks that the verses do not invite analyses into ideas of intellectual, emotional, and physical parts, it is apparent that such analyses can make the passage clearer. Quoting from Taylor (1999), Choi (2009) concludes, “the shema may be incorporated into every aspect of the Christian curriculum” (Choi, 2009, p. 117). He explains that we can find the curricular focus, context, scope, source, process, settings, and dimensions within the shema. According to him, the shema reminded Jews that there is only one God, that He is good and loves them so they should also love Him, that His rules apply to every part of a person’s life, and that children should be taught about the Torah (Choi, 2009).

In Choi’s conclusion where he cites Taylor (1999), we can see that the shema clearly illustrates principles of Christian education. These principles are also applicable to the establishment of wholistic education. It is observed that he talks about God being the centre of the educational program with love being the prime environmental ingredient. The education is also supposed to be comprehensive and wholistic, involving every human faculty. He adds: “such education happens when people are ‘taught diligently.’ Real effort, perseverance, and excellence are required” (Choi, 2009, p. 117). In addition, he talks about the settings and dimensions by linking the elements in the shema with aspects of Christian education. The elements in transmission and preservation and their representations are as follows:

##### **4.1 Transmission:**

- “when you sit in the house” – classroom setting
- “when you walk by the way” – life experience setting
- “when you lie down” – at the end of the day
- “when you rise up” – at the start of the day

##### **4.2 Preservation**

- “bind them upon your hand” – Physical development
- “wear them as frontlets between your eyes” – Intellectual development
- “write them on the posts of your house” – Spiritual development
- “write them on your gates” – social development

It is quite clear from the above that the shema can actually present lessons for a wholistic education. When we have true, wholistic education, we are preparing ourselves for life. Several definitions of education take us to only one dimension of education - Intellectual. If we are to follow this dimension alone, we cannot really build a noble character. The disadvantages of one-dimensional education call for a balance of the use of all the faculties. We don’t have to obtain our education at the expense of our health or our character. Our education must include the development of the mental, psycho-social, spiritual, and physical dimensions of life. We can say from the example of the shema creed that the following, which are the focus of the next section, should characterize our education:

- The basis of our curricula should be in God
- Our teachers must love the Lord wholeheartedly
- Teaching must be done diligently
- Transmission of knowledge must be done at all times in every setting
- The words should be inculcated into students using all the dimensions of life: physical, intellectual, social and spiritual

#### **5. Implications for our educational System today**

Comparing the shema creed with the stipulations of wholistic education, it can be seen that a wholistic educational system implies that a lot of things have to be done in our system today. First, it is realized from the

shema that the basis of transmission is in the fact that The LORD our God, the LORD is one! God is made the focus of the entire system. He is portrayed at the centre of Israelite religion and educational system. This should be a mark of our education. Christ should be presented in the classroom in all subjects. Ellen White (1948) counsels teachers to take their position as true educators and pour into the hearts of the students the living stream of redeeming love. They are to counsel with students before their minds are preoccupied with their academic work. She says, teachers should entreat students to seek Christ and His righteousness, show them the changes that will surely take place if the heart is given to Christ (White, 1948, pp. 158, 159).

In addition, the teachers must be totally committed to God. If our teachers will commit to the fundamental principles of wholistic education, they must heed to the command to “love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.” No one can teach what he doesn’t wholeheartedly accept. Teachers who wholeheartedly love God can effectively inculcate the love of God to the students. Our schools should employ teachers who are committed to the faith and are capable of presenting Christ in the classroom.

The teachers must not only love the Lord but they must also teach diligently. This is possible if the teachers are totally committed to the principles of a wholistic education. “All need to be under the inspiring, assuring conviction that they are indeed wearing the yoke of Christ and carrying His burden” (White, 1948, p. 156). If this is put at the heart of every teacher, they will not relent in transmitting the love of Christ unto the students.

The transmission of knowledge should not be limited to only the classroom. It can be done anywhere at any time. The words of the Torah were to be taught to the children of the Israelites “when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.” This means that the lessons that need to be taught can be presented in the classroom, on the playground, on the field, and in the halls. Learning should not be restricted to only the classroom. Students can learn in any setting and environment. Such learning should always have an evangelistic focus. This can be done by what Bairagee (2012) refers to as co-curricular activities. Discussing an Adventist perspective of co-curricular activities, Bairagee (2012) looks at the biblical and philosophical perspectives. He states that:

Co-curricular activities of Adventist educational institutions need to be also a part of the redemption plan. God instructed His people to nurture their children in every step from when they wake up in the morning till they go to sleep at night (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). In these perspectives co-curricular activities in the schools must lead students to salvation. These should be designed to develop and nourish four dimensions of humankind and these are mental/intellectual, physical, social, and spiritual aspects (Bairagee, 2012, p. 65).

The same lesson is what Ellen White seems to point to when she states that physical and mental training should be combined. She states that:

The education to be gained in the felling of trees, the tilling of the soil, and the erection of buildings, as well as the studies of the classroom, is what our youth should seek to obtain. Tentmaking also should be taught. Buildings should be erected, and masonry should be learned. Farther on, a printing press should be connected with the school, that an education may be given to students in this line of work. (White, 1990, p. 180).

Finally, the inculcation of knowledge should be done using all the dimensions of life: physical, intellectual, social and spiritual. True education should develop every faculty of the body. This can only be achieved through wholistic education. Teachers should be able to communicate the lessons to their students using these different faculties. The students should also have the various faculties developed and used to the maximum. Attention should not be given to only the intellectual aspect of the students. Training should also include the development of the physical, social and spiritual dimensions. When awards are given to outstanding students in academic performance, those who excel in sports, spirituality, and other aspects of campus life should also be given awards. This will encourage a balanced attention to all the dimensions of wholistic education.

This takes us back to the first quote of Ellen White in this article. She says that “in order for men and women to have well-balanced minds, all the powers of the being should be called into use and developed” (White, 1945, p. 295). This means that our educational system should also include vocation training, sports, church activities, work-study programmes, as well as intellectual exercise. These will ensure a balance of the mind and a harmonious development of all the powers. Once this becomes realistic and practical, the goal of wholistic education can be achieved.

## 6. Conclusion

The principles of wholistic education include the inculcation of knowledge through various dimensions of life, using various methods and settings, and developing the entire being. This refers to an education that emphasizes on the development of the individual in the mental/intellectual, physical, social, and spiritual dimensions of life. These principles characterize the philosophy of Adventist education. A study of the famous shema creed reveals that lessons can be learnt from the creed for our educational philosophy. The creed teaches that we should love the Lord God wholeheartedly. This love should be transmitted to the children wholistically. This education of

the children must be done in every setting and through the use of every medium. Such education must also help develop the individual in all dimensions of life. The shema creed can therefore offer some implications for our educational system today.

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