

The Shema

Week Three

Listening Guide – Nephesh and Me'od

I. Nephesh – Soul

- A. The English word “soul” comes with a lot of baggage from ancient _____ philosophy, the idea that the “soul” is a _____, _____ essence of a person that’s contained or trapped in their body to be released at death.
- B. This notion is totally _____ to the Bible; it’s not at all what “nephesh” means in biblical Hebrew.
- C. The most basic meaning of “nephesh” is _____.
- D. When the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, they’re hungry and thirsty, and they say to God, “We miss the cucumbers and melons we had in Egypt, and now our nephesh has _____.” See Numbers 11:6.
- E. Nephesh could also be used to refer to the _____ person. See Gen. 46:15.
- F. In the Torah, a _____ is called a nephesh slayer, and a kidnapper is called a nephesh thief. See Num. 31:19 and Deut. 24:7.
- G. On the first pages of the Bible, both humans and animals are called “a living nephesh,” and if the _____ has left a human or animal, the nephesh remains. It is called a “dead nephesh.” See Lev. 21:11 and Lev. 17:11, 14.

H. So in the Bible, people do not have a nephesh; rather they _____ a nephesh—a living, breathing, _____ being.

I. Biblical authors do have a concept of people existing after death waiting for their _____, they rarely talk about it, and when they do, they don't use the word "nephesh."

Discussion questions:

1. Does it surprise you that the idea of a non-physical, immortal essence of a person that's contained or trapped in their body to be released at death is not biblical? Explain.
2. In the New Testament, the Greek word traditionally translated soul or psuche (psyche) has the same meaning as the Hebrew nephesh and does not have a reference to an immortal soul. How does this affect your understanding of life after death?
3. Re-read Deut. 6:5, substituting the word "nephesh" for the word soul. Does this make a difference to your understanding and application of this verse? If so, how has your understanding changed?

I.Me-od – Muchness (aka strength)

A. Me'od is used _____ in the scriptures.

B. Me'od does not actually mean _____. It means _____

C. Me'od is an _____. (What part of speech is it?)

D. Examples of me'od, its meaning, and its story:

1. Gen. 1:31 _____

2. Gen. 4:5 _____
3. Gen. 7:18 _____
4. I Sam. 11:15 _____
5. Gen. 30:43 _____
6. Num. 14:17 _____

E. Me'od means to love God with everything you have, devoting every possibility opportunity and capacity to _____ God and to love _____.

Discussion questions:

1. The ancient Jewish translators used the Greek word for strength, but the ancient Aramaic translators used the word wealth or resources. Do these translations provide any nuance in meaning for you as you interpret the word, me'od?
2. After having looked closely at some of the words in the Shema, how has your understanding of these two verses deepened? What does the Shema mean to you?

The Shema:

Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone, and as for you, you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your resources.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5