

I. THE MAKATON “SHEMA” שְׁמָעֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל with signs (HEBREW VERSION)

(The first paragraph of the Shema. Devarim (Deuteronomy) Chapter 6: verses 4-9)

INTRODUCTION

The “Shema” or “Hear O Israel” is one of the most central prayers in Judaism. It is to be said twice daily, normally in Hebrew. This sign-translation is written against the Hebrew words of the first of the 3 paragraphs (The 1st paragraph is often used in schools to introduce children to the prayer). It is also often said at home with children as a night time prayer. Sometimes it is said in an undertone, sometimes it is chanted out loud, in some schools it is said together out loud.

One video shows the Makaton Signing of the Shema prayer in English translation <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aeaZwMxeQvY> (old link to be replaced) and the other with the chanted recitation of the Hebrew Shema prayer sung to the traditional Western European chant.

This signed translation has been produced with children and adults who have learning difficulties in mind.

Approach to selecting signs

The translation uses Makaton signs where available. Where no sign pre-exists signs are as used by either a Jewish special school using Makaton (Kisharon) or English Jewish Deaf signers (See the Jewish Deaf Association book “**Sign Language in Judaism**” now out of print but available in electronic version on request) and if not then from British Sign Language. A “key word” approach is used. Minor and joining words are not signed. The Jewish interpretation of the words has been used in this translation.

Note. “right hand” here means dominant hand. Generally, left-handed signers would reverse left for right in the instructions below)

I. THE “SHEMA’ ” - HEBREW WORDS WITH MAKATON SIGNS

The following 3 word preface is only said when saying the Shema alone:

Hebrew word(s)	Name of Sign used	Source	Description
אל	God	Makaton, Jewish Deaf signers, BSL	right hand points upward quite high, eyes look heavenward
מלך	King	Makaton , BSL(1131)	right hand, fingers splayed and curved inwards placed on top of head indicates a crown
נאמן	Faithful	Makaton	Index fingers of the two hands link and move away from the signer

This text contains the Holy name of God. Please keep it or dispose of it respectfully.

Hebrew word(s)	Name of Sign used	Source	Description
שָׁמַע	Focus, concentrate	Makaton BSL (Jewish Deaf sign translator)	Right index finger at right of eyes and left index finger at left of eyes (if fingers were opened, palm would face left head) move together forward and slightly down and close together.
יִשְׂרָאֵל	Israel, a Jew Jewish	JDA Book, BSL	right hand, fingers splayed and curved inwards moves from chin downwards and outwards (palm facing the chest (indicating a beard)
יְהוָה	God	Makaton, Jewish Deaf signers, BSL	right hand, index finger, points upward quite high, (if fingers were opened, palm would face left) & eyes look heavenward
אֱלֹהֵינוּ	Ours	Makaton, Similar to BSL	right fist clenched, circles around in horizontal plane finishing at the chest on the dominant side and gives a small flick from the wrist at the end.
יְהוָה	God	Makaton, Jewish Deaf signers, BSL	right hand, index finger, points upward quite high, (if fingers were opened, palm would face left) & eyes look heavenward
אֶחָד	One	Makaton, BSL	index finger up, remaining fingers clenched, hand in front of chest - if fingers were open palm would face the signer.

Hebrew word(s)	Name of Sign used	Source	Description
בָּרוּךְ	Blessed	Jewish Deaf signers (Teaching Judaism through Signs, Eva Fielding Jackson, Appendix 3) Makaton Blessed is fairly similar and is same as BSL Christian signs "Bless". This a more Jewish variant of the sign.	two flat hands in front of signer fingers slightly splayed as though laying hands on a person or object
שֵׁם	Name	Makaton, BSL	two finger of right hand brush forelock
פְּבוֹד	Wonderful	Makaton	palm open hands move in two stages away (and upwards a little) from either side of signer's mouth
מַלְכוּתוֹ	king + land	Makaton, BSL is similar	Right hand, fingers splayed and curved inwards placed on top of head indicates a crown, both hands palm open, face down, fingers slightly splayed move outward from centre describing a hill shape

Hebrew word(s)	Name of Sign used	Source	Description
לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד	Always	Makaton	left hand palm open facing signer and lower arm is held horizontally right “good” hand (thumb up, fist clenched) moves between left arm and signer from elbow to finger tips
וְאַהֲבָהּ	Love	Makaton, or BSL (1477)	open flat hands crossed over chest
את	-	-	-
יְהוָה	God	Jewish Deaf signers, BSL	right hand, index finger, points upward quite high, (if fingers were opened, palm would face left) & eyes look heavenward
אַלְהֵיךָ	yours (singular)	Makaton, BSL (9)	fist moves towards other person (if fingers were opened palm would face out) and flicks from wrist
בְּכָל-לְבָבְךָ	Heart	Makaton BSL	index fingers of both hands draw a large heart shape (top to bottom) on the left side of chest. intense facial expression to indicate “all”

Hebrew word(s)	Name of Sign used	Source	Description
וּבְכָל-נְפֹשׁוֹ	Soul	Makaton (adapted) = 2 nd half of sign for “Holy Spirit”, BSL (1095)	right hand with fingers spread is held in front of left side of face, palm facing face. Hand sweeps towards signer’s right and upward and fingers close as it does so (as though catching the breath that emanates from the nostrils). intense facial expression to indicate “all”
וּבְכָל-מְאֹדָּהּ	Strong	Makaton, BSL(74)	both fists clenched palms facing up hands move firmly toward signer and upwards with arms bending at elbows intense facial expression to indicate “all”
וְהָיוּ	-	-	-
הַדְּבָרִים	Words, things	Makaton (similar to sign BSL(556))	palms in, fists, hands separated with index fingers pointing upward are brought together turning 90 degrees at wrists as they go so that they tap together at the little fingers. Repeat slightly to the signer’s left to indicate plural
הֵאֵלֶּה	They, them	Makaton	right hand palm up sweeps in across from right to left
אֲנִי אֲנִי	I	Makaton, BSL	point to self with right index finger

Hebrew word(s)	Name of Sign used	Source	Description
מַצִּיחַ	Say You	Makaton, BSL Makaton, BSL(347)	index finger points to just below mouth and moves away from signer index finger points to (imagined) other person
הַיּוֹם	Today	Makaton & similar to BSL (1366 & 1625)	both hands palm in front of signer hands make a small movement up down. The movement repeated
עַל-	On	Makaton, BSL (1333)	right hand palm up on left hand (palm down)
לְבָבָהּ	Heart	Makaton BSL	index fingers of both hands draw a large heart shape (top to bottom) on the left side of chest. intense facial expression to indicate "all"
וְשִׁנְתָּם	teach (two handed, for emphasis)	Makaton, Very similar to BSL (457)	index fingers move from mouth downwards in 2 stages (doubled with both hands for emphasis). Match syllables.
לְבָנִיךְ	Children	Makaton, similar to BSL (1216)	flat right hand palm down on top of heads of 3 imaginary children of decreasing heights.
וְדַבַּרְתָּ	Say	Makaton, BSL(347)	index finger points to just below mouth and moves away from signer

Hebrew word(s)	Name of Sign used	Source	Description
בָּם	Them	Makaton	right hand palm up sweeps across from left to right
בָּשֵׁבֶתָּהּ	Sit	Makaton, Similar to BSL	two flat palms face down come down together the right over the left, in front of body
בְּבֵיתָהּ	House	Makaton, (somewhat similar to BSL sign 694)	two sloping flat hands with palms down, slide down 2 sides of an imaginary roof from its ridge.
וּבְלִכְתָּהּ	Walk	Makaton, (BSL 784)	right hand index and forefinger make walking action (extended fingers wiggle and at same time move away from signer)
בְּלִרְדָּהּ	Path	Makaton, similar to BSL (1444)	both hands palm flat and palms facing but separated indicate a path or road moving away from the signer
וּבְשֹׁכְבָהּ	Bed	Makaton, similar to BSL (1254)	two flat hands palms together are held at right side of head which leans on them
וּבְקוּמָהּ	get up	Makaton, BSL (2 handed version of 1201)	two flat hands palms up lift upwards together in front of body
וּקְשֵׁרְתָם	hand tephillin	Kisharon booklet of signs and also sign for tefillin in JDA Book	mime binding on of hand tephillin (Wind clenched fist around still left arm, towards wrist)

Hebrew word(s)	Name of Sign used	Source	Description
לאות?	Sign	Makaton, similar to BSL (1067),	two flat hands fingers splayed, slightly apart facing each other make circling motions
על-	On	Makaton, BSL (1333)	right hand flat palm up moves down onto left hand flat palm down
ידך	hand	Makaton, BSL	point to body part
והָנוּ לְטֵפִילִין	head tefillin	Kisharon booklet	point with boxed hand where head tefillin go - indicate tefillin box in correct place on head (on hair-line centrally above eyes)
בין עיניך	Eyes	Makaton, BSL	point with two index fingers of two hands to two eyes
וְכָתְבֶתֶם	write	Makaton, BSL(614,615)	mime righting with pencil on palm of left hand (held up)
על-מַזְזָוֹת	post	BSL	left forearm (that was being written upon) held stiff and upright like a post with fist clenched.
בֵּיתְךָ	house	Makaton, (somewhat similar to BSL sign 694)	two sloping flat hands with palms down, slide down 2 sides of an imaginary roof from its ridge.
וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ	doors	Makaton, (similar to BSL sign)	Straight forearms (right one in front) mime a gate/door swinging open and shut and repeat.

Footnotes about Signs selected above

The word **Shema** means "Listen" -there is a Makaton sign for "listen with the ears" however when consulting Jewish deaf sign users it was understood that the use of this sign could be offensive to Deaf signers and bearing in mind this resource could be used by Deaf learning disabled Jewish children and adults, the BSL sign for focus has been used instead following the advice of a Jewish, Deaf Sign Language interpreter.

God IS OUR GOD – The Hebrew uses the name of God which has been written as "God" in this translation. We do not say the holy name of God out loud. This name means the God who is with us and who will be and who cares about us and has a compassionate caring relationship with us.

Some translations use "Lord" in place of God's Name. Some use "HaShem" (Hebrew for "the Name")

Where the Hebrew word "Elohim" has been used it has been translated GOD here. Elohim refers to God as the powerful God, the true Judge, who created the universe.

There is only one sign for both the Hebrew names of God.

It seems a bit unsatisfactory to me that we do not have 2 distinct signs for these 2 different Jewish names for God with their different associations, however this is the state of affairs among Jewish Deaf signers at present, and it is not for me to make up BSL signs where none exist.

References

BSL Dictionary of British Sign Language/English, British Deaf Association
ISBN 0-571-14346-6

Numbers in parentheses refer to a numbered sign in the Dictionary.

JDA Book "Sign Language in Judaism", Jewish Deaf Association
ISBN 0-9544841-0-X

See also NDCS video Jewish Sign Vocabulary (which is based on the JDA book)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-8pQeWME06w>

Makaton Makaton Core Vocabulary Signs and extensions.
Signs are available online (full vocabulary requires Premium subscription of £100 p.a. after a 7 day free trial.
as well as other Makaton publications and direct advice from the MVDP.
<https://makaton.org/>

Jewish Deaf signers

Teaching Judaism Through Signs, Eva Fielding Jackson
ISBN 0 946252 32 7

and direct communication from D/deaf signers & relatives, Ruth Myers and Sharon/Pauline Ridgeway

Kisharon booklet

This text contains the Holy name of God. Please keep it or dispose of it respectfully.

This is a photocopied booklet of around 37 pages of signs with line-drawings for specifically Jewish words that one of the teachers from Kisharon school gave me when we met on a Makaton course.