

I. THE MAKATON “SHEMA” PRAYER with signs (ENGLISH 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 words of an English translation 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 with the English translation <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aeaZwMxeQvY> (old link – to be updated) and the other with the chanted recitation of the Hebrew 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.

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:

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

English word(s)	Name of Sign used	Source	Description
LISTEN	Focus, concentrate	Makaton Similar to 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.
ISRAEL	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))
God	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
IS OUR GOD	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.
God	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
IS ONE	One	Makaton, BSL	index finger up, remaining fingers clenched, hand in front of chest - if fingers were open palm would face the signer.

English word(s)	Name of Sign used	Source	Description
BLESSED BE	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 Jewish variant of the sign.	two flat hands in front of signer fingers slightly splayed as though laying hands on a person or object
THE NAME	Name	Makaton, BSL	two finger of right hand brush forelock
OF THE GLORY OF	Wonderful	Makaton	palm open hands move in two stages away (and upwards a little) from either side of signer’s mouth
HIS KINGDOM	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

English word(s)	Name of Sign used	Source	Description
FOREVER & EVER	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
YOU SHALL LOVE	Love	Makaton, Similar is BSL (1477)	open flat hands crossed over chest
God,	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
YOUR GOD	yours (singular)	Makaton, BSL (9)	fist moves towards other person (if fingers were opened palm would face out) and flicks from wrist
WITH ALL YOUR HEART	Heart	Makaton BSL on Christian Signs vocab web site	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”

English word(s)	Name of Sign used	Source	Description
AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL	Soul	Makaton (adapted) = 2nd 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"
AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH	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"
AND THESE	They, them	Makaton	right hand palm up sweeps in across from right to left
WORDS	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

English word(s)	Name of Sign used	Source	Description
WHICH I	I	Makaton, BSL	point to self with right index finger
COMMAND	Say	Makaton, BSL	index finger points to just below mouth and moves away from signer
YOU	you (singular)	Makaton, BSL(347)	index finger points to (imagined) other person
TODAY	Today	Makaton & similar to BSL (1366 & 1625)	both hands palm in front of signer hands make a small movement up down. The movement repeated
[SHALL BE] UPON	On	Makaton, BSL (1333)	right hand palm up on left hand (palm down)
YOUR HEART	Heart	Makaton BSL Christian Signs vocab web site	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”
YOU SHALL TEACH THEM	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.
TO YOUR CHILDREN	Children	Makaton, similar to BSL (1216)	flat right hand palm down on top of heads of 3 imaginary children of decreasing heights.
AND SPEAK	Say	Makaton, BSL(347)	index finger points to just below mouth and moves away from signer

English word(s)	Name of Sign used	Source	Description
OF THEM	Them	Makaton	right hand palm up sweeps across from left to right
WHEN YOU SIT	Sit	Makaton, Similar to BSL	two flat palms face down come down together the right over the left, in front of body
IN YOUR HOUSE	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.
WHEN YOU GO	Walk	Makaton, (BSL 784)	right hand index and forefinger make walking action (extended fingers wiggle and at same time move away from signer)
ALONG THE ROAD	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
WHEN YOU LIE DOWN	Bed	Makaton, similar to BSL (1254)	two flat hands palms together are held at right side of head which leans on them
AND WHEN YOU GET UP	get up	Makaton, BSL (2 handed version of 1201)	two flat hands palms up lift upwards together in front of body
AND BIND THEM	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)

English word(s)	Name of Sign used	Source	Description
AS A SIGN	Sign	Makaton, similar to BSL (1067),	two flat hands fingers splayed, slightly apart facing each other make circling motions
UPON	On	Makaton, BSL (1333)	right hand flat palm up moves down onto left hand flat palm down
YOUR HAND	hand	Makaton, BSL	point to body part
AND THEY SHALL BE FRONTLETS BETWEEN	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)
YOUR EYES	Eyes	Makaton, BSL	point with two index fingers of two hands to two eyes
AND YOU SHALL WRITE THEM	write	Makaton, BSL(614,615)	mime righting with pencil on palm of left hand (held up)
UPON THE DOORPOSTS	post	BSL	left forearm (that was being written upon) held stiff and upright like a post with fist clenched.
OF YOUR HOUSE	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.
AND WITHIN YOUR GATES	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 signs 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 (something like) the God who is was and will be and who cares about us and has a compassionate caring relationship with us.

Some translations use “Adonai” / “Lord” in place of God’s Name. Some Jews use “HaShem” (Hebrew for “the Name”). Where the Hebrew word “Elohim” has been used it has been translated GOD here. Elohim refers to God, the powerful God, the true Judge, who created the universe.

There is only one BSL 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, but I understand this is the language of Jewish Deaf signers at present, and it is not for me to make up BSL signs where none exist.

Presumably recognising the same problem in a Christian context, Makaton has recently developed other signs or combination of signs for different aspects of God: “Creator God”, “Father God”, “God of Grace”, “God most high”. However I did not feel it was necessarily appropriate to use these in a Jewish context of the signed version of the Shema.

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. or 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

Christian Signs
Christian BSL signs vocabulary web site <https://christianbsl.com/>

Kisharon booklet

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.