

## **A Theo-Pedagogical Study on Learning Christianity Based on the Israeli Shema for Contextual Education**

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### **Abstract:**

The learning of spirituality in Christian Religious Education (CRE) is often trapped in cognitive-informative patterns without regard to relational and contextual depth. This article responds to the need for a more integrative and applicable Christian learning practice by exploring the Shema of Israel (Deut. 6:4-9) as a conceptual basis. The formulation of the problem raised is: how can the principles of spirituality learning in Shema Israel be constructed as a contextualised CRE learning practice? The purpose of this research is to construct Biblical text-based spirituality learning using a hermeneutic method through a theo-pedagogical approach for contextual Christian education. This research uses a literature study method by putting the theoretical concept on the theory of faith growth from John H. Westerhoff III. The research found four dimensions of religious learning from the Shema of Israel, namely relational, repetitive, visual, and rhythmic. These four dimensions can be implemented in contextual CRE through intergenerational practices, sustainable pedagogy, visualisation of learning design and integration of faith in the context of life. This research recommends learning practices that build relationships, are continuously repeated, visualised and embedded in the rhythm of daily life as a living and meaningful expression of faith.

### **Keywords:**

Faith learning, contextual Christian education, Shema Israel

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## INTRODUCTION

In the digital, instant and fragmented world of modern education, Christian Education is faced with serious challenges in shaping the character and faith of learners deeply and sustainably. Children and teenagers live in an increasingly pluralised environment, full of distractions, and are exposed to values that are often contrary to the principles of the Christian faith. In the midst of massive information flow and a fast-paced culture, the process of learning spirituality can no longer rely on the process of knowledge transfer alone. (Kia, 2016). Learning that only emphasises cognition is not enough to form a person who lives and practices their faith as a whole. This situation requires Christian education to present learning that not only touches the intellect but also reaches the affections and actions of students, so that transformation occurs. (Bulan & George, 2024).

This issue has become increasingly urgent because churches, schools, and families, the three main institutions in the formation of faith, face internal challenges in carrying out their functions as well as external challenges in collaborating. The church is facing a generational gap (Kobstan, 2021), a lack of active involvement of children in liturgy, and difficulties in establishing continuity between worship and daily life (Wuwung, Olivia C., Aljuanika E. Ering, 2022). Additionally, in many schools, Christian education tends to focus on cognitive aspects (Rangga, 2024) and doctrinal memorisation (Sampaleng, 2024), thereby neglecting the holistic formation of faith through relational approaches and the practical application of real-life experiences of students (Rangga, 2024). Meanwhile, Christian families also often experience a decline in faith-nurturing practices at home, due to busyness, lack of theological literacy, and other factors (Pantan, 2023). The situation of spiritual learning in the midst of this era raises fundamental questions about how Christian education should be conducted to form authentic faith in the context of complex and multicultural modern life. On the other hand, the researcher believes that *Shema Israel* can be used to formulate a learning concept relevant to contextual Christian education issues. Therefore, this study further raises the question of how the theological-pedagogical (hereinafter referred to as *theo-pedagogical*) study contained in *Shema Israel* can be translated into contextual Christian education learning practices for students. These questions touch on the integration of theological and pedagogical dimensions, which are often separated in Christian education practice. Therefore, this article specifically addresses the concern over the fragmentation between faith theory and educational practice, as well as the need for a comprehensive and biblically spiritual learning model.

*Shema Israel* (Deut. 6:4-9), as the core of the faith of the Israelites, offers profound principles that are relevant to contextual Christian education. This verse is not merely a theological exhortation, but a pedagogical mandate that integrates daily life with the formation of faith. *Shema Israel* shows that faith is formed through consistent practice in the context of relationships and daily life. Literature relevant to this topic shows that spiritual learning is not only determined by curriculum or methods, but by the quality of relationships within the community and repeated, meaningful spiritual experiences. One education expert who discusses relationship-based education in everyday communities is John H. Westerhoff III. Westerhoff emphasises that faith is formed through an organic growth process within the community, not through cognitive indoctrination alone (Westerhoff III, 1984). Furthermore, he also states that the development of faith occurs gradually and that the community plays a crucial role in the

spiritual formation that takes place at each stage. Westerhoff also believes that faith does not grow solely through verbal instruction but through participation in a living faith community, the repetition of spiritual practices, and experiences that are consistently embedded in daily life—a perspective that resonates with Shema Israel. Therefore, this text of Shema Israel should be explored by following Westerhoff's approach to uncover the essence of a biblical and relevant model of learning for the context of contextual Christian education.

Mapping of Christian education studies shows a paradigm shift from traditional instructional approaches (teacher to students) towards participatory and contextual learning. Previous studies have highlighted learning models such as faith community formation, as proposed by Sargeant (Sargeant, 2015) and Galindo (Galindo, 2010), intergenerational learning, as researched by (Roberto, 2012), (Shin Hyun Ho, 2020), (Jensen, 2017), and formative practices, as studied by (Jones, 2004), (Marshall, 2017), and (Willis, 2025). However, few have explicitly integrated Shema Israel as the foundation for a systematic model of spiritual learning. Baun and Tanamal write about Shema Israel, as the Jewish creed, as the theological foundation of Christian education centred on the oneness of YHWH (Baun & Tanamal, 2024). In line with Baun and Tanamal, Akinsulire's research also discusses Shema Israel as the theological foundation of postmodern Christian education (Akinsulire, 2020). With an emphasis on the concept of postmodernism, Akinsulire stresses that Christian educators must review Christian educational thinking and practices as reflected in the curriculum to align with educational issues related to the transmission of faith to the younger generation. Additionally, Mensah also researched Shema Israel, concluding that it is a paradigm that must be used for transformative Christian education, particularly in addressing issues of poverty and corruption in Ghana (Mensah, 2023). Although the focus of each article's discussion differs, all three articles clearly emphasise Shema Israel as the theoretical foundation of Christian education. However, they do not address its practical application, leaving a research gap that this study aims to address.

For a more practical study of Shema Israel, several authors have also conducted research. For example, Ton and Marbun wrote about how the theological values of Shema Israel are internalised in Christian education practices, emphasising the strategy of repetition in learning (Ton & Marbun, 2023). Maradesa also wrote about the theological theme of Shema Israel that can be implemented in Christian education, emphasising repetitive learning methods and the commandment to love God (Maradesa, 2024). Rantesalu and Herman also wrote about the importance of semiotics-based learning for children's spiritual intelligence based on the text of Shema Israel. In their writing, Rantesalu and Herman recommend learning through signs or symbols that are already familiar in the Toraja tradition to be contextualised in Christian education practices, as was also done by the Israelites in ancient times (Deuteronomy 6) (Rantesalu & Herman, 2023). Unlike previous studies, this research aims to combine theoretical and applied frameworks because it presents a more comprehensive learning approach by integrating repetitive, relational, and visualisation concepts, while also emphasising the rhythmic patterns found in the Shema Israel text. This idea is then formulated into a relevant learning practice proposal for implementation in contextual Christian education.

This is what constitutes the novelty of this research, which this study contributes a new theoretical construct that integrates Shema Israel's relational, repetitive, visual, and rhythmic dimensions into a contextual Christian education framework. Thus, this article offers a construct

of spirituality learning based on Shema Israel with a theopedagogical approach, which can respond to the contextual needs of Christian education today. The theopedagogical approach used will integrate the principles of relationality, repetition, visualisation, and spiritual rhythm as the foundation of learning. It is hoped that through this mapping, churches, families, and schools can have an applicable conceptual framework for shaping the faith of the Christian generation holistically. Additionally, this article also aims to emphasise that spiritual learning does not only occur in the classroom but in daily life marked by faithfulness, community, and continuous spiritual practices.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative approach with library research as the basis for its analysis using hermeneutics. (Smythe, 2012). The hermeneutic steps that can be used in this research method include three main stages. First, a historical-contextual analysis of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (Shema Israel) to understand the cultural, social, and theological background of the Israelites when the commandment was given. Second, an exploration of the theological meaning of key words to uncover the values of faith and pedagogy contained in the text. Third, contextual hermeneutics is conducted, which is an interpretation that bridges the message of the text with the current educational context, so that the principles of Shema Israel can be applied in Christian religious education that is relevant, transformative, and integrated with the lives of students. This approach allows for the integration of faith, pedagogy, and context as a whole. The main focus of this research is the text of Deuteronomy 6:4-9. The primary data sources are primary literature, such as the Bible, works by John H. Westerhoff III, as well as books, scientific journals, and academic articles discussing faith formation, learning concepts, and Christian pedagogical approaches. This research was conducted systematically, beginning with the identification and selection of relevant literature that supports theological and pedagogical themes. After that, exegesis was carried out to interpret the key values contained in Shema Israel and their correlation with Westerhoff's pedagogical ideas. The researcher then categorised the data based on four main dimensions found in the text (relational, repetitive, visual, and rhythmic) and linked them to contextual Christian education in the context of the church, family, and school. The synthesis of this literature review was used as the basis for formulating contextual, applicable religious education based on biblical principles.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of the study indicate that Shema Israel offers comprehensive and contextual spiritual learning, particularly through four main dimensions: relational, repetitive, visual, and rhythmic. These four dimensions, when developed in an integrated manner through a theopedagogical approach, can address the challenges of faith formation in contemporary Christian education, whether in churches, schools, or families. The concept proposed suggests that spiritual learning should be realised in practices rooted in personal relationships across generations, consistent spiritual repetition, visualisation through educational media, and implementation within a structured and regular rhythm of life. The findings also confirm that Shema Israel implicitly reflects the concept of spiritual learning that aligns with the thoughts of

John H. Westerhoff III, particularly that faith grows through involvement in community and repetitive actions in the context of real life (Westerhoff III, 2000). The following table summarises the synthesis of findings from the four main dimensions of this learning model.

Table 1. Summary of research results on Israel-based learning

<b>Main Dimensions</b>	<b>Biblical Texts</b>	<b>Theological Description</b>	<b>Theological-Pedagogical Study for Contextual Christian Education</b>
<b>Relational</b>	“You must teach them... to your children...”	Faith is passed down through personal relationships based on love.	Encouraging community-based and intergenerational spirituality learning.
<b>Repetitive</b>	“... repeatedly ... talking about it ...”	Repeating the word of God is a form of continuous declaration of faith.	Emphasising the importance of repeating faith practices in daily life.
<b>Visual</b>	“You must tie it as a sign... a symbol... write it on the doorpost...”	Signs are a realistic visualisation of faith.	Emphasising the importance of visualisation as a learning medium in faith education.
<b>Rhythmic</b>	“You must teach it... talk about it... tie it down... write it down...” “when you sit... walk... lie down... and get up.”	Living life according to divine patterns.	Integrating daily spiritual disciplines with the rhythm of students' lives to strengthen spirituality.

## **Shema Israel as a Conceptual Framework for Christian Spirituality Learning: A Theo-Pedagogical Study**

Shema Israel found in Deuteronomy 6:6-9 is a direct continuation of a very fundamental theological declaration in Jewish and Christian tradition, namely Shema Israel (“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!”). Following this monotheistic statement, verses 6-9 show that the confession of faith must not stop at intellectual affirmation but must be internalised and concretely passed on in daily life. These verses provide not only a theological framework but also a powerful pedagogical framework for how faith is instilled in children through learning that involves relationships, repetition, symbolisation, and the rhythm of life. As a learning framework, Shema Israel contains four principles of learning practice that can be studied and implemented in contextual Christian education, namely:

### **Relational learning**

The commandment in Deuteronomy 6:4–9 begins with a fundamental declaration of faith by Israel, known as Shema: *שמע ישראל יהוה אחד* (*shema Yisrael YHWH eloheinu YHWH ehad*) “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!” (v. 4). The word *shema* (שמע) in the masculine singular imperative form does not simply mean “hear” in an acoustic sense, but implies obedience and a willingness to respond actively. This imperative is directed collectively to the people of Israel, but is conveyed individually, emphasising that each member of the community is personally responsible for hearing and obeying God. The phrase *YHWH Eloheinu YHWH Echad* (יהוה אחד) expresses the uniqueness and exclusivity of the relationship between Israel and YHWH, where this theological recognition underlies all forms of ethical and spiritual relationships of God's people.

Then verse 5 contains the main commandment: *ואהבת את יהוה אלהיך* (*we'āhavtā 'et YHWH 'ēlōheykā*) “Love the Lord your God.” The verb *'ahav* (אהב), the Qal perfect 2 masculine singular form of the trilateral root א-ה-ב, denotes an action that is complete, comprehensive, and will-oriented. It is not merely an affective feeling, but a total commitment to God in response to His love and care. The object of this love is clear: *et YHWH Eloheikha* refers to an intimate and personal covenant relationship. The three expressions of totality in this verse—with all your heart (בְּכָל־לִבְּךָ), with all your soul (וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁךָ), and with all your strength (וּבְכָל־מְאֹדְךָ) indicate the intensity and integrity of the love that is required, encompassing the affective, existential, and material dimensions. Grammatically, the form *levavkha* (לִבְּךָ) differs from the common form *'lev* (לב) for heart. This form can indicate the duality of the heart (possibly referring to the inner aspect and the will) or as a form of intensification. Meanwhile, *nefesh* (נֶפֶשׁ) does not only refer to the soul in the sense of body-soul dualism, but to the whole of human life and existence. The word *me'odekha* (מְאֹדְךָ) usually means “very” or “truly” (adverb), but in this context it functions as a noun, signifying “everything possessed,” whether strength, potential, or material possessions. Thus, love for God is relational at the deepest level of human existence and must encompass the totality of life.

Verse 6 clarifies that love must be manifested in concrete relationships through the internalisation of the word: ‘The words that I command you today shall be on your heart.’ The verb *hayu* (הָיוּ) from the root ה-י-ה in the Qal imperfect plural masculine form implies continuity—that this command must be constantly present and active in the heart (*levavkha*). This suggests that the relationship with God is not momentary, but ongoing and expressed in constant remembrance and attention to His word. Love for God is manifested in a relationship rooted in the word and in a disposition of the heart that is open to divine revelation. The command to “teach them to your children” (וְשִׁנְנָתָם לְבָנֶיךָ) in verse 7 indicates that this relationship does not stop with the individual, but is passed on in the context of the family and subsequent generations. The verb *shanan* (שָׁנַן), from the root ש-נ-ן, in the Piel perfect 2 masculine singular form, means “to sharpen,” “to hone,” or “to repeat intensely.” This indicates that the teaching of faith is not merely informative but formative and intentional, carving values into the hearts of children through meaningful repetition and personal relationships.

In the context of ancient Hebrew, education was part of a strong and ongoing family relationship, in which parents were the primary priests and educators in shaping their children's religious identity. Therefore, the intergenerational meaning in this text is very strong. Children

(*banekha*, בְּנֵיכָה) are not merely assumed to be biological heirs, but as inheritors of the covenant and the spiritual identity of the community (Hasibuan, 2021). The relationship between generations is not merely biological inheritance, but the inheritance of faith and values (Hasibuan, 2021). In Hebrew culture, the household is the centre of learning, and love for God is manifested in the relational and pedagogical relationship between parents and children. This process connects the vertical relationship with God and the horizontal relationships within the family and community, thereby forming a comprehensive and deep relational network.

Verse 7b emphasises the everyday context of this teaching: “and talk about them when you sit at home, when you are on the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” The relationship with God does not only occur in the sanctuary, but in the rhythm of daily life. The relationship that is built is holistic, encompassing all aspects of life, from the sacred to the ordinary. This clearly shows that faith education is a relational process that takes place in the intimacy of daily life, not merely in structural formalities. Parents become a “living narrative body” that consistently presents God’s love in words and actions. Thus, the relational dimension in *Shema* encompasses the entire dynamic of human life: total love for God, the translation of that love into love for others (especially children), and faith teaching that is integrated with intergenerational relationships (Panggabean, 2023).

### ***Repetitive Learning***

Repetitive learning in *Shema Israel* is strongly emphasised in both the structure and content of Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Following the command to love God with all one's heart, soul, and strength (v. 5), verses 6–7 immediately connect this love with an act of repetitive teaching: “These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts,” and then, “Impress them on your children.” Love for God is not confined to emotions or intentions; it is demonstrated through a continuous, deliberate educational practice embedded in daily life. The key term *ve'shinnantam* (וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם) in verse 7 is the Piel perfect form of the root שָׁנָן (*shanan*), which means “to sharpen,” “to engrave,” or pedagogically, “to repeat with intensity.” The Piel stem, being intensive, emphasises that this teaching is not a one-time transmission of information but a deep engraving of truth into children through persistent repetition and reinforcement (Nainggolan et al., 2021).

This word choice is highly meaningful; in the oral culture of ancient Israel, repetition was the primary method for forming collective identity. God’s word had to be deeply embedded through intentional habitual repetition. The structure in verses 7b–8 reflects a rhythmic pattern of life based on repetition: “Talk about them when you sit at home, when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” This syntactic parallelism has a mnemonic and liturgical effect. These four phrases encompass the full daily rhythm of the Israelites from morning to night, from home to journey, emphasising that faith formation happens not at isolated times but continuously, through repetition in every life context.

In Jewish tradition, these verses form the foundation of the daily recitation of *Shema*, twice a day, as a rhythmic and consistent practice of faith. Repetition in spiritual learning also mirrors God's nature, faithful and consistent in self-revelation. In covenantal terms, God's people are called to live in remembrance of His saving acts, and the repetition of His word

becomes the human response to divine grace. In the Hebrew educational system, repetition is not viewed as tedious but as a form of reverence and internalisation. Children learn through repeated hearing, memorisation, and observing the living example of parents and the community. Thus, repetition in Shema is narrative in nature, reminding each generation of their identity as a beloved people called to covenantal faithfulness.

The verb forms used in this passage reinforce the nature of repetition: the word *vedibbarta* (וְדַבַּרְתָּ), meaning “you shall speak of them,” is derived from the root דִּבֶּר (davar). In the *Piel perfect* form, it signifies an intensive and continuous act of speaking. This is not a one-time conversation but a habitual engagement in talking about the Word of God in every moment of life. In Hebrew thought, repetition is not merely a pedagogical strategy but a theological structure. God reveals Himself repetitively through history and through His Word, and His people are called to remember, proclaim, and teach it unceasingly.

This repetitive process is closely tied to collective memory. Israel was commanded to continuously *remember* (*zakar*) the deeds of the Lord and to *reiterate* them to their children. In Old Testament theology, forgetting is a form of rebellion, while repetition is a means of covenantal faithfulness. Thus, repetition is not merely a mechanism for education, but also a mechanism for spiritual restoration, preventing the people from forgetting their identity as God's covenant community. Through repeating the Word, the people preserve a spiritual memory that shapes their actions, character, and daily ethical decisions.

The repetitive dimension fosters spiritual continuity. Repetition enables the transmission of values from one generation to the next, not as an empty tradition, but as a living liturgy. Through consistent repetition, children do not merely become familiar with God's Word; they embody it as an existential rhythm. This repetition shapes their mindset, builds spiritual resilience, and creates a spiritual bridge across generations. Thus, repetition in Shema is not simply about memorisation; it is the cultivation of wisdom through deep habituation. In light of Deuteronomy 6:4-9, repetition is an expression of responsible love. Parents who love God will faithfully repeat His Word to their children.

### ***Visualisation in Learning***

Following the command to love and to teach verbally and repetitively, God gives a concrete instruction: “Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.” Here, we see that spiritual learning in the Hebrew tradition is not merely abstract but is made tangible through physical symbols, objects that can be seen, touched, and visually experienced in daily life.

The keyword in verse 8, *ukeshartam* (וְקָשַׁרְתָּם), derives from the root קָשַׁר (*qashar*), meaning “to bind” or “to tie tightly.” It appears in the Qal perfect form, second person masculine singular, with the suffix -ם, referring to the plural object (“them”—God's commandments). This command implies a concrete physical action: binding God's words on the hands and forehead. This is not merely passive symbolism but an active bodily engagement with faith. In later Jewish practice, this is manifested through the use of *tefillin* (phylacteries), small boxes containing Shema passages, literally bound to the arm and forehead during morning prayers, as a means of embodying faith through visible symbols.

The next phrase, “*they shall be as frontlets between your eyes,*” uses the rare term *totafot* (טוֹטָפוֹת), which appears only a few times in the Torah. While its exact etymology is debated, contextually it refers to a symbolic ornament or visible reminder worn between the eyes. In some Semitic roots, the term is associated with something shiny or attention-grabbing, suggesting that God’s word should be prominently displayed, not hidden or forgotten.

In the context of faith education, this emphasises the importance of visual reinforcement. God’s word must be physically present in human spaces, becoming a visible focal point rather than merely an internal reflection. Verse 9 continues with another visual command: “*Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*” The verb *ukhtavtam* (וּכְתַבְתֶּם), from the root כִּתֵּב (*katav*), in Qal perfect 2ms, indicates a clear and permanent act of writing. God’s word is to be written—not merely memorised or spoken, but formalised in written form in strategic places in both the home and the public sphere. The *doorframes of your houses* (*mezuzot beitekha*) and *your gates* represent locations of frequent passage; inscribing God’s word there integrates faith into both private and communal life. In modern Jewish practice, these verses are written on scrolls placed inside *mezuzahs*, affixed to doorposts as a sign of household sanctification by the Word of God.

The theological significance of these visual actions is profound. In the culture of the ancient Near East, visual symbols were used to signify identity and loyalty, such as royal insignia or covenantal signs. By placing God’s word on their bodies and in their homes, the Israelites affirmed their identity as a covenant people. These visual symbols were not only personal reminders but also public testimonies. Everyone who entered the house or passed through the gate would see that the household lived in obedience to God’s word. Thus, visualisation becomes a medium of evangelism, education, and communal reinforcement simultaneously.

Based on grammatical analysis, these visual actions are not optional but mandated. All the main verbs in verses 8–9 use the *Qal perfect* form with the conjunction *waw* (ו), indicating a sequence of imperative commands in a narrative structure. This creates a rhythmic and urgent tone, as if Moses intended to ensure that the word of God is not only heard but also sensed, seen, and tangibly experienced every day. These forms show a continuity between love for God and the physical actions that accompany it: binding, writing, and seeing. In faith education for children, this dimension of visualisation is highly crucial. Children in their early years learn through sight and sensory experiences. When God’s word is written on the walls of the home, when symbols of faith are visible daily, children learn not only from spoken words but also from their environment. The home becomes an interactive space for learning faith. Visual experiences create strong emotional and cognitive associations with the word, reinforcing previously repeated verbal teachings. Therefore, visualisation serves as a bridge between word and experience, between faith and real life.

Ultimately, this dimension of visualisation also points to the unity of personal and communal faith. The term *she’arekha* (your gates) in ancient Israel referred to public spaces where courts, assemblies, and collective decisions took place. By writing God’s word on the gates, Israel was called to make the word the foundation of society. Thus, the visualisation of faith is not only meant to shape individuals but also to shape communities that embody the values of the Kingdom of God. In the modern era, this encourages churches and Christian

families to arrange spaces theologically, placing symbols, Scripture quotes, or spiritual artwork in their living environments so that eternal values remain present and continue to shape every generation.

### ***Rhythmic Learning***

The rhythmic dimension in Deuteronomy 6:7b becomes strikingly evident through the sequence of phrases that reflect a daily temporal pattern: “when you sit at home, when you walk along the road, when you lie down, and when you get up.” This structure is not merely literary; it mirrors the everyday life cycle of the people of Israel. The verse emphasises that the teaching of faith is not confined to sacred spaces or isolated moments, but flows through the regular and repeated rhythm of daily time. It describes a spirituality shaped by rhythm, faith formed through the patterns of life. In the Hebrew text, these phrases are constructed in a parallel and repetitive form, utilising temporal particles that emphasise habitual actions:

- **בְּשִׁיבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ (be’shivtekha be’veitekha)** – “when you sit in your house”
- **וּבְלֶכְתְּךָ בַּדֶּרֶךְ (u’velekhtekha va’derekh)** – “when you walk along the road”
- **וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ (u’ve’shokhbekha)** – “when you lie down”
- **וּבְקוּמְךָ (u’ve’qumekha)** – “when you rise”

Each phrase uses the construct infinitive form + pronominal suffix, which in Hebrew grammar is known as the infinitive construct with a temporal function. This indicates duration and habitual action, rather than a one-time event. This pattern, both literary and phonetic, creates a rhythmic flow that seems to mirror the breath of daily life. The beauty of this parallelism enhances memorisation and consistent spiritual awareness through temporal repetition. The spiritual meaning of this structure is highly significant. It shows that the teaching of faith must permeate the daily rhythm in sitting, walking, lying down, and rising. It is not merely a devotional moment detached from life, but a faith that lives alongside time. By embedding the Word into daily moments, the people of God learn to see time as belonging to God and as the space of His revelation. Thus, this rhythmic dimension teaches a holistic and comprehensive spirituality, encompassing every aspect of human time.

Grammatically, the use of the 2ms pronominal suffix (-ךָ ending) in each phrase (e.g., *be’shivtekha*, *u’velekhtekha*) signifies personal intimacy. The Word is not some distant, communal property, but is personally instilled in the individual Israelite. This shows that the spiritual rhythm is not merely impersonal or institutional, but touches personal daily life. God's Word is present in personal time and becomes part of one's life from waking to sleeping. This rhythmic spirituality is a continuous personal journey with God. The structure follows a non-liturgical time order, beginning with sitting, then walking, then lying down, and finally rising. This is a realistic depiction of daily life, not merely a religious rite. This means that spiritual learning is not confined to worship spaces but becomes the liturgy of life. In this rhythm, faith is not merely memorised but lived. Like the consistent ticking of a clock, the teaching of the Word pulses throughout daily life. This aligns with modern pedagogical principles that the most effective learning happens in real, repeated contexts, not only within the classroom. In conclusion, the rhythmic dimension of Shema Israel is the foundation of enduring spirituality. By embedding the Word into a repeated and structured time pattern, God’s people are not only

taught to know the Lord, but also to live with Him every day. The Hebrew language used in this verse reinforces the urgency and beauty of this rhythmic pattern, making it a model of spiritual learning that forms generation after generation in a continual, stable, and profound manner.

## **Theoretical Argument for Contextual Christian Religious Education Based on Shema Israel**

Spirituality learning grounded in *Shema Israel* requires a strong theoretical foundation to be developed as a relevant conceptual framework for contemporary Christian education. Historically, Shema Israel is not merely a command to memorise or recite God's laws but serves as a framework for integral and practical faith formation. Therefore, reading Deuteronomy 6:6-9 demands more than a linguistic or theological analysis; it must be extended into the development of educational theory that aligns with its core message. This is where the insights of John H. Westerhoff III become essential, as he proposes a model of faith formation that unfolds progressively and is deeply rooted in the life of the faith community. In *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (Westerhoff III, 2000), He critiques religious education that overly emphasises cognitive aspects and offers instead a model of faith development rooted in lived experience. For Westerhoff, faith is not merely taught but formed through a holistic process involving narrative, tradition, community, and lived experience. This aligns with Shema's call to teach God's Word as part of daily life, not limited to sacred spaces.

Importantly, Westerhoff emphasises that the family and faith community serve as primary pedagogical spaces for spiritual formation (Westerhoff III, 2000), which directly resonates with Shema Israel. He also introduces an intergenerational approach, where faith is naturally transmitted through interactions between older and younger generations (Westerhoff III, 1984). The command in Shema to "teach them diligently to your children" is a clear call for parents to serve as primary faith educators (Bulan & George, 2024). This concept echoes Westerhoff's idea that faith formation is not dependent on formal curricula alone but emerges from the authentic life of the community. Here, the role of community as a faith ecosystem becomes vital, where values are transmitted through relationships, stories, and sustained practices (Roberto, 2012).

Additionally, Shema Israel underscores repetition and rhythm, which in Westerhoff's view correspond to the stage of experienced faith where repeated spiritual experiences such as liturgy, family habits, and symbols serve as tools of formation (Neville & Kennedy, 1978). Verses 7 and 9 of Deuteronomy 6 describe a life rhythm imbued with the Word of God, from sitting to walking, lying down to rising, from doorposts to gates. Westerhoff acknowledges that faith formation requires structure and rhythm, not just information delivery (Westerhoff III, 1984). Thus, his framework affirms that Shema Israel provides a biblical basis for a pedagogical approach that is both intentional and contextual.

Westerhoff further distinguishes between education as transmission (information transfer) and education as transformation (identity formation) (Westerhoff III, 2000). This distinction supports the article's findings that *Shema Israel* is a call to embed God's Word into personal and communal identity (Zaluchu, 2021). When one binds the Word on their hands and forehead (v.8), the act is not merely symbolic but reflects the integration of faith into all aspects of life.

Thus, the dichotomy between spiritual and daily life becomes obsolete (Family, 2017), as faith becomes a lifestyle both practical and symbolic.

The pedagogical implications of this are wide-ranging. When the relational, repetitive, visual, and rhythmic dimensions of Shema Israel are interpreted through Westerhoff's theory, a model of spirituality learning emerges that not only targets doctrinal understanding but shapes faithful living through habits, community, and symbolic engagement. This responds to the crisis in education that often focuses merely on knowledge without addressing character and spiritual formation. Therefore, the theo-pedagogical approach combining the exposition of Shema Israel with Westerhoff's theory of faith formation contributes significantly to the development of a contextual Christian Religious Education model. These findings offer not only a theoretical framework but also a practical foundation that can be applied in the contexts of church, school, and Christian families. The integration of biblical theology and pedagogical theory gives both scientific and pastoral legitimacy to an educational practice that is holistic and transformative (Kia, 2016).

This argument affirms that Shema Israel is not merely a liturgical text but a dynamic source for learning (Maradesa, 2024). When integrated with Westerhoff's pedagogical theory, it forms a paradigm of spirituality learning that is not confined to the classroom but is lived out in relationships, repeated in life's rhythms, embodied in symbols, and passed on across generations (Harvijanto, 2024). This provides a robust foundation for developing Christian education that is not only contextual but also biblical, relevant, and applicable (Prawono, 2020).

## **Constructing Shema Israel-Based Spirituality Learning: Four Core Dimensions**

The development of spirituality learning based on Shema Israel requires a systematic and contextual construction to ensure its practical implementation within Christian education, particularly in the realm of Christian Religious Education (CRE). This construction is not speculative in nature but is rooted in exegetical interpretation of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and integrated with Westerhoff's theory of faith development. Four foundational pillars: relational, repetitive, visual, and rhythmic form a conceptual framework that can be developed into holistic Christian spirituality learning.

First, the relational dimension emphasises that spirituality learning does not occur in isolation but through personal interaction and community (Sitompul et al., 2025). In Shema Israel, relationships are underscored by the command to teach God's Word to children within the household and broader community (Wirawan, 2021). This dimension directs the construction of learning strategies toward intergenerational learning, the use of small groups, spiritual mentoring, and parental involvement in the learning process. The goal is to shape learning as a shared journey (Darmanto, 2017), rather than a mere transmission of content.

Second, the repetitive dimension refers to the consistent and continuous reinforcement of faith content. The phrase "repeat them to your children" serves as the basis for strengthening values through narrative, liturgical practice, and faith-based habits (Susanta, 2019). In practice, Christian educators can design learning programs that emphasise the repetition of core Christian values (Simanjuntak, 2024) through stories, songs, memorisation, and structured reflection. The

purpose of repetition is not mere rote learning, but to deepen understanding and facilitate value internalisation (Ton & Marbun, 2023).

Third, the visual dimension draws from verse 8 of *Shema Israel*, which highlights the importance of faith symbols: “tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.” This inspires the use of visual media in learning posters, faith icons, symbolic objects (crosses, modern mezuzahs), and visual arts (drawings, drama, painting). Visualisation enables students to engage meaning through their senses and strengthens spiritual memory (Pasaribu, 2021). In digital contexts, this aspect may be expanded through faith infographics, visual presentations, or reflective videos that convey Christian teachings in a contextualised manner.

Fourth, the rhythmic dimension points to the structured integration of faith into daily life rhythms. Verses 7 and 9 specify moments of faith practice when sitting, walking, lying down, and rising. This calls for scheduled and integrated learning that reflects the rhythms of everyday life (Samuel, 2022).

Spirituality learning based on these four pillars must be organised into coherent instructional units. For instance, a single topic can be taught through a relational strategy (such as small family group discussions), reinforced repetitively (through weekly reflections), visualised (by creating artistic faith expressions), and ritualised (via class devotional practices). These dimensions are not meant to function independently, but rather to interact synergistically, forming a comprehensive and contextual learning model.

## **Implementing Shema Israel-Based Spirituality Learning for Contextual Christian Education**

The implementation of spirituality learning based on *Shema Israel* within the framework of contextual Christian education demands the courage to move beyond normative teaching models toward approaches that are more dynamic, contextual, and responsive to the realities of today’s learners. Christian Religious Education (CRE) cannot be detached from the evolving social, cultural, and spiritual contexts of students. Therefore, the idea of spirituality learning rooted in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 must be translated into tangible practices that reach the spheres of home, school, and church. In the Indonesian context, faith education must grapple with religious pluralism, digitalisation challenges, and the shifting roles of Christian families in nurturing faith. In such a situation, the relational approach of *Shema Israel* reminds us that faith education cannot be carried out by teachers alone in the classroom; it requires intergenerational involvement—from parents, teachers, pastors, to peers. This approach can be implemented through home-based faith learning (Astuti & Silalahi, 2022), spiritual mentoring across age groups, or collaborative faith-based projects involving children and their parents in engaging with God’s Word. Christian schools and churches can work together to provide intergenerational modules that cultivate dialogue across ages (Woen, 2021).

Meanwhile, the repetitive dimension can be applied through sustained learning programs that emphasise the reinforcement of faith values in various forms, such as repeated narrative Bible readings, classroom worship routines, and strengthening symbols of faith through creative activities. This repetition is formational rather than merely informational. For today’s digital-

native students, the use of faith infographics, thematic videos, scripture posters, or augmented reality can serve as symbolic-modern tools for “binding the Word on hands and foreheads.” Schools may design spiritually rich classrooms filled with Christian visual symbols to help students sensorially experience the presence of God’s Word. Artistic works, faith installations, and spiritual theatre can serve as expressive spaces for the visual dimension, which is not only aesthetic but also deeply spiritual.

The final dimension, rhythmic, emphasises the integration of faith into the daily rhythms of life. This can be applied by creating daily rituals in the school context, such as morning prayer sessions, brief reflections before lessons, and a “faith calendar” integrated into the academic schedule. Parents, teachers, or spiritual mentors can design a learning structure that focuses not only on academic content but also on students’ spiritual rhythms, taking into account key moments such as the start of a semester, Christian holidays, or significant life events (birthdays, losses, achievements).

Contextual Christian education must be grounded in the local realities and cultures of the learners. This means that curriculum development and the practice of spirituality learning cannot overlook the social, cultural, linguistic, and local values present in Christian communities. For instance, in regions with a strong oral culture, repetitive and rhythmic approaches may take the form of spiritual folk songs; in urban digital settings, visualisation becomes a strategic medium; and in minority Christian communities, relational approaches are essential for building resilient faith through supportive small communities.

More than that, this approach challenges Christian educators not merely to teach *about* faith, but to teach *in* and *through* faith. Teachers are not just information transmitters but must become living witnesses who embody the values they teach. Therefore, Shema Israel-based spirituality learning is not just a new strategy in Christian education but a paradigm of learning drawn from the rich theological depth of Scripture, strengthened by pedagogical reflection, and creatively implemented in context. This paradigm paves the way for the formation of Christian learning communities that build one another up, honour time and symbols, and live out faith holistically across all dimensions of students' lives.

## CONCLUSION

This study thus establishes a new theo-pedagogical model that unites biblical exegesis with contemporary educational theory, offering a framework that transforms Shema Israel from a creedal declaration into a pedagogical strategy for forming holistic Christian faith. The text of Shema *Israel* (Deut. 6:6-9) as a conceptual framework for Christian spirituality learning through a theo-pedagogical approach, culminating in the practice of contextual Christian Religious Education (CRE). From the exegetical study of the text, four essential dimensions of spirituality learning were identified: relational, repetitive, visual, and rhythmic. These four dimensions not only reflect the structure of the biblical text but also represent pedagogical principles that are intergenerational, integrative, and transformative. In the context of contemporary CRE, these dimensions provide new direction for developing learning strategies rooted in biblical spirituality and relevant to the challenges of the present age. The research question has been addressed through a theo-pedagogical construction that combines biblical

interpretation with Westerhoff's theory of faith education, resulting in the formulation of the four core dimensions of spirituality learning based on *Shema Israel*. Spirituality learning is a living, dialogical process grounded in loving relationships, repetition, visual engagement, and integration into the daily rhythms of students' lives. The originality of this research lies in a new theo-pedagogical construct that integrates *Shema Israel*'s relational, repetitive, visual, and rhythmic dimensions into a contextual Christian education framework.

This study shows that spirituality learning is not merely normative, but participatory and applicable. As such, the article provides a theoretical foundation and practical guidance for Christian educators in designing meaningful, contextual learning that nurtures a resilient faith. This research also opens future opportunities for the development of curriculum models based on the four dimensions of *Shema Israel*, both in school and church settings, as well as classroom action research to test their effectiveness. Therefore, it is essential for educators and church leaders not only to understand the content of *Shema Israel* but also to embody it in an educational rhythm that shapes the hearts, minds, and actions of God's children in a constantly changing world.

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