

# 2

## שִׁמְעֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד

(דברים ו', ד)



*Listen B'nei Yisrael, Hashem is our G-d,  
Hashem is one.*

(DEVARIM 6:4)

LIVING LESSON 1

*Everything is  
From Hashem*

LIVING LESSON 2

*Every Aveirah  
is a Rebellion*

LIVING LESSON 3

*Mesiras Nefesh*

LIVING LESSON 4

*Thoughts Lead  
to Feelings*

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד

*Listen B'nei Yisrael, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is one.*

## Everything is From Hashem

Everything in the world was created and is constantly run by Hashem. However, when we look at the world, it is difficult to see how Hashem manages everything. To us, it appears that everything is governed by nature. To help us recognize the truth, Hashem gave us a gift called the neshamah. The neshamah of a Jew is a part of Hashem and, therefore, helps us realize how Hashem governs everything.

The neshamah is similar to a pair of 3D glasses. Without them, everything seems flat.

However, as soon as you put a pair on, a whole

new world comes to life. Similarly, without the neshamah, it can be quite challenging to recognize Hashem's presence in everything. When we connect with our neshamah, it becomes easier to do the right thing and listen to Hashem.

This is what the pasuk of Shema teaches: we say Hashem Elokeinu—Hashem is our strength and source of life. Through the words of Shema, we connect with our neshamah and begin to perceive the world accurately, recognizing that Hashem is the source of all life.

When we recognize that everything happening in our lives comes from Hashem, it helps us remain calm and happy at all times. Hashem is always looking out for us, and nothing that occurs is random or accidental.

### CHALLENGE YOURSELF

*The neshamah helps us see Hashem. What are some ways we can use our neshamah to recognize Hashem?*



## The Wine Factory

Reb Yehuda Leib, one of the chassidim of the Yesod Ha'avodah, once passed by the shul when he heard someone crying. When he went inside to investigate, he found Ephraim, the winemaker, saying Tehillim with tears streaming down his face.

Suddenly, Ephraim called out, "Hashem, please don't let them hurt my family!" Reb Yehuda Leib waited for him to calm down and asked what was wrong.

"Less than an hour ago," Ephraim replied, "someone told me that the police were on their way to my house. One of my workers became upset with me and accused me of not filling out my paperwork, claiming that my entire business was illegal. They will use anything as an excuse to throw me in prison."

The first thing I did was run straight to the Yesod Havodah, but the Rebbe was out of town. What was I supposed to do? I came here to the Shul and started davening to Hashem..."

As this was happening, the police arrived at Ephraim's house. His wife, in a panic, took some straw and sprinkled it on the steps that led down to the wine cellar, then shut the door.

Immediately after she finished, the police barged through the door led by the former worker. The police began searching every corner of the house but found nothing.

The worker who brought them there began to lose patience. "The factory is right over there, officer," he said, pointing to the cellar door.

The chief looked at him sharply. "Don't tell us how to do our job." And went right on looking around the house.

Eventually, the police turned to go. "There is obviously nothing here," they decided.

In desperation, the worker threw open the door to the cellar. "Officer, you didn't look here yet; all the wine is down here," he cried.

The chief of police took one look at the steps going down and, seeing them covered in straw, exploded.

"Do you take me for a fool! Everyone knows that straw is bad for wine." With that, he stormed out of the house.

Whenever Reb Yehuda would repeat this story, he would say: "Look how a Yid reacts when he has a problem. Ephraim didn't start looking for a lawyer. He knew that the only place he could get help was with the Rebbe or by davening to Hashem."<sup>1</sup>







## Our Sages Say

### Doesn't Even Know

אין בעל הנס מכיר בניסו - Even the person the miracle happened to doesn't realize it was a miracle.<sup>2</sup>

Hashem conceals His constant miracles and involvement under the guise of nature, leading us to believe that they aren't miracles at all. Sometimes, Hashem clearly reveals the miracles to us, but often, we fail to recognize the tremendous miracles that happen continuously in our lives.

### G-d of Gods

קרר לי אלקא דאלקייא - The non-Jews call Hashem the G-d of the gods.<sup>3</sup>

Even many people without a neshamah believe that Hashem is powerful and that He created the world. However, many of them think that Hashem then gave His powers to nature and that nature now controls the world, chas v'shalom. As Jews, we know that this isn't true. Nature is merely a tool in Hashem's hand. It is truly Hashem who is behind everything that happens.

#### CHALLENGE YOURSELF

Why do you think Hashem hides the miracles that are happening around us constantly?

### Plant with Emunah

מאמין בחיי העולם וזורע - [B'nei Yisrael] plant because they believe in Hashem.<sup>4</sup>

Although everyone uses the same tools and methods to grow crops, as Jews, we recognize that nothing can grow without the help of Hashem. While it may seem to most that fields grow naturally, we understand that it is Hashem who provides.

When we need help in our lives, we know whom to turn to.



## Pearls of Wisdom

### Make it Make Sense

Although everything comes from Hashem, we still need to work to create a "kli," or path, for Hashem's blessings to flow. This is why the Torah commands us, "ששת ימים, תעבוד," meaning for six days you should work. Ultimately, Hashem desires that our sustenance reaches us in a natural way. Therefore, we must put in the effort to receive Hashem's help.

Nevertheless, we should never lose sight of the fact that Hashem, not our work, is the true source of our livelihoods.<sup>5</sup>

#### CHALLENGE YOURSELF

If Hashem provides everything, why do we still need to work?



## Did You Know?

### Daily Prayer

The Zohar<sup>6</sup> relates that R' Yeisa Savah would ask Hashem to provide him with food every day, even if he already had food in his house. R' Yeisa Savah understood that Hashem provides everything in our lives. Even if we have food in our homes, it is Hashem who ensures we can benefit from it. Nothing can happen without Hashem's help.

### The Purim Miracle

In the story of Purim, Mordechai and Esther didn't rely on natural means to overturn the decree. Mordechai didn't use his influence as a minister to nullify the decree but instead began fasting and engaging in teshuvah. Likewise, Esther fasted for three days before approaching Achashverosh, even though fasting would diminish her beauty in his eyes. Mordechai and Esther recognized that Hashem is behind everything. Therefore, their immediate reaction to the decree was to turn to Hashem for help.<sup>7</sup>



## Word Power

### From אֵין

In Tehillim, Dovid Hamelech writes, מֵאֵין יָבֵא עֲזָרִי—from where will my help come?

The word אֵין literally means "nothing." This can serve as a reference to Hashem, whom we cannot see or understand. Therefore, this sentence can be understood as a statement—from אֵין, Hashem, my help will come.

Everything comes from Hashem.<sup>8</sup>



## Extra Food for Thought

If everything comes from Hashem, why does it sometimes feel like things happen randomly?

In Shema we say that Hashem is one. How does understanding that Hashem is one help us in our daily lives?



שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד

*Listen B'nei Yisrael, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is one.*

## Every Aveirah is a Rebellion

If a king asks one of his servants to do something and the servant doesn't listen, it is considered a form of rebellion. It does not matter if the king requested the servant to do something big or small; if a servant ignores their king, they deny the king's authority.

The same goes for Hashem and the mitzvot.

The words *אֶחָד* mean that Hashem is one. When we say these words, we acknowledge that Hashem is the only one who controls and governs the world. Therefore, we listen to whatever Hashem commands.

When a person commits an aveirah, it is as if they are denying this truth and claiming that someone else is in

charge. Committing an aveirah is like rebelling against Hashem, implying that what Hashem wants is unimportant and that only personal desires matter.

Sometimes, we may think that only serious aveiros, such as Avodah Zarah, are a denial and rebellion against Hashem's authority. However, in reality, every aveirah is like Avodah Zarah. When we rebel against Hashem and ignore His words, we imply that there is another authority, aside from Hashem, that we choose to follow. That is Avodah Zarah.<sup>9</sup>

### CHALLENGE YOURSELF

*It's mentioned that when we say "Hashem is one," we are acknowledging that Hashem controls everything. How does committing an aveirah make it seem as though we don't believe Hashem is the only one in charge?*



### Our Sages Say

#### Small and Big

וְהָיָה זֶהִיר בְּמִצְוָה קְלָה כְּבִחְמוּרָה – Be just as careful with a minor mitzvah as with a major mitzvah.<sup>10</sup>

Although some mitzvot may be seen as stricter than others, the foundation of every mitzvah remains the same: recognizing Hashem as our King and listening to His words. Therefore, the size of a mitzvah doesn't matter. Regardless of the mitzvah, we are listening to Hashem and serving Him.<sup>11</sup>

#### Worse than a Mosquito

וְאִם לֹא אוֹמְרִים לוֹ זָבוּב קִדְמָךְ יְתוֹשׁ קִדְמָךְ שֶׁלְשׁוֹל זֶה קִדְמָךְ – If you are not good, they tell you that even the flies were created before you, the mosquitoes come before you, and the worms preceded you.<sup>12</sup>

When a person commits an aveirah, they are worse than the lowest creatures. Even the lowest creatures obey Hashem and act as they were created to. However, a person who commits an aveirah is rebelling against Hashem and acting contrary to how Hashem intended.

### CHALLENGE YOURSELF

*The Sages teach us to be as careful with a minor mitzvah as with a major one. Why do you think the size of the mitzvah doesn't affect its importance in listening to Hashem?*



### Did You Know?

#### The First Two

The first two of the Aseres Hadibros encompass the entire Torah. Every positive mitzvah affirms that Hashem is one, fulfilling the first commandment of believing in Hashem, while every aveirah denies Hashem, similar to the second commandment against Avodah Zarah.<sup>13</sup>

### CHALLENGE YOURSELF

*The first two of the Aseres Hadibros are about believing in Hashem and not worshipping other gods. How does committing any aveirah relate to the idea of believing in other authorities besides Hashem?*



## The First Opportunity

A Jewish man was once imprisoned and unable to daven with a minyan or perform many of the mitzvot. However, the guards informed him that he could select one day that year to leave prison and fulfill the mitzvot he desired. This man wrote to the Radvaz,<sup>14</sup> asking which day he should choose to leave. The Radvaz responded that he should request to leave on the earliest day possible because every mitzvah is equally important.<sup>15</sup>





## The Rabbi and Philosopher

Rabbi Reuven once stayed in Teveria for Shabbos and was discovered by a philosopher.

“Tell me,” the philosopher asked, “who is the most hated person in the world?”

“Someone who denies his Creator,” Rabbi Reuven answered.

The philosopher was still not satisfied, “and who would that be?”

Rabbi Reuven responded, “Someone who doesn’t respect their parents, steals, or is jealous. Because not listening to Hashem shows that you deny His existence.”<sup>16</sup>



### Pearly Wisdom

#### Only Existence

On a deeper level, believing in Hashem means acknowledging that He is the only true existence and that everything in the world was created solely to fulfill His will. Every aveirah denies that belief. An aveirah suggests that there is another existence apart from Hashem and that the creations have a separate identity from Him.

If someone doesn’t believe that everything is part of Hashem, they are denying the concept that there is nothing besides Him.<sup>17</sup>



### Extra Food for Thought

The word for straying (תַּשְׁטָח) is related to foolishness (שְׁטוּת). Why do you think it’s considered foolish to believe our own desires are more important than what Hashem asks of us?

If every aveirah is like saying “no” to Hashem, what is one small “yes” (mitzvah) you could focus on doing today to show that you recognize Hashem as your King?



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### Word Power

#### Fool

The passuk states,<sup>18</sup> כִּי תִשָּׁטָה אִשְׁתּוֹ—If a wife strays and commits an aveirah. The word תִּשָּׁטָה relates to שְׁטוּת, meaning foolishness. This is because engaging in an aveirah can only occur in moments of foolishness. How can one believe that their desires hold more weight than what Hashem wants?<sup>19</sup>

## Mesiras Nefesh

When we recite Shema every day, we accept Hashem’s kingship over ourselves,<sup>20</sup> and arouse a desire to connect with Him. In Shema, it states that we should serve Hashem “with our whole life.” This teaches us that we should serve Hashem, even if it means sacrificing our lives.<sup>21</sup>

When we accept Hashem as our authority and wish to remain connected to Him at all times, ignoring His wishes becomes impossible.

This is the meaning of mesiras nefesh—giving up your life for Hashem. In the past, mesiras nefesh was literal. Millions of Jews throughout history sacrificed their lives to remain united with Hashem. Nowadays, our physical lives are not under threat, and mesiras

nefesh doesn’t usually involve giving up our lives. Nevertheless, we can practice mesiras nefesh by listening to Hashem even when it’s difficult. When we set aside our own desires and instead listen to Hashem, we demonstrate that Hashem is what truly matters, regardless of what we may have to sacrifice to serve Him.<sup>22</sup>

#### CHALLENGE YOURSELF

*In Shema, we state that we will serve Hashem with our whole life, even if we must sacrifice our lives. What do you think it means to serve Hashem with your whole life today, when we are not typically forced to give up our physical lives?*



### Pearly Wisdom

#### Deepest Connection

The neshamah of a Jew originates from the deepest part of Hashem. Since the neshamah is a piece of Hashem, it is impossible for it to be disconnected from Him, even for a moment. Our neshamah is what empowers us with mesiras nefesh. Because we have a piece of Hashem within us, disconnecting ourselves from Him is like separating a part of ourselves.<sup>23</sup>







### Did You Know?

#### The Big Three

There are three mitzvos for which we are commanded to give up our lives: Avodah Zarah (worshipping other gods), giluy arayos (certain forbidden relationships), and murder.<sup>24</sup> This is known as dying Al Kiddush Hashem—to sanctify Hashem’s name.

#### Painless Death

When a person is killed Al Kiddush Hashem, their neshamah is revealed, causing them to feel no pain at all!<sup>25</sup>

#### CHALLENGE YOURSELF

*There are three special mitzvot for which we are commanded to give up our lives: Avodah Zarah (worshipping other gods), giluy arayos (certain forbidden relationships), and murder. Why do you think these three actions are so serious that we should choose to die rather than commit them?*



### Our Sages Say

#### Proper Intent

The Zohar teaches that if one thinks during Shema that they are willing to give up their lives for Hashem, it is regarded as if they have actually done so. In fact, some say that to fulfill the mitzvah of reciting Shema, one needs to think during Shema that they are sacrificing their lives for Hashem.<sup>26</sup>

#### CHALLENGE YOURSELF

*Why do you think the Zohar teaches that simply thinking about your willingness to give up your life for Hashem is regarded as if you had actually done it?*



### Yossele the Thief

The Shpoler Zeide<sup>27</sup> used to befriend a group of thieves in his area. No one knew why he cared so much for them. Whenever one of them was caught and had to spend time in jail, the Tzadik would send him food and drink and take care of him.

One of these thieves was named Yossele.

Once, Yossele was caught stealing a large sum of money from the local church. The church decreed his punishment: death by burning.

“We will give you one way out,” the priest informed him, “if you convert to our religion, we will let you live.”

Yossele stubbornly refused. As he was about to be burned, the priest could not contain himself. “You are obviously not a pious person and have committed many sins in your lifetime. Why won’t you just do one more sin and convert?!”

“I may be a thief,” Yossel responded resolutely, “but I am a Jew and I will die a Jew!” and he jumped into the flames.

When it was all over, his body was handed over to the Jewish community for burial, and the simple gravestone in the old cemetery of Shpola records the date of his mesiras nefesh.

“You see,” the Shpoler Zeide would say, “it is not in vain that I speak in praise of my thieves!”<sup>28</sup>

#### CHALLENGE YOURSELF

*Yossele, the thief, wasn’t considered religious but still chose to die rather than convert. What do you think pushed Yossele to remain a Jew, even though he didn’t follow the Torah?*



## Living Lessons 4

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד

*Listen B’nei Yisrael, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is one.*

## Thoughts Lead to Feelings

The second paragraph of Shema begins with אַתָּה תִּאָהֱבֶהּ, which means “You shall love Hashem.” The Torah commands us to love Hashem. But how can someone be commanded to love something? Feelings are not something you can choose to have. Either you like something or you don’t. Imagine being told to start liking chocolate ice cream when you only like vanilla; you can’t simply change what you enjoy.

The truth is that it is possible to create new feelings for something. When a person thinks deeply about something, their thoughts can actually create new feelings towards it. For example, when someone learns a great deal about the health benefits of certain foods and how they impact people’s moods, they will naturally begin to crave those foods. Similarly, once they fully understand the harm that certain foods can cause, it becomes much easier to lose interest in them and even start feeling repulsed by them.

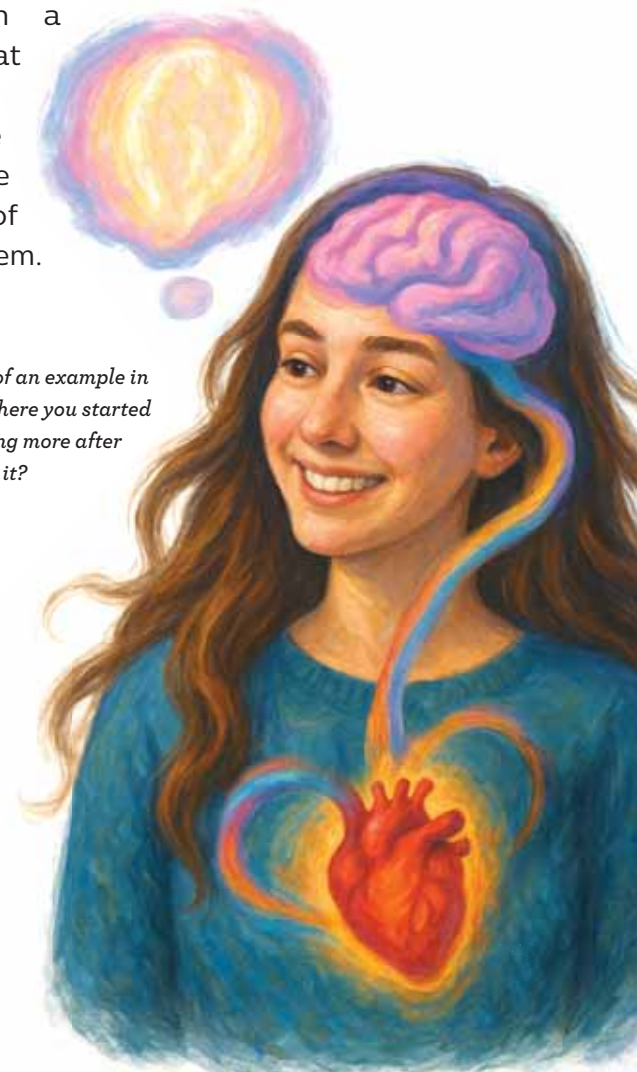
The same is true for feelings toward Hashem. When we think deeply about Hashem’s greatness, we can arouse emotions for Him. This is the message of the first line of the Shema—“Listen and understand, B’nei Yisrael, that Hashem is our G-d... therefore, you

should love Hashem.” When we contemplate the greatness of Hashem, how He created the entire world and everything in it, and yet cares specifically for us—He is our G-d—this fills us with profound appreciation and love for Him.

By contemplating Hashem in a manner that fosters love for Him, we fulfill the mitzvah of loving Hashem.

#### CHALLENGE YOURSELF

*Can you think of an example in your own life where you started to like something more after learning about it?*







### Did You Know?

#### Six Constants

There are six mitzvot that every Jew must fulfill at all times. These are known as the שֵׁשׁ מִצְוֹת תָּמִידִית—the six constant mitzvot. One of these six is to love Hashem.

#### No Pause

The people of Yericho had the custom of not saying the phrase “baruch shem”; instead, they would start the paragraph “V’ahavta” immediately following “Shema.”<sup>29</sup> This was because they didn’t want anything to separate the conclusion of loving Hashem reached during Shema from the result of V’ahavta—loving Him.

#### CHALLENGE YOURSELF

The “six constant mitzvot” include loving Hashem. Why do you think it’s so important that we should love Hashem all the time?



### Our Sages Say

#### Serve with Love

לֵית פּוֹלְחָנָא כְּפּוֹלְחָנָא דְרַחֲמוּתָא—There is no better way to serve Hashem than by loving Him.<sup>31</sup>

Loving Hashem is considered a service because it doesn’t happen automatically. To love Hashem, one must take the time to reflect on His greatness. Loving Hashem requires a commitment of time to develop.

However, serving Hashem with love is the best way to fulfill His commands, since when we love someone, we are naturally more eager to follow their instructions. When we serve Hashem with love, our mitzvot take on deeper meaning and are filled with passion.

#### CHALLENGE YOURSELF

Loving Hashem is referred to as a “service.” Why do you think loving someone can be a way of serving them? How is serving Hashem with love different from just following rules without feeling anything?

#### Reflective Feelings

מִהֶם הַמִּים הַלֵּלוּ, אָדָם נוֹתֵן בְּכָלִי וּמִסְתַּכֵּל בָּהֶן וְהֵן נִרְאִין לּוֹ, כִּד - Just as water reflects other things, so too do people’s feelings.<sup>32</sup>

People naturally reflect the emotions of those around them. When we’re in a room full of happy people, our mood lifts. Similarly, when someone is kind to us, we tend to feel kinder towards them in return.

When we contemplate Hashem’s love for us and recognize how much He always helps us, our hearts naturally feel love for Him. By thinking about Hashem’s love, our own love is ignited.

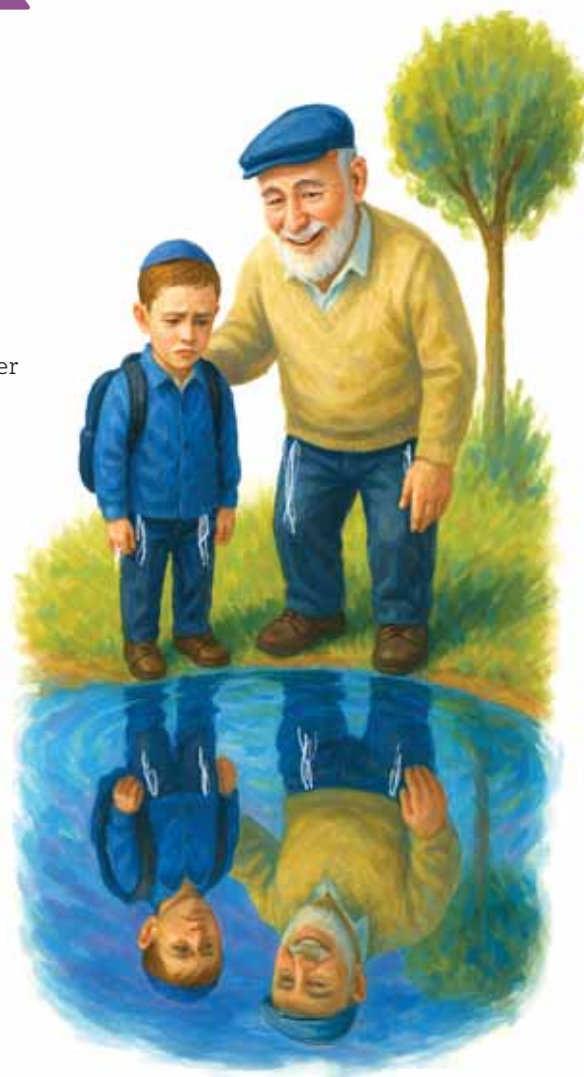


### Pearls of Wisdom

#### Kiddush Hashem

Part of the mitzvah of loving Hashem is to inspire others to love Him. This can be achieved by consistently treating others with kindness and respect. When people see how well we behave, they will begin to love Hashem, who teaches us to act in this way.<sup>30</sup>

This is one of the meanings of making a Kiddush Hashem.



### Story

#### In Complete Control

During the Napoleonic War between France and Russia, the Alter Rebbe asked his chossid, Reb Moshe Meisel, to spy on the French army. One time, Reb Moshe was sitting in a meeting with some French officers when the door burst open, and Napoleon himself stormed into the room.

“Someone here is a spy!” he announced. His eyes scanned the room, and suddenly, they fell on R’ Moshe. “You are the spy,” said Napoleon as he placed his hand on R’ Moshe’s chest, checking to see if it had started beating faster.

R’ Moshe replied calmly, “His Excellency’s commanders have appointed me as their interpreter, your majesty.” Napoleon was satisfied that R’ Moshe was not a spy.

When R’ Moshe’s friends asked him how he was able to remain so calm, he would say, “My Rebbe taught me that the mind controls the heart.” Controlling our thoughts can control the way we feel.

#### CHALLENGE YOURSELF

In the story, the Rebbe taught that “the mind controls the heart.” How did R’ Moshe use his thoughts to control his fear when he was accused of being a spy? Can you think of a time when changing your thoughts helped you feel differently about something?

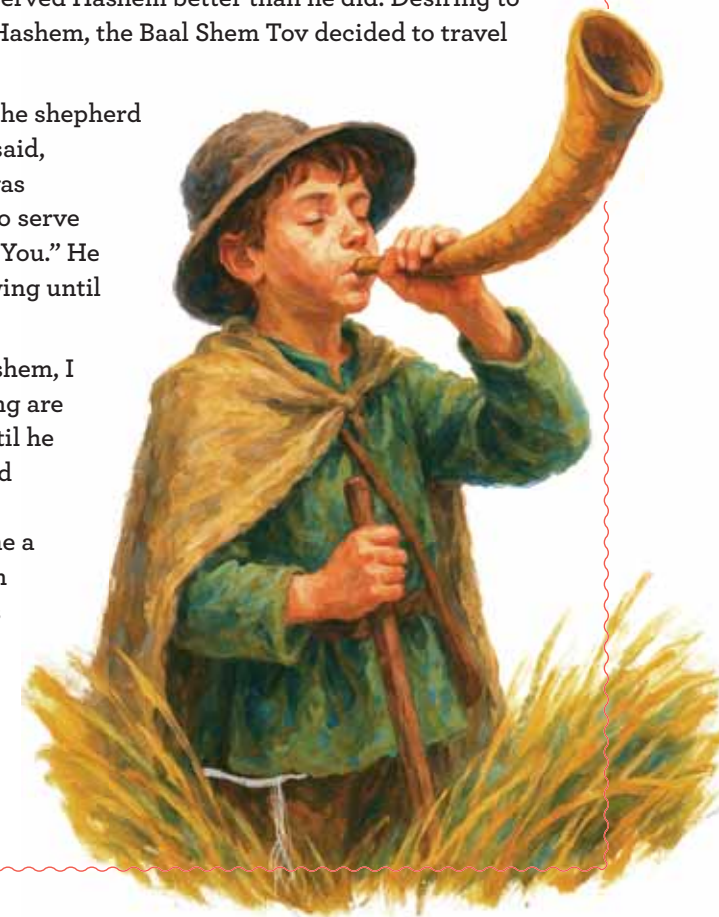
#### The Coin Taken by Hashem

The Baal Shem Tov was once shown that a shepherd served Hashem better than he did. Desiring to meet this shepherd and comprehend his service to Hashem, the Baal Shem Tov decided to travel with his students to the shepherd’s town.

When they saw the shepherd, they hid to observe him. The shepherd was tending his flock when he looked up to heaven and said, “Hashem, I want to serve You, but I don’t know how.” I was orphaned and raised by non-Jews, so I don’t know how to serve You. All I have is a shepherd’s horn that I could blow for You.” He began blowing the horn with all his might and kept blowing until he ran out of breath and collapsed.

When he regained his strength, he got up and said, “Hashem, I want to daven to You, but I don’t know how.” All I can sing are shepherd songs.” He began to sing with all his might until he collapsed again. After picking himself back up, he turned again to Hashem and said, “I want to give You a present. The other day, the poretz, who owns these sheep, gave me a silver coin, and I want to give it to You.” He took the coin and threw it up into the air. The Baal Shem Tov, who was watching all of this, saw a hand come from heaven and take the coin.

The Baal Shem Tov turned to his students and said, “This simple shepherd taught me how to truly fulfill the mitzvah to love Hashem.”



### Endnotes

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28. Memoirs of Refael Volf of Skulen
29. פסחים נ"ו עמוד א'
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