

5

כִּי קָרוֹב אֵלַיִךְ הַדָּבָר
מֵאֵד, בְּפִיִּךְ וּבִלְבָבְךָ
לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ.

(דברים ל, י"ד)



*It is within your close reach to follow the
Torah in speech, feeling, and deed.*

(DEVORIM 30,14)

LIVING LESSON 1
Feel Hashem

LIVING LESSON 2
In Complete Control

LIVING LESSON 3
Within our Reach

כִּי־קָרוֹב אֵלֶיךָ הַדְּבָר מְאֹד, בְּפִיךָ וּבִלְבָבְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ.

It is within your close reach to follow the Torah in speech, feeling, and deed.

Feel Hashem

Serving Hashem doesn't always come easily. Sometimes we want to do what's right, while at other times we don't. However, we can usually motivate ourselves to do the right thing, even if we don't feel enthusiastic about it.

The passuk Ki Karov teaches that serving Hashem with proper excitement is also easy and attainable for every Jew.

How is this possible? What if one day the feeling simply isn't there?

The truth is that feeling excited about doing the right thing is inherent in every Jew from birth. The neshamah that Hashem gives each of us is always excited and eager to do what He desires. However, when we get distracted by the world around us, our neshamah can become covered, making it feel difficult to do what's right.

To feel excited to serve Hashem, all that is necessary is to remember the neshamah. By reminding ourselves of the special nature of Torah and mitzvos, and about Hashem's greatness and love for each of us, we awaken our neshamah. This, in turn, arouses enthusiasm and love to fulfill what Hashem desires.

Feeling love and excitement for Hashem comes naturally to every Jew. However, we sometimes need to reflect on Hashem's greatness to arouse these feelings within us.

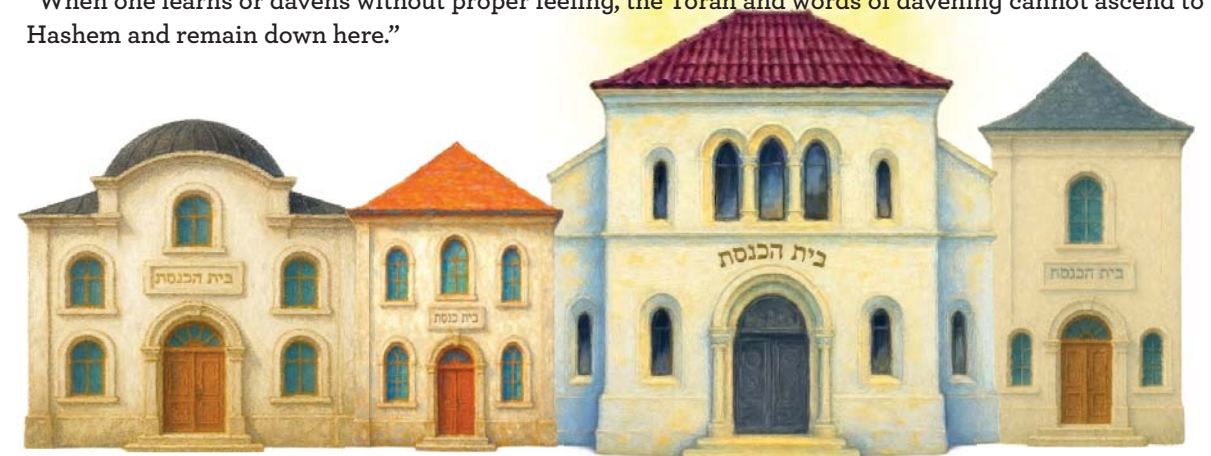
CHALLENGE YOURSELF

In what ways do worldly distractions hide the neshamah, and what practical steps can be taken to reveal the neshamah



Packed Shul

Once, the Baal Shem Tov was traveling with some of his Chassidim. During their journey, they stopped at a shul for minchah. As the Baal Shem Tov was about to enter, he paused and refused to go inside. "There is no room for me here; the space is filled with Torah and words of davening," he said. The Chassidim were puzzled. "Isn't that a good thing?" they asked. The Baal Shem Tov explained: "When one learns or davens without proper feeling, the Torah and words of davening cannot ascend to Hashem and remain down here."



Word Power

Connected

מְחַשְׁבָה טוֹבָה הַקב"ה מְצַרְפָּה לַמַּעֲשֵׂה
- Hashem connects a good thought to action.

One way to explain this statement is that sometimes we can't generate genuine feelings of love for Hashem. Still, as long as we understand in our minds that we should love Him, Hashem regards it as if we have the appropriate feelings. Hashem "connects" our good thoughts to our actions and counts them as though we performed the action with real emotions and excitement.¹



Our Sages Say

In Our Control

הַכֹּל בְּיַדֵי שָׁמַיִם, חוּץ מִיִּרְאַת שָׁמַיִם - Everything is in Hashem's hands besides for fear of Hashem.²

Hashem controls the world and manages it with perfection. However, how we feel about Him is left to us. Hashem doesn't force us to feel excitement for Him. Love and fear of Heaven are entirely within our grasp.

Little Moshe

וַעֲתָה יִשְׂרָאֵל מָה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ שָׂאֵל מֵעַמּוֹךְ כִּי אִם לִירְאָה...³ אָטוּ יִרְאַת שָׁמַיִם מִלְתָּא וּזְוִרְתָּא הִיא - Moshe said, "Listen B'nei Yisrael, all Hashem wants from you is to fear Him." The gemarah asks, "Is fearing Hashem so easy?" It answers, "Yes, for Moshe it is easy."⁴

For Moshe, loving Hashem was easy, but for the rest of B'nei Yisrael, it was very hard. If so, why, when addressing B'nei Yisrael, did Moshe make it sound like loving Hashem is easy for everyone?⁵

Every Jew has a spark of Moshe—their neshamah—inside them. This spark makes it easy for every Jew to love Hashem. When we reveal the little Moshe within us, having strong feelings for Hashem becomes accessible to all.⁶

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

How does the understanding that love and fear of Hashem are in our control help us serve Hashem?



Fake It till You Make It

Real feelings for something don't always come naturally and sometimes require thoughts or words for them to be felt.

A shopkeeper once approached R' Moshe of Kobrin⁹ and complained that he was barely making ends meet, while his neighbor, who sold the same merchandise, was quite wealthy and often came to the Rebbe with a generous amount of tzedakah.

"I guarantee you, you too will be rich," responded the Rebbe, "if, when you see your friend, you say, 'Thank you Hashem for giving my friend abundance.' Even if you don't mean it the first time, the more you say it, the more you will mean it."¹⁰

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

Can you think of a personal experience where "faking it till you make it" led to genuine feelings of connection or gratitude?



Did You Know?

Standing Over Us

Arousing feelings for Hashem is so important that the Shulchan Aruch states⁷ that as soon as one wakes up, they should think thoughts that awaken love for Hashem.

When we open our eyes in the morning, we should recognize that Hashem stands over us, waiting for us to begin our day. This thought inspires awe and motivates us to leap out of bed to serve Hashem. Reflecting on this concept enough will certainly yield results—if a regular king were standing watch over us, would we continue lying in bed? Absolutely not! How much more so for Hashem, the King of kings?



Pearls of Wisdom

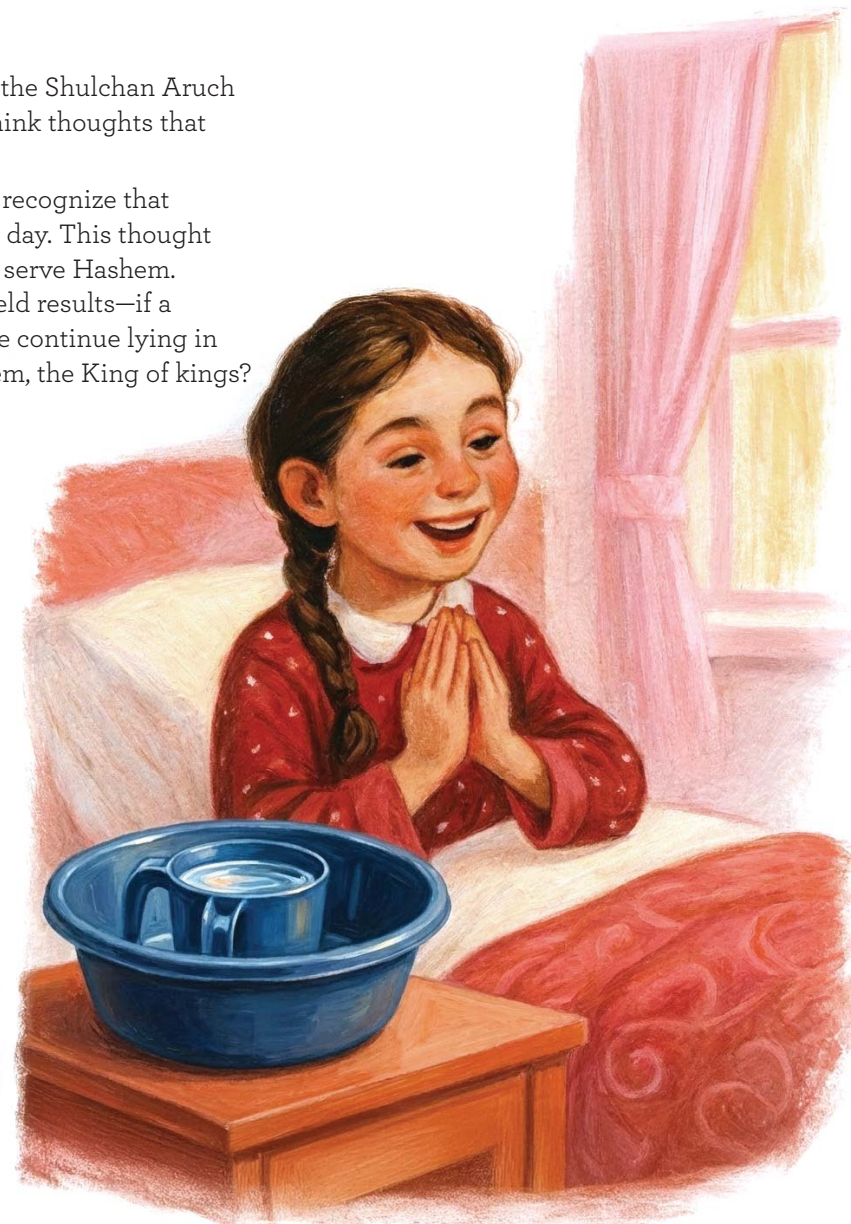
Flying High

Love and fear of Hashem are described as the wings of mitzvos. This is because the excitement and feelings we experience when performing mitzvos enable them to ascend to Hashem.⁸

For mitzvos to rise up to Hashem, it is essential to perform them with warmth and excitement rather than out of cold habit.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

In what specific ways can we infuse warmth and excitement into our performance of mitzvos, making them "fly to Hashem"?



כִּי־קָרוֹב אֵלַי הַדְּבָר מְאֹד, בְּפִיךָ וּבִלְבָבְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ.

It is within your close reach to follow the Torah in speech, feeling, and deed.

In Complete Control

Following the Torah and mitzvos is achievable and accessible for every Jew. If Hashem commanded it to us, He knows we can do it. Hashem wouldn't ask us to do anything beyond our abilities.

In general, mitzvos can be divided into three categories: speech-related mitzvot (such as making brochos and not speaking lashon hara), those associated with thoughts (such as believing in Hashem), and those carried out through actions (such as wrapping tefillin and lighting Shabbos candles).

The passuk refers to these three categories as פִּיךָ (speech), לְבָבְךָ (emotions), and לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ

(actions), teaching that all mitzvos are achievable for everyone.

The words we say, the thoughts we willingly think, and what we do are all things we can control. We can choose to speak kindly, think positive thoughts, and perform good actions instead of bad ones.

Because we can control our words, thoughts, and actions, it is our job to always choose the right path. We have the power to decide which direction to take; it is our obligation to make the right choice.¹¹





Our Sages Say

Good Choices

The Medrash teaches: “Our mouths, hands, and feet are within our control. If you wish, you can speak words of Torah, or you can engage in lashon harah or cursing. With your hands, you can either perform a mitzvah or commit theft or murder. With your feet, you can go to the theater or the circus, or you can attend the Bais Knesses or Bais Medrash.¹⁷”

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

In what ways can we better recognize and resist the temptations that lead us away from positive choices?



Word Power

מאד

How can we ensure that we actually do what we’re supposed to do? In the passuk Ki Karov, there is a hint: “מאד,” which stands for מ – Moshe, א – Avraham, and ד – Dovid. The defining quality of each of these tzadikim was their humility. To follow in their ways and consistently choose the right path in serving Hashem, we must strive to be humble.¹⁶

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

How does humility, as indicated by the acronym “מאד,” help us in choosing the right path?



Did You Know?

Free Will

The belief that our choices are within our control is a fundamental principle of the Torah known as free will. If our actions were not under our control and were forced by Hashem, how could we be rewarded or punished for them? We didn’t choose to do the mitzvah or aveirah; we were compelled by someone else. Rather, every person has a choice whether to do the right thing and be rewarded or to sin and face the consequences.¹²

Change of Clothing

Thought, speech, and action are referred to as “the garments” of the neshamah.¹³ One reason for this is that, just as it is easy to change one’s clothing, our thoughts, speech, and actions can also be changed with ease.¹⁴

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

How does the concept of “garments of the neshamah” influence our understanding of personal change and growth?



Extra Food for Thought

What specific techniques can be used to strengthen our control over our thoughts, speech, and actions?

Can you share a personal experience where choosing the right words, emotions, or actions made a significant difference in your life or someone else’s life?



Pearls of Wisdom

Self-encouragement

Sometimes, choosing the right feelings, words, and actions can be challenging. When it’s difficult to make the right choice, we can tell ourselves, “I really don’t want to do something wrong because I never want to be a rasha, even for a second! I know that aveiros will separate me from Hashem, and I don’t want to be separated from Him at all.” Reminding ourselves of this can help us resist the temptation to do something bad and reinforce what we truly believe.¹⁵



Don’t Let Them In

A chassid once came to the Maggid of Mezeritch. “Rebbe,” he said, “I don’t understand how the Torah can command us what to think. For example, when the Torah tells us not to even entertain a thought that is destructive and wrong. What should one do when such thoughts enter his mind involuntarily? Can a person control his thoughts?”

Instead of answering the chassid’s question, Rabbi Dovber sent him to the town of Zhitomir. “Go visit my disciple, R’ Zev,” he said. “Only he can answer your question.”

Although it was the middle of winter, the chassid immediately set out.

By the time he arrived, it was long past midnight. To his happy surprise, the windows of R’ Zev’s study were lit up. Through a small crack in the shutters, the visitor could see R’ Zev studying. However, when he tried knocking, R’ Zev ignored him. After waiting a while, he tried again, knocking harder. Still, he was completely ignored. He began to feel cold. As the night wore on, the visitor, with nowhere else to turn, continued to knock, while R’ Zev, a few steps away, kept studying by his fireside, seemingly oblivious to the persistent knocks.

Finally, in the morning, R’ Zev rose from his seat, opened the door, and warmly greeted his visitor. After the chassid had warmed himself, he asked R’ Zev, “Didn’t you hear me knocking all night? Why didn’t you open the door?” R’ Zev replied, “You see, in my home, I’m the one in charge. Whoever I choose to let in—I allow in; whoever I don’t want to let in—I don’t.”

The chassid realized the message: we are the masters of our thoughts and can shut out the negative ones. He now understood why the Maggid had sent him to R’ Zev.¹⁸

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

How can we apply the lesson from the story of Rabbi Zev to our daily lives when dealing with unwanted thoughts?



כִּי־קָרוֹב אֵלֶיךָ הַדְּבָר מְאֹד, בְּפִיךָ וּבִלְבָבְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ.

It is within your close reach to follow the Torah in speech, feeling, and deed.

Within our Reach

Connecting with Hashem can sometimes feel like a challenging task. After all, Hashem is unlimited, and we are so small. Even learning Torah and performing mitzvos can seem out of reach; there are hundreds of mitzvos and endless depths in the Torah. How could we ever connect to Hashem?

The Torah teaches us that connecting to Hashem does not require ascending to the heavens or descending to the sea.¹⁹ Following the Torah is right here within our reach. Every moment of the day has a mitzvah we can do. From the moment we wake up in the morning until we go to sleep at night, we have countless opportunities to connect with Hashem.

In Shulchan Aruch, we discover halachos related to what foods to eat, how to dress, and even how to walk! Hashem wants us to connect with Him easily and consistently in everything we do.

When we reflect on our day, we can easily discover ways to connect with Hashem at every moment. We are lucky to have such a constant and personal connection with Hashem!

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

Why do you think Hashem wants us to connect with Him so often?

What is your favorite mitzvah, and why does it make you feel connected?

If Hashem only makes requests that He knows are within our abilities, how does that make you feel about doing mitzvos?



Permanent Mitzvos

David Hamelech was once in the bathhouse and felt sad because he wasn't performing any mitzvos. Then, he remembered his bris milah and felt relief knowing he was never without a mitzvah. After finishing his bath, he was overwhelmed with joy at his constant connection with Hashem. This inspired him to compose the twelfth chapter of Tehillim.



Our Sages Say

All Around

חֲבִיבֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁסָבְבוּ הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּמִצְוֹת: תַּפְלִין בְּרָאשֵׁיהֶן, וְתַפְלִין בְּזְרוּעוֹתֵיהֶן, וְצִיצִית בְּבִגְדֵיהֶן, וּמְזוּזָה לַפֶּתַחֵיהֶן— B'nei Yisrael are precious, so Hashem surrounded them with mitzvos: tefillin on their heads and arms, tzitzis on their clothes, and mezuzos on their doorways.²⁰

Mitzvos are present all around us; it's up to us to grab them.

Perfectly Coordinated

בְּגִין דְּאִית בְּרַ נְשׁ רַמ"ח שְׁיַפִּין לְקַבֵּל רַמ"ח פְּקוּדֵי דְּאוּרִייתָא—People have 248 limbs to correspond with the 248 positive mitzvos of the Torah.²¹

You were built for this!

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

How does knowing that mitzvos are always within reach change the way you see your day?



Did You Know?

The Promise

Before a neshamah enters the world, it swears to be a tzaddik.²³ This promise fosters a strong bond with Hashem, empowering the neshamah to choose the right path.²⁴

Even before our birth, we were given the power to choose good.

Constant Connection

Our connection to Hashem isn't limited to the holy parts of our day, like when we're learning Torah and davening. At every moment, we can connect to Hashem. Everything in our lives can be done l'shem shamayim—for Hashem's sake. When we maintain this attitude, every moment of our lives, even the most mundane, becomes an opportunity for connection.²⁵

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

Can you think of a time when you turned an ordinary activity into a mitzvah?



Word Power

Inseparable

It [Torah] is not far from you. - לא נִפְלְאָת הִיא

The word פּוֹלָא means separate. The passuk teaches that Torah and mitzvos are not separate from us but blend into every moment of our lives, making us complete.²²



Endnotes

17 בראשית רבה ס"ז, ג'
 18 Once upon a chossid
 19 דברים י"ב-י"ג
 20 מנחות מ"ג עמוד ב'
 21 זהר א: ק"ע, ב'
 22 לקותי תורה נצבים מ"ו, א
 23 נדה ל' עמוד ב'
 24 באר הגולה שבת שובה
 25 משלי ג, ו עפ"י מצודת דוד, אבות
 ב, י"ב

9 R' Moshe Pallier of Kobrin
 [1784 - 1858], the first Rebbe of
 Kobrin
 10 סיפורי חסידים זוין נצבים
 11 תניא פרק י"ד
 12 רמב"ם משנה תורה, תשובה ה, ג
 13 תניא פרק ד'
 14 מאמר ד"ה ונחה תשי"ד
 15 תניא פרק י"ד
 16 חומת אנך דברים ל, י"ד

Endnotes

1 תניא פרק ט"ז
 2 ברכות ל"ג עמוד ב'
 3 דברים י', י"ב
 4 ברכות שם
 5 מהרש"א, דרשות הר"ן י'
 6 פרק מ"ב
 7 שולחן ערוך הרב מהדו"ק א, א,
 קיצור שולחן ערוך א, ד
 8 תקוני זהר כ"ה