

שמע Listen [and
understand]
ישראל Yisrael,
ה' Hashem
אלקינו is our G-d,
ה' אחד Hashem is One

SHEMA YISRAEL

Talking to Kids About Hashem

1. A YID'S FOUNDATION

Shema's Message

The *pasuk* of *Shema Yisrael* requires no introduction. Throughout the generations, these six words have always been the basic expression of our connection to Hashem. In day-to-day life, *Shema* is recited every morning and evening and is inscribed in our *mezuzos* and *tefillin*.

In this special *pasuk*, *Moshe Rabbeinu* teaches what we are meant to constantly remember about Hashem.¹ He directly addresses every Jew and says, “*Shema Yisrael*,” Listen, Yisrael, and internalize that:

- 1) *Hashem Elokeinu*: Hashem is not just **the** G-d, Who is great and strong, and so on, but He is also **our** G-d — in a personal and relatable way.
- 2) *Hashem Echad*: Even within the world, which is filled with so many creations, Hashem is *Echad*, the one and only.

Considering *Shema*’s centrality in establishing *emunah* and strengthening our connection with Hashem, the importance of teaching *Shema* to children cannot be understated. Its message is something that every Jew, of every age, deserves to know. In fact, *halachah* clearly states that as soon as a Jewish child begins to speak and is introduced to Torah study with *Torah Tzivah*, they are to be taught the *pasuk* of *Shema*.²

It is therefore no surprise that *Shema* is prominently featured as the second educational message of the Twelve *Pesukim*, immediately following *Torah Tzivah*.³

Kids and *Shema*

Children easily recognize *Shema*’s importance and centrality.

From a young age, children know that *davening* is an important part of being a *Yid*. Learning from their environment, toddlers often mimic their parents’ *davening* and before long, they are taught to

1. Although the *mitzvah* of reciting *Shema* applies only twice daily, its messages of recognizing Hashem’s Oneness and developing the resulting love for Him are two of the six constant *mitzvos* enumerated in *halachah*. See *Sefer HaChinuch*, Introduction; *Mishnah Berurah*, *Biur Halachah* on *Orach Chaim*, 1:1.

On a related note, see *Sichos Kodesh* 5736, Vol. 2, p. 213, where the obligation of the six constant *mitzvos* is mentioned as a reason to encourage the study and memorization of the Twelve *Pesukim*.

2. *Sukkah* 42a; *Alter Rebbe’s Shulchan Aruch, Hilchos Talmud Torah*, 1:1.

3. See *Sichos Kodesh* 5736, Vol. 2, pp. 170, 184-185, where the Rebbe explains that these messages of *Torah Tzivah* and *Shema Yisrael* are the educational foundations referenced in the *pasuk*, “*Mipi olelim veyonkim yasadeta oz*,” “Out of the mouths of infants and babies You have **established** strength” (*Tehillim* 8:3). Therefore, it is imperative to teach these *pesukim* as early as possible. See also *Ohr HaChaim* on *Vayikra*, 19:23; above, *Torah Tzivah*, p. 3.

say their own daily *tefillos*. They begin by learning some basic sections and are told that *davening* is the way we speak to Hashem and connect to Him.⁴

While on a halachic level, the most central *tefillah* is the *Shemoneh Esreh*,⁵ children are only introduced to it when they grow older.⁶ Instead, at a young age, their primary *tefillah* is *Shema Yisrael*. Even before being taught the exact meaning of *Shema*, they already perceive it as being **the** basic *tefillah* which expresses their connection with Hashem.⁷

This correlates with the *Mishnah*'s teaching that the recitation of *Shema* serves as *kabbalas ol Malchus Shamayim*, a personal acceptance of Hashem's sovereignty.⁸

From infancy, Jewish boys and girls are taught to say *Modeh Ani*, acknowledging Hashem as their "Melech Chai VeKayam," "the Living and Eternal King." However, although *Modeh Ani* is said first thing in the morning, we need to invest effort to make it permeate our entire day. What affirms this submission to Hashem's authority in a steadfast manner is the recitation of *Shema Yisrael*.⁹

When saying *Shema* twice daily, before bed and in their morning *tefillos*,¹⁰ children should be taught that there is more than just saying the words. Even at their young age, we can guide them in making their *Shema* shine with meaning and *kavanah*,

4. See the Alter Rebbe's *Siddur* which begins with "Morning *Berachos* for small children." See *Toras Menachem* 5742, Vol. 2, p. 708, which explains that these prayers are appropriate for children even before the age of three.

5. *Mishneh Torah*, *Ahavah*, *Hilchos Tefillah*, 1:1-2. See also *Likkutei Torah*, *Bamidbar*, 71c.

6. *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chaim*, 106:2.

7. See *Toras Menachem* 5746, Vol. 4, p. 265. Notably, in the *maamar* selected by the Alter Rebbe to be published as the introduction to his *siddur*, it states that the soulful call of *Shema* is the primary theme of *tefillah* even for adults. From this perspective, the rest of *davening*, including *Shemoneh Esreh*, is described as an expansion and explanation of this *neshamah* connection established in *Shema*. See *Siddur Torah Ohr*, 4a-b; *Siddur Im Dach*, 27c-32b (Kehot, 2019).

8. *Berachos* 2:2.

9. See source in fn. 12, as well as *Toras Menachem*, Vol. 6, p. 137, et al.

10. *Beshachbecha uvekumecha*, "When we lie down to sleep and when we arise," *Devarim* 6:7. See also *Sichos Kodesh* 5736, Vol. 2, p. 146.

helping them concentrate on their connection with Hashem and personally accepting His authority.¹¹



For every *Yid*, but especially for a child, *Shema* is the anchor of one's day: It affirms a *Yid's emunah*, empowers proper choices, and inspires full *bitachon* and trust in Hashem. When a child recites the *pasuk* of *Shema* with their characteristic enthusiasm and vigor, they make it apparent to all that they are *Yidden*, soldiers of Hashem who live with this truth.¹² The effect of this *pasuk* on the day and lifestyle of a child is simply transformative.¹³

With this in mind, let us discuss the meaning of *Shema* as the Rebbe presented it to children.

Takeaways

- Teaching the *pasuk* of *Shema* provides an important foundation for all of *Yiddishkeit* and establishes our personal connection with Hashem.
- By sharing the meaning of *Shema* with our children we give them the opportunity for meaningful *kavanah* and connection.

11. See 8 *Tishrei* 5746, *Toras Menachem* 5746, Vol. 1, pp. 101-102.

On a practical level, the importance of *kavanah* during *Shema* can easily be introduced to children by pointing out that, unlike any other *tefillah* or *berachah*, we cover our eyes while saying these six special words. This is a practical illustration of the fact that when reciting *Shema*, nothing should distract us from devoting ourselves entirely to Hashem. We are not looking at anything around us. It is a moment where there is just the *Yid* and Hashem alone together. See *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim*, 61:5.

12. 20 *Shevat* 5741, *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 21, p. 311.

13. See *Toras Menachem* 5746, Vol. 4, pp. 264-265. It is well known that the Rebbe campaigned for a daily moment of silence in American public schools to allow children the opportunity to reflect on a Higher power. The Rebbe extensively explained that daily contemplation on the fact that the world has a Creator and Director Who sees and hears, etc., is transformative for children, affecting their day at school, their lives as a whole, and ultimately society at large.

However, when it came to Jewish schools where the students *daven* together at the start of each day, the Rebbe did not advocate for such a moment of silent reflection. This is because the children's *davening* appropriately fulfills this purpose. See *Toras Menachem* 5743, Vol. 4, p. 1751.

2. PERSONAL CONNECTION



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Hashem is Ours

Often overlooked in the message of *Shema* are the words “*Hashem Elokeinu*,” “Hashem is **our G-d**.” At first glance, it may seem that this phrase simply introduces Hashem so that we can know who is the One G-d. In truth though, these words carry an independent message which is fundamental to the way we see our connection with Hashem.

Before we declare *Yiddishkeit*’s core belief that Hashem is One, we each need to realize that Hashem is our **personal** G-d. Of course, Hashem is the G-d and Creator of the entire world and He chose our entire people as His beloved nation. Nevertheless, He is also the *Aibershter* of the **individual** man, woman, and child.

The *pasuk* of *Shema* says, “Listen *Yisrael*,” you, the individual *Yid*,¹⁴ please remember that “*Hashem Elokeinu*,” “Hashem is **our** G-d;” He is connected to each of us on an individual, personal basis.¹⁵

This *pasuk* clarifies to the child that Hashem cares so much about them and wants to be their personal G-d. Although Hashem is constantly creating and directing the entire world, He is not preoccupied or distracted, *chas veshalom*. Hashem is always available; He is right alongside each and every *Yiddishe* boy and girl. No Jew, adult or child, is too small to deserve Hashem’s full attention. Hashem is constantly here to help them, to listen to them, and to provide whatever they need.¹⁶

14. *Yisrael* is both the name of our nation, *Am Yisrael*, as well as the name that describes the personal identity of each *Yid*. See *Toras Menachem* 5743, Vol. 3, pp. 1564-1565.

15. *Sichos Kodesh* 5736, Vol. 2, p. 439; 5th day of Sukkos 5751, *Toras Menachem* 5751, Vol. 1, p. 154f.

To clarify, the entire section of *Shema* is written in singular form, as can be clearly seen in the subsequent *pesukim*. Accordingly, the collective term “*Elokeinu*,” “**our** G-d” is not addressed to the people as a **collective**, but rather to each Jew **in particular**. *Moshe Rabbeinu* says, “You, the individual Jew, should internalize that Hashem is your personal G-d.” However, even so, “please know that you need not do this alone as Hashem is also **our** G-d, yours and mine” - shared between each Jew and Moshe. *Moshe Rabbeinu* informs us that it is the role of a Jewish leader to uncover our bond with Hashem and enable us to internalize the message of *Shema*. See *Ohr HaTorah, Devarim*, Vol. 1, p. 220.

16. See also below, *VeHinei*, p. 000.

On many occasions, the Rebbe noted how this idea resonates so deeply with children. A child knows that they do not need to call out to some distant place in *Shamayim* to reach Hashem. They deeply recognize that Hashem is right here with them.¹⁷

When a child makes a *berachah*, even on something as simple as a drink of water, they say, “*Baruch Atah Hashem...*,” “Blessed are **You**, Hashem...”. The usage of the word “*Atah*,” “You,” makes it clear that when we say a *berachah*, we are not just acknowledging Hashem’s goodness, but actually addressing Him directly. Linguistically, “*atah*” implies that we are talking **to** someone — not **about** them. Nevertheless, a child feels comfortable speaking to Hashem in this way because He truly is right here with us.¹⁸

What Are Kids Ready to Hear?

The emphasis on teaching children about their personal relationship with Hashem is related to a broader topic in *chinuch*.

A common misconception is that children are too young to be taught much about Hashem. Some may argue that knowledge of Hashem belongs to *pnimiyus haTorah*, the inner element of the Torah, which is typically studied by adults. Many wonder how we can introduce these esoteric ideas to children, whose young minds are likely to find them abstract and confusing.

For example, if we tell a child that Hashem is everywhere, even in their bedroom, they will expect to see Him there. If the parent or teacher explains that Hashem is invisible, the child will start thinking of Hashem as being like the air or a smell which they also cannot see – a flawed comparison to make in reference to Hashem.¹⁹

Likewise, children tend to be literalists and may not understand metaphorical language. For instance, if a parent says that Hash-

17. See sources in fn. 34.

18. *Sichos Kodesh* 5741, Vol. 1, pp. 231-233.

19. See *Sichos Kodesh* 5741, Vol. 1, p. 233. Simply put, Hashem is beyond any definition or description. Therefore, any attempt to compare Hashem’s boundless presence to created substances, such as air or a smell, is fundamentally flawed.

em took us out of *Mitzrayim* with His great and strong hand,²⁰ a child cannot picture anything other than a humongous hand — much stronger than their *tatty's* — leading the *Geulah* and so forth.²¹

Considering these potential misunderstandings, one might conclude that, to protect the child from confusion about such foundational ideas of *Yiddishkeit*, it is better to keep things simple. Perhaps, it would be preferable to limit conversations about the abstract and focus entirely on teaching the practical and less esoteric aspects of the Torah?



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Kid-Friendly Content

What the *pasuk* of *Shema Yisrael* clarifies is that Hashem is “*Elokeinu*,” the personal G-d of every Jew, **adult or child**.

Hashem's existence is not an abstract philosophical truth, reserved exclusively for adult conversation. Hashem is *Emes*; He is real, and therefore, His existence is an undeniable reality. There is no age too young to hear about G-dliness, as even children, regardless of any lapses of understanding, can sense Hashem's existence. They can feel it and connect simply because He truly exists.²²

Not only do we not need to shield children from hearing too much about Hashem, but in fact, topics of G-dliness can deeply resonate with them. The childish perception of kids may temporarily allow for some lapses in intellectual comprehension, but this will not disrupt their faith.²³ Instead, these years of childhood are actually an

20. *Shemos* 13:9, 14:31; *Devarim* 7:19, et al.

21. Importantly, even when a child is told that Hashem has no physical form and the usage of bodily phraseology is just a metaphor, the child will not truly understand what it means for something to be non-literal. Regardless of any explanations, the metaphor will still bring up physical connotations in their mind. *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 15, p. 79.

22. See *Torah Ohr*, 14a; *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 27, pp. 251-254, and fns. 13, 25; *Sefer HaSichos* 5752, pp. 88ff., 126f.

On a practical level, children naturally question and seek to understand everything. However, few children ask for proof of Hashem's existence. This suggests that they already clearly and intuitively know this to be true and therefore require no further proof. *Toras Menachem* 5742, Vol. 2, p. 817.

23. *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 15, pp. 79-80, *Toras Menachem* 5743, Vol. 3, pp. 1596-1601.

One can be assured that such topics are not harmful to children, as there is no halachic

opportune time for establishing a vibrant personal connection with Hashem.

In this vein, the Rebbe included *Shema Yisrael* in the Twelve *Pesukim* for children with the intention that they utilize these younger years to learn its meaning and internalize its messages. Their childish appreciation of Hashem is important, and it ensures that “*gam ki yazkin lo yasur mimena*,”²⁴ even as they age and mature, they will only deepen their internalization of *Elokus* which was so real to them as young children.²⁵

A Child’s Advantage

So, what about childhood makes kids more receptive to hearing about Hashem?

In the journey from infancy to adulthood, cognitive development has a major role. A child is born with very limited intellectual capabilities, and over time and through education, the child’s brain undergoes significant transformation.

Metaphorically, we can describe childhood as the “nighttime” which precedes the “daylight” of adulthood. Just as in the darkness of night, one cannot clearly distinguish between safety and danger, or detect finer nuances of things, so too, young children lack the benefits of cognitive discernment and under-

ban on teaching children *pesukim* that use physical terminology in reference to Hashem. Certainly, if there was a legitimate concern that teaching such ideas could damage the *emunah* of impressionable youngsters, it would be prohibited, or at least strongly discouraged. Instead, these ideas and terms are integral to traditional *chinuch* across all Jewish communities.

Clearly, one must distinguish between situations where people with developed mental capacity who can know better yet **deliberately** choose to interpret the physical terminology literally, in which case such beliefs are antithetical to *Yiddishkeit*, and young minds whose perceived errors are **not intentional**, but merely a result of their intellectual immaturity. It’s not their fault; they simply can’t understand things non-literally. Importantly, Hashem gave the entire Torah to every Jew, including children, with the clear expectation that until they mature and understand these terms correctly, their Torah study will lead them to think of physical attributes. Nevertheless, Hashem, so to speak, approves of their childish study, considering their understanding as authentic as well. *Ibid*.

24. *Mishlei* 22:6.

25. See *Sichos Kodesh* 5736, Vol. 2, pp. 184-185; *Toras Menachem* 5746, Vol. 4, pp. 264ff. See also below, pp. 34f.

standing. They struggle to process complex information and are confused by intangible ideas and abstract phraseology.²⁶

In terms of logical comprehension, topics of spirituality and G-dliness are a far stretch for young minds. It's not that children do not want to pursue these topics; they simply seem to lack the framework with which to understand it.

However, despite their limitations in terms of intellectual study, G-dliness is not any less relevant to children. Logic is not the only way to approach G-dliness; there is also *emunah*, super-rational faith. *Am Yisrael* is described as being "*maaminim bnei maaminim*," "believers, the children of believers."²⁷ This indicates that *emunah* is so intrinsic to our identity as *Yidden* that the faith of our ancestors, the Avos and Imahos, is passed on to us hereditarily, and every Jew is born a "*ben maaminim*." Every *neshamah* has *emunah* built into the very fabric of its existence; *emunah* is our spiritual DNA.²⁸

While this is true of all Jews, young and old, this *emunah* shines forth very naturally in small children.²⁹ Their lack of cognitive ability to understand abstract ideas is not a drawback. Instead, it provides the opportunity for *emunah* to flow without the hindrances of logic and reason. Specifically the "darkness" of intellectual immaturity provides the optimal conditions for *emunah* to shine.³⁰

26. See *Toras Levi Yitzchak*, p. 248; *Toras Menachem* 5746, *ibid.*, p. 265.

27. *Shabbos* 97a.

28. See *Toras Menachem*, Vol. 2, pp. 262-263, for an explanation of the nature of this influence. See also *Tanya*, Ch. 18.

29. This is also noticeable in the life of the first Jew, *Avraham Avinu*, who was only three years old when he recognized Hashem. Although he would later mature and recognize Hashem on a more intellectual level at ages forty and forty-eight, the basis of it all was his childish realization of *emunah* at three years old. *Likkutei Torah*, *Vayikra*, 30a.

30. See *Toras Menachem* 5746, Vol. 4, pp. 264-265; 6 Elul 5739, *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 24, p. 291, fn. 14.

On a related note, the *pasuk* in *Tehillim* (92:3) states, "*ve'emunascha baleilos*," associating the trait of *emunah* with the nighttime, which serves as a metaphor for spiritual darkness (see *Rashi* and *Radak* ad loc.), wherein the lack of logical comprehension precludes proper intellectual appreciation of G-dliness. See *Maamarei Admur HaZakein HaKetzarim*, p. 266.

Emunah in Kids

The advantage of children's *emunah* is apparent in the way they relate to Hashem during *davening* and throughout their day.

In *Yiddishkeit*, a central part of a *Yid's* day is *davening*. It's the time when one is meant to put all their other matters aside and focus on talking to Hashem, asking for their needs and connecting to Him.

For adults, fulfilling this obligation is far from simple. Many struggle to put themselves in the mind space of "*da lifnei mi atah omed*,"³¹ standing in front of Hashem and speaking to Him. Preparation is also crucial for achieving proper *kavanah* and recognizing that Hashem is truly in charge of everything and that we can genuinely ask Him for all we may need.³²

On the other hand, children simply know that they are talking to Hashem. They don't get caught up in complexities. They sense Hashem as real and present and do not hesitate to speak to Him.

Likewise, a child is accustomed to saying "*Baruch Hashem*" and acknowledging that whatever happens, big or small, is all from Hashem. They may not understand the intricacies of food production, but they know to enthusiastically make a *berachah* and thank Hashem for the food He is giving them. They don't know of any Kabbalistic worlds and levels; all they know is that Hashem is real and nearby.³³

A child's sincerity and simplicity when addressing Hashem directly is something that adults can envy and aspire to.³⁴ But in a child's world, such behavior is normal and expected. It is a natural expression of their *emunah*, which shines brightly and unfiltered, unobscured by the details of intellectual rationalization.³⁵

31. "Know before Whom you are standing." See *Berachos* 28b.

32. See *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim*, sec. 98. See also *Sefer HaChinuch, mitzvah* 433.

33. See for example, *Sichos Kodesh* 5741, Vol. 1, p. 235; *Sefer HaSichos* 5752, pp. 88ff., 126f.

34. As is well known, the great Torah sage of the 13th century, Rabbi Shimshon of Kinon, said that rather than contemplating Kabbalistic intentions, he aspired to daven "*ledaas zeh hatinok*," "with the simple intention of a child." *Shalos U'Teshuvos HaRivash*, sec. 157; also quoted in *Derech Mitzvosecha, Shores Mitzvas HaTefillah*, Ch. 8, p. 118a.

35. *Sefer HaSichos* 5752, pp. 126f.; *Toras Menachem* 5745, Vol. 4, p. 2506.

Notably, even when an adult seeks to go beyond the confines of logical understanding and embrace super-rational *emunah*, there is still an advantage to a child's natural sincerity. *Sefer HaSichos*, *ibid*; *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 27, pp. 251-254.

While a child may not be able to discuss such topics with the same complex vocabulary as adults, their bright faith compensates for their intellectual lapses. Even young children are more than ready to learn about Hashem and His Oneness, and the results are bound to inspire adults as well.³⁶

Building the Personal Connection

Ultimately, the educational message of “*Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu*,” is to embrace children’s simple faith and enable them to connect to it in a way that they understand and internalize. This is in fact a central mission of *chinuch* that children should feel Hashem as being real and personally relevant.³⁷

To put it simply, we ought to allow our children to be “*maaminim*,” believers in their own right, not just “*bnei maaminim*,” children of believers.³⁸

Importantly, when we do introduce explanations and discussions on these topics, we do not aim to **replace** the *emunah* with logic, but rather to **express** the *emunah* further, allowing it to resonate fully within their minds and hearts. In these early years of life, *chinuch* is about channeling the *neshamah*’s simple faith so that it permeates their developing psyches, enabling them to build their lives upon its solid foundation.³⁹

Relevantly, this personal connection to Hashem goes hand-in-hand with the theme of *Tzivos Hashem* in which the child sees themselves as a soldier in the Army of Hashem. As their Commander-in-Chief, Hashem is the One personally in charge of each and every Jewish child. He is the authority in the child’s life, and His orders must surely be carried out.⁴⁰

36. *Sichos Kodesh* 5736, Vol. 2, pp. 146, 184ff.

37. See *Sichos Kodesh* 5736, Vol. 2, p. 439; 5th day of Sukkos 5751, *Toras Menachem* 5751, Vol. 1, p. 154.

38. *Sichos Kodesh* 5741, Vol. 1, p. 235.

39. See *maamar* of Rosh Chodesh Iyar 5736, which coincided with the introduction of the first half of the Twelve *Pesukim*. *Toras Menachem*, *Sefer HaMaamarim Melukat*, Vol. 3, pp. 238ff.

40. 28 Tishrei 5741, *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 24, p. 320.

Takeaways

- Being a *Yid* is about a personal connection to Hashem. I am not just part of a chosen people, Hashem is my personal G-d and Commander-in-Chief.
- Since we are each personally connected to Hashem, no age is too young to sense how real Hashem is. There is no need to wait to develop this foundational relationship.
- We can cherish our children's childishness. Their worldview is fertile for feeling, believing in, trusting, and knowing Hashem Himself.

3. RECOGNIZING HASHEM'S ONENESS

Hashem Is One

Building on the idea that Hashem is our personal G-d, the *pasuk* continues with the defining belief of *Am Yisrael* that *Hashem Echad*, He is the only One.

The concept of *Achdus Hashem* has many layers of depth and it may seem like a daunting task to teach it all to children. However, as just explained, the *pasuk* of *Shema* itself reiterates to us that Hashem is no less relevant to kids than He is to adults.⁴¹

Experience shows that profound ideas can resonate in young minds even without the nuance and detail that grownups require. Therefore, with patient explanation, all these layers can gradually be shared with Jewish children.⁴²

On a general level, the concept of Hashem's Oneness can be presented in three stages:

1) First, a child can be taught that Hashem is the **greatest authority**. He is the King of kings, and no one or nothing has more power than Him.

The child is familiar with various figures of authority. These include their parents, teachers, principals, and government

41. See *Sichos Kodesh* 5736, Vol. 2, p. 146.

42. See *Toras Menachem*, Vol. 12, p. 148, where the three explanations provided below are presented as three layers of *Achdus Hashem* which can be gradually taught to children. See also *Sichos Kodesh* 5736, Vol. 2, pp. 184-185, where these themes are mentioned in connection with the importance of teaching *Shema* from the earliest stages of infancy to imbue the children with *emunah* from the very beginning.

leaders, all of whom have a certain amount of rulership and jurisdiction.⁴³ Some positions of authority are greater than others, and those who are higher ranking have the capacity to overrule those who are lower ranking.

In this light, the child can naturally understand that Hashem is the greatest ruler with ultimate power. There may be many strong forces and powerful rulers in the world, but Hashem is greater than them all. He has the final say over what is right or wrong and what can transpire in His world.

In this sense, Hashem is the only One who has ultimate control.⁴⁴

2) When a child grows slightly older, their understanding and appreciation of Hashem's Oneness should grow as well.⁴⁵ The parent can now explain that in truth, no one aside from Hashem has any power at all. Although it may seem that there are many levels of rulership, Hashem is really the **only authority**.

A child knows that when a person uses a tool, such as a hammer, saw, or ax, the tool itself has no control. The worker is the one who decides how it is used, and the tool is powerless without their direction.⁴⁶

Likewise, all forces and powers in the world are "tools" created by Hashem. Nothing has any independent power, just as nothing in the world was able to create itself. Rather, Hashem is simply running the world **through** these "devices."⁴⁷ The forces

43. See also *Igros Melech*, Vol. 1, p. 418.

44. In this initial understanding, the meaning of *Hashem Echad* is to rule out the possibility of another deity. *Sichos Kodesh* 5736, Vol. 2, p. 185.

45. *Toras Menachem*, *ibid*.

46. This analogy of "*kegarzen beyad hachotzev*," "like an ax in the hand of the woodchopper," is gleaned from *Yeshayahu* 10:15: "Shall the ax boast over the one who hews with it, or shall the saw hold itself greater than he who wields it? It is as though the rod wields those who raise it. When the staff is raised, it is not the wood."

47. Obviously, it is not necessary for Hashem to use these implements; He is the creator of these tools and is surely able to carry out the desired function without them. Unlike a human builder, who is credited with constructing an impressive building, yet still relies on materials and equipment to make it all happen, Hashem's "tools" have no importance whatsoever. See *Toras Menachem*, Vol. 12, p. 148; *Toras Menachem*, *Sefer HaMaamarim Melukat*, Vol. 3, pp. 134f.

of nature do nothing but follow Hashem's command and the wicked plots of *resha'im* have no substance. Even governments and armies have no power to do anything that does not accord with Hashem's masterplan.⁴⁸

In this manner, not only is Hashem the **greatest** Boss of the whole world, but more than that, Hashem is the **only One in charge**.⁴⁹

3) Finally, a child can be taught that "*ein od milvado*,"⁵⁰ there is truly **nothing besides for Hashem**, as the whole world is entirely His.

As taught in the *pasuk* of *Bereishis*,⁵¹ the child knows that Hashem is the one Who makes everything in the entire world. Although the child might not be able to fully articulate this idea, they can intuitively understand that there is a constant G-dly power making everything function.

What compels the child to feel this way is not necessarily intellectual arguments — after all, they don't yet know the details of how it all works. However, it just makes sense to them that nothing has independence from Hashem. Hashem is the truth of all that is, and only He can make anything feel real.

Therefore, already as a child, the foundation is established that Hashem is the only true existence and there is no concept of anything being separate from Him.⁵²

48. As reiterated in the *pasuk* (Yeshayahu 8:10), "*Utzu eitzah vesufar dabru davar velo yakum ki imanu Kel*," "Contrive a scheme but it shall be foiled, formulate an evil plot but it shall not prevail, for Hashem is with us." A proper Jewish education is noticeable in a child's strong *bitachon*, their absolute trust that only Hashem is in charge and no harm will befall *Am Yisrael* because "*imanu Kel*," "Hashem is with us." See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 21, pp. 206ff.

49. In this context, *Hashem Echad* establishes that a Jew recognizes that Hashem has no partners or helpers in running the world. It is solely Him, without any notion of *shituf*. *Sichos Kodesh* 5736, Vol. 2, p. 185.

50. *Devarim* 4:35.

51. See below, pp. 00ff.

52. In this light, *Hashem Echad* means that not only is Hashem the one and only G-d, but He is also the only true existence. This concept is not just taught in *Chassidus* but is also found in *Targum Onkelos*, *Shemos* 15:11, where instead of rendering the *pasuk* "*Mi kamocha ba'eilim Hashem*," as "there is none comparable to You, O G-d," which is its literal meaning, Onkelos translates, "there is none besides You, O G-d." *Sichos Kodesh* 5736, Vol. 2, p. 185.

What this all means to a child is that there is no place where Hashem is not. He is everywhere and in everything, and all things should be used for what Hashem wants.⁵³ Hashem is not only the **child's** Commander-in-Chief; He is also the Boss of the **whole entire world**.⁵⁴

The Letters of *Echad*

Even the deepest ideas of *Yiddishkeit* can be explained in simple terms which can be understood by young children. However, when a child hears about the many layers of meaning in the word “*echad*,” they may find it confusing. They may wonder, “Isn’t ‘*echad*’ just a number? Where do we see all of these ideas and explanations in the words of the *pasuk*?”

This can be explained to the child by showing them the letters that make up the word *echad*: **alef**, **ches**, and **dalet**. As is explained in *halachah*,⁵⁵ these letters contain the messages of all the ideas discussed above:

Alef is the first letter of the *alef-beis* and in *gematria*, numerically equates to **one**. Also, the word *alef* is related to the word *aluf*, which translates to “master.” This means that the letter *alef* hints to Hashem Who is **One** and is the Master of the world, “*Alufo shel olam*.”

The next letter, **ches**, numerically equates to eight. This represents the seven heavens and one earth. Although we on earth do not see all the heavens, the Torah tells us that there are seven levels of *ruchniyus* that are beyond our physical world.⁵⁶ All these heavens and our earth — the great **eight** — are all created by the One Hashem.

Lastly, the letter **dalet** numerically equates to four, symbolizing the four directions: north, south, east, and west.

In this way, the word *echad* doesn’t only tell us that Hashem is One; it also tells us where we can **feel His Oneness**. He is One **in the heavens and the earth** which He created and is constantly directing, and

53. *Sichos Kodesh* 5741, Vol. 1, pp. 234-235; *Sichos Kodesh* 5736, Vol. 2, pp. 146-147.

54. See also below, *Bereishis*, pp. 000ff.

55. *Beis Yosef, Orach Chaim*, 61:6, from the *Sefer Mitzvos Katan*, 1.

56. See *Sichos Kodesh* 5736, Vol. 2, pp. 439-440, regarding a child’s limited perception of the heavens.

His presence can be felt in every direction and location. Wherever Hashem is found, He is the one and only.

At every time and in every place, Hashem is what matters. He is always the only One! And, because He is always with us, we can always trust and rely on Him to help and protect us, and he will surely *ben-tch* us with everything we need.⁵⁷

Takeaways

- Hashem's Oneness is something kids can learn about and appreciate in an ever-growing manner.
- This world has a Boss. Hashem is the only one in charge of our lives and kids can know to count on Him with full *bitachon*.
- Hashem is everywhere – and children can remember that when saying *Shema* by thinking of the letters of *echad*.

4 . F E E L I N G I T



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Cultivating Love for Hashem

Importantly, the message of *Shema* speaks not only to our **minds**, but also to our **hearts**. Immediately following the six words of “*Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad*,” the Torah states, “*Ve’ahavta es Hashem Elokecha*,” You should love Hashem, your G-d.”⁵⁸ This means that when we truly listen to the messages of *Shema*, we will automatically start feeling love for Hashem as well.⁵⁹

The Rebbe explained that this is integral to the intention of teaching this *pasuk* as part of the Twelve *Pesukim*:

As parents, we are to teach the *pasuk* of *Shema* with such clarity and relatability that our children naturally feel love and connection to Hashem.⁶⁰

57. *Sichos Kodesh* 5736, Vol. 2, pp. 146, 439.

58. *Devarim* 6:5. Of course, in our actual recitation of *Shema*, we quietly say the phrase “*Baruch shem...*” between these two *pesukim*. However, this does not interrupt the connection between the messages of *Shema* and the resulting love for Hashem.

59. See also *Likkutei Torah, Devarim*, 11b.

60. *Sichos Kodesh* 5736, Vol. 2, p. 147.

See *Sichos Kodesh* 5737, Vol. 2, pp. 431ff., where the wording of the Alter Rebbe's *Shulchan*

Even a young child can appreciate the fact that Hashem is our ultimate Benefactor and that we can fully trust in Him to provide for us and protect us.⁶¹

The child can feel cherished by Hashem, knowing that Hashem chooses him or her, a young boy or girl, to be their personal *Aibershter*.⁶²

The knowledge that Hashem fills the entire world and is found everywhere encourages the child to think of Hashem constantly and always feel connected to Him.⁶³

For a child, the world of emotion is incredibly real. Even matters that adults may perceive as technical, or even trivial, are strongly integrated in children's emotions.

Children form strong emotional bonds with their toys, sippy cups, and blankets. They vehemently reject things they do not want and eagerly anticipate events or *Yomim Tovim* which they will enjoy.

Nothing in a child's life "just happens." Every aspect of their experience is **felt** — with very big childish feelings.⁶⁴

In this light, it is very realistically possible to cultivate a love for Hashem in their young hearts. Considering that children find joy in far less meaningful things, it is only natural that by thinking about Hashem, they will feel emotionally bonded to Him. When one understands the child's inner world, one realizes that they are fully capable of loving Hashem with true *ahavah*.⁶⁵

Aruch (Hilchos Talmud Torah, 1:1) is explained to also indicate the importance of children learning lessons from the entire paragraph of *Shema*. See *Sefer HaSichos* 5748, Vol. 2, p. 431, fn. 26.

61. See *Sefer HaSichos* 5748, Vol. 2, p. 431.

62. *Sichos Kodesh* 5736, Vol. 2, p. 439.

63. 7 Elul 5750, *Toras Menachem* 5750, Vol. 4, p. 214.

64. See also *Sichos Kodesh* 5736, Vol. 2, p. 186.

65. See *Sichos Kodesh* 5736, Vol. 2, p. 147. See also *Sefer HaSichos* 5748, *ibid.*, fn. 25.



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An Overflowing Love

Shema's inspiration as it applies to shaping a *Yid's* love for Hashem is very powerful. The following *pasuk* of “*Ve’ahavta es Hashem Elokecha*,” tells us that we should love Hashem “*bechol levavecha, uvechol nafshecha, uvechol me’odecha*,” “with all your **heart**, with all your **soul**, and with all your **might**.”⁶⁶

In simple terms, this means that our love for Hashem should not just remain a feeling in the heart, but is meant to shape who we are and permeate every aspect of our lives. We are meant to love Hashem beyond what we think is possible. Our love should be “spilling over the top.”

This overflowing love for Hashem is also relevant to children. In fact, while adults may find it difficult to cultivate such a feeling, children are more naturally receptive to it.⁶⁷ As parents, we ought to know that just by speaking with our kids about a *Yid's* love for Hashem and how it should be to the extent of “*bechol me’odecha*,” we cultivate these feelings within them. As a result, a child’s love for Hashem can be profoundly sincere and have tremendous practical application.⁶⁸

A most effective way to arouse this type of love for Hashem within children is to teach them of Hashem’s intense love for every *Yid*, and especially for children.⁶⁹

The *pasuk* tells us, “*Ki naar Yisrael vao’haveihu*,”⁷⁰ which the *Midrash* interprets to mean, “Because *Yisrael* is like a *naar*, a young child, therefore, I [Hashem] love them.”⁷¹

Young kids are typically surrounded with love. From the moment of birth, babies receive immense love from their parents,

66. *Devarim* 6:5.

67. As parents, we should recognize that our words resonate deeply with our young children. Even ideas which they may not intellectually comprehend can leave a significant impression on them simply because their *mommy* or *tatty* said so. *Sichos Kodesh* 5740, Vol. 3, pp. 216-217.

68. *Sichos Kodesh* 5740, *ibid.*; 7 Elul 5750, *Toras Menachem* 5750, Vol. 4, pp. 213f.

69. *Toras Menachem* 5750, *ibid.*

70. *Hosheia* 11:1.

71. *Devarim Rabbah*, 5:7. By contrast, *Rashi* on *Hosheia* 10:15 explains it to mean, “When *Yisrael* was still young, I already loved him.”

siblings, relatives, and even strangers. There is something about the innocent purity of young children that puts a smile on people's faces and prompts them to exhibit their endearment. This love is not because of the child's accomplishments or talents. Rather, it is natural to love kids simply for who they are.⁷²

When Hashem says that He loves *Yidden* because they are like small *kinderlach*, it means that Hashem loves every *Yid* so endlessly much! While some of Hashem's blessings are given in a calculated manner based on what each person deserves, His love for *Yidden* is simply overflowing. To use a metaphor, it's like when someone pours into a cup and instead of measuring out just enough to fill the cup, they just keep pouring without limit until it overflows.

To Hashem, we are all like young children, "*naar Yisrael*." Therefore, rather than only loving us in proportion with our talents and accomplishments, Hashem showers every *Yid* with limitless love, similar to how everyone loves a baby just for being themselves.⁷³

Children know that the natural reaction to receiving love is to reciprocate in kind. Therefore, when a child thinks of how they are loved by Hashem without limits, it motivates them to love Hashem without any limits as well.⁷⁴ Particularly because they are young children, they relate well to this boundless love,⁷⁵ and their love for Hashem grows to the point that it **overflows** into their everyday life.

The personal bond with Hashem established in *Shema* forges a sense of constant connection and boundless love to Hashem, His Torah, and His *mitzvos*. Every aspect of a Jewish child's day - how they

72. See *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5666-5667, pp. 27-28; *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 21, p. 20, fn. 6.

73. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 21, p. 20ff.; *Lag BaOmer* 5747, *Sefer HaSichos* 5747, Vol. 2, p. 386.

74. 7 Elul 5750, *Toras Menachem* 5750, Vol. 4, p. 214.

75. While Hashem loves every *Yid* for the innocent "young child" they intrinsically are inside, kids can feel that Hashem loves them especially much because their entire being is in fact that of a young child, without the adult facade of an accomplishment-based relationship with Hashem. See for example, 4th day of Sukkos 5749, *Toras Menachem* 5749, Vol. 1, pp. 145-146.

On a related note, just as Hashem's love for *Am Yisrael* is shown to children in a special manner, the loving care and *berachos* of a Rebbe are also extended to children in an abundant manner. *Igros Kodesh*, Vol. 3, p. 397.

think, speak, and behave, how they eat, interact with their friends, and go to sleep at night - can be infused with the passionate enthusiasm of their connection to Hashem. Inspired by this love, children will celebrate the opportunity to do a *mitzvah* and naturally feel the urge to share G-dliness and *Yiddishkeit* with others as well.⁷⁶

What it Means to Be a *Yid*

In all, the *pasuk Shema Yisrael* teaches a child who Hashem is and what it means to be a *Yid*. It encapsulates a most valuable lesson which will set the child's foundation for life as a Jew.

Throughout history, countless Jews sacrificed their very lives *al kiddush Hashem* with the words of *Shema Yisrael* on their lips. In more desirable circumstances, we recite *Shema Yisrael* at the culmination of *Ne'ilah* of Yom Kippur. In these final moments of the holiest day, our *neshamos* shine forth and we too completely dedicate our entire beings and lives to Hashem.⁷⁷

While not every day is Yom Kippur, the deepest point of the *neshamah*, the *pintele Yid*, is always present within every Jew. By saying *Shema Yisrael*, we tap into this deepest core and solidify our identity as Hashem's nation.

In practical terms, it means that our connection with Hashem goes beyond whatever we understand or feel. This deeper connection holds us strong so that no matter how hard it may be to do what is right, we will always trust in Hashem and follow His orders. This message of *Shema* fosters limitless devotion to *Yiddishkeit*, contributing immeasurable benefit to a child's Jewish identity and education.⁷⁸

76. 7 Elul 5750, *Toras Menachem* 5750, *ibid*.

77. See *Machzor HaShaleim Nusach Chabad*; See also 8 Tishrei 5746, *Toras Menachem* 5746, Vol. 1, pp. 101-102. See also *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 1, pp. 18-22, regarding the importance of basing *chinuch* on the ideal of *mesirus nefesh* and super-rational dedication to Hashem.

78. *Sichos Kodesh* 5740, Vol. 3, pp. 216-218.

See there, where the Rebbe explains the Rebbe Rashab's famous words quoted in *Hayom Yom* (22 Teves): "Just as putting on *tefillin* every day is a Torah obligation... so too, it is an absolute obligation for every Jew to dedicate half an hour each day to thinking about his children's education."

The comparison between the two ideas is that the theme of putting on *tefillin* is to submit one's heart and mind to Hashem, Who is beyond them both. Similarly, the key to proper

Takeaways

- *Shema* teaches more than just ideas; it also shapes our emotional attachment to Hashem.
- Children are really good at feeling their feelings, it's up to us to channel that strength towards love for Hashem.
- The *pasuk* of *Shema* is what brings forth our boundless connection with Hashem, building the most solid foundation for a child's healthy upbringing.

education is to nurture a child's dedication to Hashem in a way that surpasses feeling and reason, "*bechol me'odecha*." See also *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 1, p. 9, for an additional explanation.

See also *Igros Kodesh, Rebbe Rashab*, Vol. 2, pp. 660-661. Writing to a mother, the Rebbe Rashab replaces the example of *tefillin* with the obligation to *daven* each day, likewise encouraging her to see in her children's education as the fitting application of the connection established in *davening*.

A P P L I C A T I O N S

• **Saying *Shema* evening and morning:**

A basic application of learning the *pasuk* of *Shema* is to make it a part of our daily routine as the Torah tells us to.¹ From infancy, *Shema* should be recited with children before they go to sleep at night, and as soon as they can speak, they should learn to say *Shema* during the daytime as well.²

While this is mostly a matter of habit for many children, extra care should be taken on days when regular schedules vary. A child should know that saying *Shema* is integral to who they are as *Yidden*. By remembering our connection with Hashem, we can be sure that our sleep afterwards will be healthy and restful and our days will be filled with goodness and *berachah*.³

• **The *Mezuzah*'s Message of Connection:**

From the earliest age, children are taught to notice the *mezuzos* around their house. In a most loving manner, parents traditionally lift their children so that they can kiss their bedroom *mezuzah* before going to sleep at night.⁴

Children are naturally curious, and when a child inquires about the contents of a *mezuzah*, they are informed that it contains a portion of the Torah beginning with the words *Shema Yisrael*. This affords parents the opportunity

1. See *Sichos Kodesh* 5736, Vol. 2, pp. 146, 439.

2. See above, p. 27, and fn. 4. As mentioned there, it is likewise important to educate children to say *Modeh Ani* immediately upon awakening. See 8 Tishrei 5746, *Toras Menachem* 5746, Vol. 1, pp. 101-102.

3. 7 Elul 5750, *Toras Menachem* 5750, Vol. 4, p. 214.

4. This is one beautiful example of a *minhag* developed by Jewish mothers seeking to imbue their children with love for Hashem and His *mitzvos*. See *Sefer HaSichos* 5752, p. 89. See also *Likkutei Dibburim*, Vol. 4, 995a.

to explain to their children that their room and everything in it belongs to *Hashem Echad* and He is always there along with the child.⁵

• **Hashem is Always Available:**

As parents, there are many life opportunities to reiterate to our children that Hashem is always available to hear us and help us. By nature, children are especially influenced by their parents' words, and all the more so, by their living example. This confirms their personal bond with Hashem that they feel inside and encourages children to find personal meaning in *davening* as they know that they have Hashem's full attention and consideration.⁶

• **Emphasize that Hashem Is Constantly Present:**

Learning this *pasuk* by heart and reciting it regularly helps kids internalize that Hashem is always with them as He is everywhere all the time. Teaching our children to be aware of Hashem's presence empowers them not to be daunted by the challenges which may come their way. Every Jewish child deserves to know that Hashem is their Commander-in-Chief Who creates and fills all existence and certainly, when the Commander gives a command, it is entirely achievable. Nothing can prevent them from dedicating themselves entirely to *Hashem Echad*, the one and only G-d.⁷

• **A Jewish Child Is Never Alone:**

It is common for children to feel unsettled or lonely when no one else is around. In an

5. 5th day of Sukkos 5751, *Toras Menachem* 5751, Vol. 1, p. 154ff; *Toras Menachem* 5747, Vol. 2, p. 647.

6. See *Sichos Kodesh* 5736, Vol. 2, p. 439; *Sichos Kodesh* 5741, Vol. 1, pp. 232ff.

7. *Sichos Kodesh* 5736, Vol. 2, pp. 146f., 439ff.; 20 Shevat 5741, *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 21, p. 311.

appropriate manner, we can remind them that Hashem is always with them and they are never truly alone.⁸ This is also an important message for parents to remember when children travel on their own. They are not unaccompanied. Hashem is with them.⁹

• Daily Life Should Be Energized by Our Love for Hashem::

Being a *Yid* is not only about how we act, but also about how we feel. Because we are connected to Hashem in a special way and He loves us without limits, we too love Him in the greatest way possible. Kids should be instilled with this message so that it resonates well in their day-to-day life. This theme should be emphasized particularly during the month of *Elul* when our *avodah* centers around the model of “*Ani ledodi vedodi li*,” that “I am lovingly dedicated to Hashem and Hashem loves me.”¹⁰

Importantly, children tend to tell others about the things they love and enjoy. Likewise, an important expression of children loving Hashem is when their love for Hashem’s Torah and *mitzvos* extends to the point that they share it with everyone they can reach.¹¹

8. See 15 Tammuz 5720, *Toras Menachem*, Vol. 28, p. 243, where the Rebbe conveys this message to children, explaining that this is a lesson to be learnt from the Baal Shem Tov’s youth.

9. The Rebbe’s handwritten response to Mr. Zalman Jaffe regarding his granddaughter’s air travel as an “unaccompanied minor.”

10. See *Shir HaShirim* 6:3, and *Likkutei Torah*, *Devarim*, 32b, et al.

11. 7 Elul 5750, *Toras Menachem* 5750, Vol. 4, pp. 213f.

P L A Y A C T S

**A PROUD SOLDIER**

Three-year-old Rivkah was rather overwhelmed by the crowd at her cousin's birthday party. On her way home, she learns that her energetic recitation of the pasuk Shema Yisrael is something to be proud of.

MOMMY (holding Rivkah's hand on the way home): How did you enjoy the birthday party, Rivkah'le? Did you like playing with the cousins?

RIVKAH: Uh-huh. I was playing with Sheina and her dollies. But then it got very noisy...

MOMMY: Hm...

RIVKAH (complaining): Mommy, I was trying to put one of the babies to sleep but the bigger kids kept on disturbing!

MOMMY: I hear that. It sounds like you liked playing with Sheina and her dolls, but there was just so much going on because of the birthday party and all the *kinderlach*, *kein ayin hara*...

RIVKAH: Yeah, Mommy. I really hope we can go there to play another time when it's more quiet...

MOMMY: It sounds like you would really enjoy that. Later, I will ask Aunt Beila when is a good time...

MOMMY (seizing the opportunity to talk about a better part of the birthday party): You know something, Rivkah'le? I noticed that when Sheina's Tatty called on you to say the *pasuk* of *Shema*, you said it really loud and proud.

Rivkah smiles shyly.

MOMMY: Sometimes small *kinderlach* don't feel ready to talk in front of a lot of people or say a *pasuk*, but you did it! You said *Shema* really well, every word loud and clear.

Rivkah nods.

MOMMY: Its very special, Rivkah. I think everyone who was watching saw what it means to be a proud soldier of Hashem's army.

MOMMY (noticing Rivkah is really listening): Rivkah'le, did you know that *Shema* tells us how much Hashem wants us to think about Him and to be His special *Yidden*? And you didn't just say the words. You said them with lots of *chayus* too. I'm sure Hashem is very proud of that.

RIVKAH (feeling accomplished): Yeah. I love saying *Shema*, and I know it well. I wasn't even embarrassed.

MOMMY: Yes, you really are a proud soldier in Tzivos Hashem.



ALWAYS ATTENTIVE

Four-year-old Baruch learns that unlike people who are frequently pre-occupied or distracted, Hashem is always available and attentive. In the following weeks, his parents learn that a single moment of connection and insight really has long term influence.

BARUCH (running in from outside): Tatty, can you get me a cup? I'm really thirsty.

TATTY: Sure, Baruch, I'd love to. I'm just in middle of changing the baby's diaper. It'll take another minute.

BARUCH: But I can't reach the cups, and I'm super **duper** thirsty!

TATTY: I hear your words, Baruch. As soon as I finish this diaper change and wash my hands, I'll be more than happy to get you a drink.

Baruch waits impatiently.

TATTY: I see you're really waiting. I wish I could have been available as soon as you need it. Right now, I'm still busy with something else. I wish that as soon as you needed the cup, I would have been able to get it from the cupboard **right away**.

Baruch relaxes somewhat and listens.

TATTY: Baruch, do you know who is never too busy to listen and help us? Hashem. Even though Hashem runs the whole entire world, He always hears us. Like when we need a drink of water and

say a *berachah Shehakol*, do we need to wait until Hashem is ready to hear it?

BARUCH (thinking): Yeah, Tatty. Sometimes people are busy and we need to wait for them, but Hashem is not like a person, right? He is available all day long. Right?

TATTY (washing hands and reaching for a cup for Baruch): Exactly, Baruch. And now I am available to get you the drink that you waited for so patiently.

TATTY (handing him the cup): And now who is available to listen to your *berachah Shehakol* loud and clear?

BARUCH (smiling): Tatty and Hashem. *Baruch Atah...*

Three weeks later...

BARUCH (eating a snack after school): Mommy, I made a *berachah*, but you didn't answer *amen*!

MOMMY: Oops, I'm sorry, Baruch. I must have not noticed. Maybe I was a little distracted...

BARUCH: Yeah, but Mommy, do you know who did hear me? Hashem! He's never too busy to hear a boy's *berachah*, or watch him do a *mitzvah*...

MOMMY: That's right, Baruch. I see you really know that Hashem is here with you all the time. That's really special.



HASHEM IS EVERYWHERE

Five-year-old Sholom and three-year-old Bentzi are hard at play with magna tiles. As their towers go up and are joyfully knocked down, they find the time to talk about some big ideas. With Mommy's help, both boys learn something new and deepen their appreciation of Hashem Echad.

SHOLOM (confidently placing a square tile): Bentzi, before you were born, your *neshamah* was in *Shamayim* with Hashem.

BENTZI (eyes brightening with imagination): Yeah, Hashem is in *Shamayim*, and I saw Him there.

SHOLOM: Nuh-uh. You can't see Hashem. And besides, Hashem is everywhere, not just in *Shamayim*.

BENTZI: Well, I saw Hashem in *Shamayim*.

SHOLOM: Bentzi, that can't be! We can't see Hashem until *Mashiach* comes. And also, *malachim* are in *Shamayim*, but Hashem is **everywhere**.

BENTZI (at this point purposely provoking his older brother): Nuh-uh. You're wrong. Hashem is in *Shamayim*.

MOMMY (hearing the profound conversation from the other room): I think I hear two boys talking about some very special things.

BENTZI: Yeah, I am.

SHOLOM: But Bentzi is wrong. He thinks Hashem is in *Shamayim* and not everywhere, **but that's not true**. Really Hashem is everywhere, even inside our magna tiles tower...

MOMMY: I hear that. Bentzi, I think you might know a song that has the answer to your question. Do you think you can guess what it is?

BENTZI (mischievously admitting what he knew all along): I know, it's "Hashem is here, Hashem is there, Hashem is truly everywhere..."

MOMMY: It seems that both boys really do know that Hashem is everywhere. Maybe Bentzi was wondering why we can't see Hashem? He was thinking that maybe Hashem is more in *Shamayim* because that's a place that we don't see...

SHOLOM: Well, really we can't see Hashem because He is **invisible**.

BENTZI (confused): What's invisible?

MOMMY: You seem curious, Bentzi. It looks like you really want to know about Hashem.

Bentzi nods.

MOMMY: Well, did you know that because we are *Yidden*, our *neshamos* always feel Hashem, even without seeing Him? Hashem really cares about every *Yid* and makes sure that we can know about Him. Hashem is not just in charge of the whole world, He also likes being the Hashem of each one of us.

Hashem is Sholom's Hashem, and Bentzi's Hashem, and Mommy's Hashem, and...

SHOLOM (happily interjecting): ... and Tatty's Hashem, and baby Gittel's Hashem, and... even Bubby's Hashem.

MOMMY: Sholom, I see you are really thinking of examples. Bentzi, do you want to think of some too?

BENTZI: Hashem is my Hashem, and yours, and yours... (pointing around the room).

MOMMY: Hm... it sounds like Hashem really is everywhere even though we don't see Him. That's what invisible means, Bentzi. It means we can't see Hashem even though He is really here.

BENTZI (nods confidently): Inisible means we can't see Hashem, but really we know He is here.

MOMMY: Exactly. But *kinderlach*, do we want to be able to feel Hashem **all the way**?

SHOLOM: That's gonna happen when *Mashiach* comes, right?

MOMMY (nodding): Yep, and who wants *Mashiach* now? This is also a song we like, and it even has the same tune we sang before...

MOMMY AND THE BOYS start in unison: *Am Yisrael*, have no fear... We want *Mashiach* now! We don't want to wait!



LOVING HASHEM

Four-year-old Moishy is cuddling with his Mommy on the couch. Mommy is telling him just how special he is to her and how grateful she is to Hashem that He gave her such a precious boy. Moishy loves the affection and responds in kind. Mommy seizes the opportunity to teach Moishy about Hashem's love for him and how he can love Hashem in return.

MOISHY: Mommy, I love you so much. I want you to hold me forever.

MOMMY: And I love my Moishele so much that I want to hold you all day long.

(This goes back and forth a bit and Mommy takes the moment to teach Moishy something that will make him feel loved all the time.)

MOMMY: Do you like it that Mommy loves you so much?

MOISHY: Yeaahh. I love you so much!

MOMMY: Me too. I love you and you love me. We match! First I love you and you love me, then you love me and I love you.

MOISHY (excitedly exclaims): Back and forth, it keeps on going!

MOMMY: Exactly. Did you know that Hashem also loves you so much?

MOISHY: Uh-huh.

MOMMY: Hashem loves you tons and tons.

MOISHY: And I love Him back!

MOMMY: Hm... I think that also goes back and forth. Hashem loves you and you love Hashem, you love Hashem and Hashem loves you.

MOISHY: It goes again and again forever!

MOMMY: Isn't that special? Moishy, do you want to give Hashem a hug?

MOISHY: Yeah, a super duper big one.

MOMMY: Me too. Do you know how I like to show Hashem I love him so much? I always try to do a *mitzvah* the best way I can. I think: Hm... I love Hashem and I wish I could hug Him. I'll show him that I love Him so much and do exactly what He says in the Torah.

MOISHY (boastingly): I also do that.

MOMMY: You really do! I see how you make a *berachah* on your food. Even when you're super hungry, you are happy to thank Hashem and you're happy to listen to Mommy and Tatty like Hashem says to. You're happy to learn *alef-beis*, and you're happy and proud to wear your *tzitzis* like a soldier in Hashem's army...

MOISHY: Yeah, Hashem loves me, and I love Him. So I give *mitzvah* hugs to Him all day long.

MOMMY: I am so happy we had this time to sit together and hug. Now let's think if there are any *mitzvos* we can do. Maybe you can be Mommy's helper to start supper so our family will have yummy food to eat when they all get home.



TOO MUCH LOVE?

The kids are coming around the table as their father is getting ready to make Kiddush. Five-year-old Esty notices how Tatty is filling up the Kiddush cup until it overflows and has a comment to make. From there, that Shabbos meal starts on the right note with a relevant conversation on how much we can love Hashem.

ESTY (concerned): Tatty, It's more than full. I think you poured too much.

MOTTY (age 9): That's our *minhag*. It's supposed to spill over.

ESTY: But Tatty, there is even wine on the plate now...

TATTY: I see you noticed that, Esty. Let's talk after *Kiddush*. There is a very good answer to your question and it even has to do with one of the Twelve *Pesukim*.

After Hamotzi...

TATTY: Mommy, before *Kiddush*, Esty asked a very good question. She wanted to know why we pour the wine for *Kiddush* until it overflows.

TATTY: *Kinderlach*, when someone asks for a drink of water, does Tatty or Mommy fill it all the way to the top, or not so much?

DOVID (age 3): Not so much. I always ask for more to the tippy top, but you never say yes.

TATTY: That's because we don't want the cup to spill and get you all wet, right? So why should we fill the *Kiddush* wine so much?

SHEINA (age 11): Because it's for a *mitzvah*?

TATTY: That's a good point. *Kiddush* is a *mitzvah*, and we always like to do *mitzvos* all the way. But for that, should we fill it up just till the top or also make it spill?

SHEINA: Maybe just to the top so none of the cup will be empty. So why **do** we make it spill over?

MOTTY: I already said, we do it because that's our *minhag*.

MOMMY: Yes, I heard you say that earlier, you are right. I think Tatty is trying to help us understand a lesson from this special *minhag*.

TATTY: The wine we fill for *Kiddush* is a symbol of Hashem's *berachos* for *Yidden*. And when Hashem gives us *berachos*, He doesn't just give us just enough, but He gives us plenty. Hashem loves us so much that He makes sure that we have even more than what we need.

ESTY: Like the extra wine that spills on the plate...

TATTY: Exactly...

SHUA (age 7): So Tatty, what's the lesson?

TATTY: Very good, Shua, I see you were really listening. When a *Yid* says *Shema* and thinks about Hashem, we automatically think about how much we love Him too. But do we love Hashem just a little? No, we love Him tons and tons. The *pasuk* says we should love Hashem with our whole heart and soul and even more than that, *bechol me'odecha*, so very much that it spreads to everything we do

SHUA: To everything we do? Like even when we are not actually serving Hashem? Like even when I put on my socks, or run outside to play ball?

TATTY: Shua, those are actually perfect examples. Everything we have comes from Hashem, and we are His special soldiers **all the time**. We can love Hashem not just when we are learning and *davening*, but even when we are doing regular things too. Really, we are always serving Hashem, and we can feel excited to do everything just for Him. Our overflowing love for Hashem can spill over and everyone around us will also want to serve Hashem.

MOMMY: That's very interesting. Thank you, Esty, for your wonderful question. You really made us all think and learn something new.

DOVID: Okay, can someone please fill up my cup of water till how much I love Hashem?...