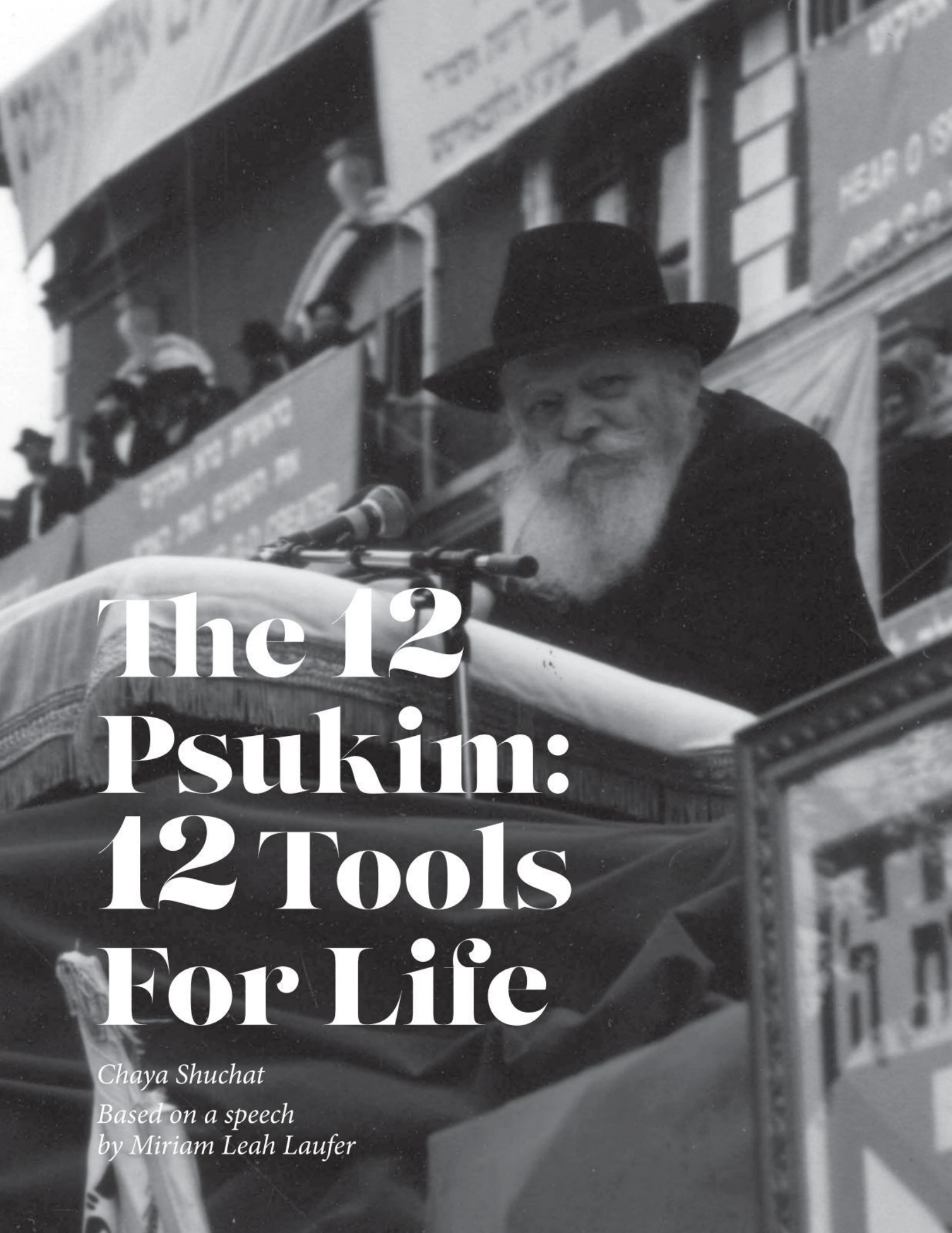


The 12 Psukim: 12 Tools For Life

Chaya Shuchat

Based on a speech by Miriam Leah Laufer


THE LORD IS
LORD IS ONE



All the children pictured in this article are Tzivos Hashem soldiers at the Mega Hakhel event in Crown Heights, Sukkos 2015.

Mazel Tov! Your baby is born, completely helpless and dependent on you for every need. It is now your job to raise this child into a healthy, independent adult with strong chassidishe values. Quite an awesome undertaking and many of us feel woefully unequipped.

On Rosh Chodesh Iyar 5736 (1976), the Rebbe introduced six psukim and taught how they are fundamental to the chinuch of every Jewish child. The first two are from Tanach, the next two are maamarei Chazal, and the next two are from Tanya. During the Lag B'omer parade that same year, the Rebbe introduced another set of six, following the same pattern: two from Torah sheb'chsav, two from Torah sheb'al peh, and two from the Alter Rebbe's teachings. The order of the psukim was not random but carefully structured by the Rebbe. In the above two sichos the Rebbe explains how these psukim are essential tools in the development of a Jewish child. The Rebbe urges us to teach these psukim to our children and repeat them at every opportunity.

Each passuk is a guidepost, showing us the way through each stage of a child's development.

1

Torah Tzivah: Identity

The Torah that Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the congregation of Yaakov. (Devarim 33:4)

The first developmental task of a child, from the moment it is born, is to develop a sense of its own identity. A baby lives within its mother for nine months, and for the first few months after birth it still sees itself as an extension of its mother. Gradually it learns that there is an outside world, separate from itself. A child's experiences during infancy set the stage for its emotional development for life.

The Rebbe emphasized that from the moment a child is born, we surround the child with *psukim* of Torah. The first *passuk* that we teach a child, the one we sing to a baby when it first awakens to the world, is *Torah tzivah*. Why this one? Why not *Bereishis*—the first *passuk* in Torah?

The expression used in this *passuk* is *morashah*—inheritance. There are three ways of acquiring something—we can buy it, receive it as a gift, or inherit it. When we buy something we are limited by how much money we have. A gift, too, has certain limits, since what we receive depends on our relationship with the giver. You give a bigger gift to someone you're close to than

to a casual acquaintance. You also would not give the same gift to a five-year-old child as to an adult. But with inheritance, there are no limits. You do not have to do anything to earn it, and the size or value of the inheritance is not in proportion to the person receiving it. The first life lesson we teach our children is that the Torah is a *morashah*—it is our inheritance and cannot be taken away. The Torah is what defines us—this is our identity.

2

Shema: Security

Hear O Israel, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One. (*Devarim 6:4*)

At age one or two, children enter the exploratory phase. They learn to walk and climb and do many other things independently. They want to look and touch and taste and feel everything. As their world expands, children begin to realize that the world can actually be a scary place. Children need to have a secure base, a secure attachment to their parents, to feel safe enough to explore the world.

The second *passuk*, *Shema*, instills in children the awareness that no matter where they go, Hashem is with them. The *Shulchan Aruch* states that when we say the word *echad*, we should have in mind that Hashem is one (*alef*) in the seven heavens plus earth (eight, the *gematria* of *ches*), and in all four directions (*gematria* of *daled*). This gives a child a tremendous sense of safety and security. I can leave the nest and learn to be independent—because Hashem is always with me.

3

Bechol: Initiative

In every generation a person must look upon himself as if he personally had gone out of Egypt. (*Pesachim 116b*)

During the pre-school years, ages three to five, children develop many new skills. They learn to color, to use scissors and glue, to build things out of Legos and blocks. They are not just moving for the sake of movement—they have a goal in mind and are learning to plan the steps needed to accomplish a task. At this age children love to be little helpers, bringing food to the table or putting toys away. But sometimes a child may not be able to achieve the goal exactly as planned and then gets frustrated, acting out by kicking, hitting or throwing objects.

At this age, the child has formed a strong sense of identity (Torah) and feels safe and secure (*Shema*). At this point we can begin to teach the child: You have a responsibility in this world. We all have our personal Mitzrayim, our limitations that keep us from doing what we need to do. We have a *yetzer hara* that we must overcome. But just as the Yidden went out of Mitzrayim we have the power to go out of our own Mitzrayim. That is our job and our mission—the obligation of every one of us.

4

Kol Yisroel: Community

All Israel have a share in the World to Come, as it is stated: "And Your people are tzadikim." They shall inherit the land forever. They are the branch of My planting, the work of My hands, in which I take pride. (*Sanhedrin 90a*)

During the toddler years children tend to play next to each other but not with each other—known as parallel play. Slowly, children learn to incorporate others into their play. They develop the sense of being part of a group, and then face the challenge of figuring out exactly how they fit into that group. At this point their identity is still fluid—they may see themselves in terms of their position in the family or their standing in class. They learn the intricacies of group dynamics—how you have to act to be part of a group, who is in the "in-group" and who is on the outside. During this stage children have to develop a strong sense of themselves while also learning to get along with others.

The *passuk* of *Kol Yisroel* has within it these dual lessons on being an individual while being part of a community. The word *kol* refers to each of us as an individual, while Yisroel emphasizes how we are part of a *klal*. Each of us is a unique creation of Hashem, *netzer mato'ai maasei yodai,* in whom He takes pride. We teach our children that there is a place reserved for them in *Olam Haba* which they can earn through their own efforts. We are each given our own role and task to fulfill that will lead to the reward. This gives our children the *cheshek* they need to learn Torah and fulfill *mitzvos* with joy, knowing that they can make a difference. Yet we are connected to all other Jews. We are part of *Klal Yisroel* and all of us are *tzadikim*, each in our own way. The *passuk* of *Kol Yisroel* instills in children the confidence they need to be strong individuals, among other strong individuals who share a common goal and purpose.

5

Ki karov: Competence

It is within your close reach to follow the Torah in speech, feeling and deed. (*Devarim 30:14*)

Children ages six to 12 move beyond simple activities like coloring and pasting to master many complex skills. They can read a *passuk* and explain it to others. They are learning to express their own thoughts through speech and writing. They may practice a game or a musical instrument until they become very good at it. They are starting to discover that they have individual talents that set them apart from their peers. At this stage children can also develop feelings of inferiority, if they are unable to earn the respect and admiration of their teachers and parents through demonstrating their skills.

The message of *Ki karov* is that each of us has a mission to fulfill in this world and

Children have a direct perception of Hashem that doesn't require a lot of elaboration.

Hashem gives us the capabilities we need to achieve it. We have control over our own speech (*b'ficha*), thoughts (*bilvavcha*) and actions (*la'asoso*). Everything else is not in our hands. We are responsible for developing our individual talents, but if someone else has a talent that we don't have, this means that this talent is not necessary for our *avodas Hashem*. We need to concentrate on our own work without comparing ourselves to others.

6

V'hinei: Perception

Behold, Hashem is standing over him, and fills the whole earth with His glory, and He searches his mind and heart [to see] if he is serving Him as is fitting. (Tanya, Chapter 41)

Young children are very concrete thinkers. As they grow older they mature in their capacity for abstract thought—to reason, to think about hypothetical situations, to plan future events and to understand the consequences of actions. This capacity does not become fully developed until the early 20's.

A child's understanding of Hashem is simple and uncomplicated. Children have a direct perception of Hashem that doesn't require a lot of elaboration. END

In the *maamar Shoresh Mitzvas Hatefillah*, the Tzemach Tzedek quotes, "*Ani mispalel ledaas zeh hatinok*." I *daven* with the knowledge of a child. This *maamar* contains very complex ideas from *Kabbalah* and Chassidus to meditate on during *davening*, so why does the Tzemach Tzedek talk about the knowledge of a child? The Rebbe explains (*Sefer Maamarim Melukatim, Emor* 5737) that no matter how vast and deep our understanding of Hashem may be, our *davening* must be permeated with the simplicity of a child—the knowledge that we are children speaking to our Father.

Children have an innate awareness of Hashem. Our task as parents is not to instill this awareness but to make sure that it doesn't get covered up as they become more immersed in the *velt*. As they get older they are exposed to more information and begin to grasp the vastness of the universe—the earth is just one planet out of millions of stars and galaxies. I am just one person out of billions! The age-old question arises—does Hashem, Who is so great and fills the entire universe, really care about me? Is what I do important to Him? The *passuk* of *V'hinei* instills in a child not only a sense of awe at Hashem's greatness, but that we are important to Him and He watches what we do; He cares.

7

Bereishis: Creativity

In the beginning Hashem created the heavens and the earth. (Bereishis 1:1)

During adolescence, teens develop greater powers of self-expression. They learn to plan projects, to build displays, to write stories and essays, to perform on stage. They gradually assume more leadership roles in the community—leading Shabbos groups, going on *mivtza'im*, babysitting, working as counselors, giving *shiurim*. All these efforts put their creativity to the test as they prepare to enter the adult world.

Children who are shy or lack confidence may feel swallowed up during this stage, as if their voices are not heard and they don't matter. They may be overlooked when it comes to summer jobs or school activities. They may not know how to express their ideas in a way that will make others pay attention. They see their peers flourishing, creating and achieving wonderful things, while they feel worthless and powerless.

And here is where the *passuk* of *Bereishis* comes in. All powers of creativity derive from Hashem. When we are successful we must remember this and thank Him humbly. When we are not, we can always turn

to Hashem and ask Him for help to open up, to find our own voice, our own niche, the way in which we can contribute something to this world. Hashem is the *Baal Habayis* of this world Who invested each of us with some of His creative powers. We need not be intimidated by others.

8

V'shinantam: Diligence

And you shall teach the Torah to your children, and you shall speak about it when you are home and when you travel, before you lie down to sleep and when you wake up. (Devarim 6:7)

When we teach our children the *psukim* in a way that is mindful of their developmental stage, taking their personality and emotions into account, children become enthusiastic learners and want to learn more and more. They will come to us begging, "Teach me today's *Chitas*! Tell me the *Hayom Yom*!" Our challenge as parents is not to "make" our children learn but to quench their thirst in a natural way.

When the Rebbe Rashab was four or five years old, he came to his grandfather, the Tzemach Tzedek, in tears. He had learned that Hashem had appeared to Avraham and he was crying because Hashem did not appear to him. The Rebbe explains in a *sichah* (*Likutei Sichos Chelek 20, Vayera*) that this story was not told just to teach us how special the Rebbe Rashab was. Every Jewish child has the potential to desire Hashem to the point of tears. It is our job as parents and teachers to stimulate that excitement in our children.

Throughout the day there are teaching moments—sitting around the supper table, while walking down the street, when you put the children to bed and when they wake up. The weekly *parshah*, stories of *tzadikim*, *chassidishe vertlach*—children eat them up and readily absorb them. We have a wealth of material available to us in many different formats—books, CD's, videos, charts, games—to make learning exciting and accessible for our children.

9

Yagati: Perseverance

If someone says, "I have worked hard, and I have not been successful," don't believe him. If someone says, "I have not worked hard and I have been successful," don't believe him. If someone says, "I have worked hard, and I have been successful," believe him! (Megilla, 6b)

We've been through eight steps so far and at this point you may be saying, this is all too much! Can we really be expected to be teaching Torah to our children every second, in between cooking meals, washing laundry, driving carpool, not to mention pregnancy and nursing babies! I don't have the time, I don't have the patience, I don't have the knowledge.

Raising children takes effort. If someone says, "I put no special work into my children and they turned out fine," don't believe them. But if someone says, "I tried and I did not succeed," don't believe them either. The *passuk* of *Yagati* teaches us that no effort is in vain. Whatever you put into your children will pay off in the long run. The Rebbe Rashab tells us to spend a half hour a day thinking about the *chinuch* of our children. If that's too much, can you start with 15 minutes? Five minutes? Take small steps each day to invest a little more time and effort into your children and you will see the dividends.

The word *matzasi* does not mean "I succeeded" or "I achieved." It means "I found." That means that the reward is not according to our efforts—it is much greater than our efforts. It's like paying one dollar for a lottery ticket and winning a million. You didn't work for that million dollars, it came to you. But it would not have come if you did not put that dollar in. So put a dollar into your child, put in five minutes, ten minutes, whatever you can. Every Yid has the power to figure out what Hashem wants from them and to bring it into actuality.

10

V'ahavta: Love

Rabbi Akiva says that to "Love your fellow as yourself" is a great basic principle of the Torah. (Vayikra 19:18, Midrash)

Young children are naturally self-centered. As they grow we teach them the skills they need to be sociable human beings: to share, cooperate, take turns, have manners. But at what point do we learn to truly bond with other people, to be as invested in their success as we are in our own, to transcend our own needs and desires for the sake of others?

Some people, unfortunately, never learn this important life skill. They may learn the trappings of civilized behavior but at heart they are completely egotistical, thinking only of how to advance themselves.

The essence of Torah is to grow to become a person without ego—or rather, to see others as an extension of our own ego. As *Perek 32* of *Tanya* explains, "As long as we make the body primary and the soul secondary, it is impossible to have true love and friendship between them..." When we place less emphasis on materialism and more on matters of the soul, it comes naturally to us to feel our essential unity. Although our bodies are separate, we are one soul.

Having progressed through the *psukim*, the next developmental step is to think beyond yourself. How can I inspire others as I have been inspired? How can I teach these *psukim* to someone else in a way that will be meaningful to them, in a way that speaks to their mind and *neshamah*?

11

V'zeh: Purpose

And this is all of man and the purpose of his creation, and the creation of all the worlds, higher and lower: To be [make] a dwelling place for G-d in this lowly world. (Tanya, Chapter 33)



The children we raised are now adults—working, married, raising their own families. As we go through adult life we face many challenges. Sometimes our trials are in worldly areas: *parnassah*, health, childrearing. Sometimes they may be in the spiritual realm, confronting our own doubts and crises of faith as well as the questions and challenges of others. At a certain age people may have a mid-life crisis, wondering, *Why am I here? What is the purpose of it all? Have I achieved anything noteworthy in my life?* Without a clearly defined goal, we go through life in a haze, never quite able to lift ourselves up above our surroundings.

Chassidus is unique in that it teaches us how to achieve balance between our physical and spiritual lives, between body and soul. It teaches us that our purpose in life is not to achieve material success, nor is it to soar in the heavens while leaving physical cares behind. Our mission here is to merge heaven and earth—to combine the two into a place that has all the advantages of both heaven and earth. We are here to create something unique, something that all the angels cannot do, something that nobody but us, as souls in bodies, can accomplish. We are here in this world to make a *dirah b'tachtonim*, a dwelling for Hashem in the lowest world. And this gives us the strength to rise above our circumstances and all the difficulties we face in life. We know that *davka* through facing *this* hardship and meeting *this* challenge, we are elevating this part of the world. Every single thing we do has meaning and purpose. It is all part of the Divine plan to help us reach the ultimate goal, the *dirah b'tachtonim*.

12

Yismach: Joy

The Jews should rejoice in their Maker. Every Jew should share in G-d's joy, Who rejoices and is happy in His dwelling place in this world. (Tanya, Chapter 33)

I recently saw a feature in a parenting magazine on how to make the most out of your trip to Disney World. The "expert" advice was to start planning your trip a year in advance! Only then can you make sure to get the best deal on hotels and reserve the shows and rides of your choice. Because who wants to go to Disney World and squander even one second of potential fun?

From a secular, western perspective, true joy is very difficult to achieve. We live in a future-oriented society, where we are always planning and saving for some future event, or trying to avert some future calamity. From an early age we are taught to start saving for retirement. So we go through our lives focusing on some theoretical age when we will reap the benefits of all that we worked for all our lives. Except that moment never comes. When people reach retirement age, even those with comfortable savings, they suddenly find themselves bereft and alone, and start to wonder—is this what I saved up for all my life?

From the point of view of Chassidus, joy isn't something you plan for or save up for. It doesn't come from parties or vacations or new furniture. Joy arises naturally as a result of living as a Jew, secure in the knowledge that we are serving Hashem and are partners with Him in this very special project, to make the world into a home for Hashem. And our joy is a shared joy. The ultimate stage of development for a *chossid* is to share in Hashem's joy, to do *mitzvos* only for His sake. Then we will feel the exuberance that Hashem has when He sees His creation come to life, to recognize Him and invite him into the world that He created. Hashem's *simchah* becomes our *simchah*, and this leads us to the ultimate *simchah* and the greatest one of all—the coming of Moshiach. ■

Chaya Shuchat is the author of the wildly popular A Diamond a Day, *an adaptation of* Hayom Yom *for children. Volume 2, covering the months of Sivan to Kislev, has just been released and is available in Jewish bookstores or online at diamondpublications.org.*

The 12 Psukim

1 תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה קהילת יעקב

2 שמע ישראל הוי׳ אלקינו הוי׳ אחד

3 בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים

4 כל ישראל יש להם חלק לעולם הבא שנאמר ועמך כולם
צדיקים לעולם ירשו ארץ נצר מטעי מעשי ידי להתפאר

5 כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאד בפיך ובלבבך לעשותו

6 והנה ה׳ נצב עליו ומלא כל הארץ כבודו ומביט
עליו ובוחן כליות ולב עם עבדו כראוי

7 בראשית ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ

8 ושננתם לבניך ודברת בם בשבתך בביתך ובלכתך בדרך ובשכבך ובקומך

9 יגעתי ולא מצאתי אל תאמין. לא יגעתי
ומצאתי אל תאמין. יגעתי ומצאתי תאמין

10 ואבהת לרעך כמוך רבי עקיבא אומר זה כלל גדול בתורה

11 וזה כל האדם ותכלית בריאתו ובריאת כל העולמות עליונים
ותחתונים להיות לו יתברך דירה זו בתחתונים

12 ישמח ישראל בעושיו פירוש שכל מי שהוא מזרע ישראל יש לו לשמח
.בשמחת הוי׳ אשר שש ושמח בדירתו בתחתונים