

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

Judaism is lofty and full of idealistic truths. Real life has many knocks that present a challenge. How do we live Judaism the way it's meant to be lived? How do we make sure there isn't a vast difference between what is written and what is actually practiced?

I was thinking of this when I came across a vort based on the famous words in kapitel 16 of Tehillim, "Shivisi Hashem lenegdi tamid, I set Hashem before me always." The Baal Shem Tov is quoted as saying, "The word shivisi can also mean I made equal.' Everything becomes of equal worth to me because I serve Hashem constantly. I care not if I am praised or blamed, whether I eat dry bread or luscious fruits. I serve Hashem equally in every circumstance and every place, when I am alone or when I speak to people, when I am at home or on the road. I believe that Hashem's care is never absent from me. He sends people to talk to me because He wishes me to serve Him through speaking to them. He leads me away from home because I am wanted for His service elsewhere. Only He, my Creator, knows what is for my good and what is not."

What a powerful message! It speaks of a level so high that it seems impossible, yet if the holy Baal Shem Tov spoke so and had it recorded, he meant for us more ordinary folk to learn from its wisdom and strive toward its ideal.

How do we even begin to approach such a level?

We must try to answer this question, for if not, our understanding of where we should be is lacking. The entire kapitel describes how fortunate is the person who seeks to be close to Hashem, and how such a feeling gives him a sense of confidence and peace. "Protect me, Hashem, for I have taken refuge in You." Here we have it in a nutshell. David tells Hashem, "My life consists of only You, Hashem, and I know that everything that happens is part of the ongoing plan meant for my growth. I can become closer to You because I realize that You are my Master; I have no well-being without You."

There is no reality that is not Hashem's. Everything else is an illusion, just smoke and reflections in the worldly mirror of doubt and pain. Our problems begin when our ego gets in the way and makes it difficult for us to become subservient to the reality of Hashem's totality. Yet our Creator purposely made us with this rough edge so we would have the freedom to choose and receive reward for our efforts.

Where does one turn to find such devotion? In every generation, Hashem sends unique souls that

are living examples of King David's aspirations. If you merit to find yourself in the radius of such souls, it is your obligation to watch, listen and learn. Perhaps part of this obligation is to tell others of such holiness, and it may very well be that the Baal Shem Tov spoke of this matter for this very reason.

With a humble heart and great trepidation, I would like to share just a few snapshots that I remember witnessing from one of our generation's greatest lights. I do so only to illustrate our kapitel; I don't pretend to understand more than just the obvious that was seen. This light was the Bobover Rebbe, zt"l, and in the shivisi Hashem realm, he was an expert.

Let us take a look at one scene back in the early sixties. We are traveling on a train that is taking us from Haifa to Tel Aviv. The Bobover Rebbe has come to Eretz Yisrael to give chizuk to his small but growing yeshiva. The train is taken up almost entirely by chassidim, who have waited for hours at the port of Haifa just to be able to travel with their Rebbe. I have been allowed to stand in the Rebbe's compartment, and I watch as the train rattles along, swaying back and forth. We stop at a few stations along the way. At each stop there are crowds of Yidden waiting to catch a glimpse of the tzaddik, and the air takes on more and more of an atmosphere that seems alive with spirituality.

The Rebbe goes to the open window, Yidden cry out shalom, and everyone becomes animated with a joy that is almost tangible to the touch. The Rav smiles that heart-warming smile that is only his, and in those few moments, he transforms all those waiting into varmer chassidim.

You must understand, my dear readers, that these Jews were almost all survivors of the Holocaust. Many had grown cold and numb from the pain they carried within. They had come to catch a glimpse of the Rebbe in the faint hope of re-igniting their souls, and with his magical smile, the Rebbe did exactly that.

I can hear the fleeting conversations between the Rebbe and the few who managed to get close to the window: "Shalom, Yankele! Do you remember when we walked together to the tisch of my father, zt"l?" "Oy, Rebbe! I remember those days every moment." "Mendele! Where have you been? I asked all over about you." "Rebbe, I was far, far away, but seeing you has brought me home."

On and on it goes, snatched words that carry years and generations. Each stop is only for a few minutes, and all too soon the train is back on its rocking way. The Rebbe's face seems so intense; no one dares to speak, he is somewhere way beyond our existence.

Then we come to Tel Aviv, the final destination. There are thousands standing in the cool night. They are waiting for the man who represents their lives before all the suffering, who at the same time stands for their hope of the future. Police enter the car, ready to escort the honored guest through the throngs. The Rebbe is white as a sheet. He stands there, and one can detect his lips moving with words that fly straight up to the heavens: Shivisi Hashem... Yes, that's the passage he is saying. I leave the rest to you.

That night, the Rebbe gives a talk to the large gathering who have come to his new community in Bat Yam. These are the same sort of Yidden that had flocked to his train earlier. Most have gone through so much and lost so much, and they have come to hear words from their holy teacher's son. Can he bring them back to the fold? What words are possible, in light of all the pain in the recent past?

The Rebbe stands in front of the rows and rows of expectant faces. He starts to speak, and in moments the building is awash with tears. In his passionate manner, he cries with his listeners, "Do you remember your holy mothers? How they stood by the candles every Friday night and begged Hashem for only one thing? Eibishter, hut rachmanus oif mir. Zay az mine kind zol blaben a Yid, Hashem, have pity on me. Let my child remain a Jew."

Such power! Such feeling! The tears roll down faces that have seen so much and suddenly find themselves home again. Shivisi Hashem...here, there, wherever You place me.

Another scene, one played out regularly. The Rebbe is sitting in his office. It is Chanuka, moments before kindling the lights. The yeshiva is facing a terrible crisis, and funds are needed within hours or everything may fall apart. The Rebbe is on the telephone, cajoling someone to help. Another phone rings. The Rebbe picks it up. A Yid is in trouble. He needs to know if he should undergo a serious operation. The Rebbe listens, asks a few pertinent questions, and gives his heartfelt blessing. He then returns to the other line and finishes asking the potential donor for his help. The shammas walks in; everyone is waiting for the Rebbe to light the menorah. The Rebbe stands up and looks to the heavens. He puts on his gartel and walks briskly into the room where the menorah awaits to be lit. The mitzva is performed. The Rebbe sits in deep thought, gazing at the lighted row of wicks, and we all feel the sweep of angelic wings overhead. Shivisi Hashem...there's no difference if it's on the phone, in the hospital or in front of the menorah.

And finally, just one more example dancing. The Rebbe danced in a manner that only one who is totally imbued with Hashem can. It was like watching the whole of the Shemoneh Esrei expressed in a physical form its highs, its lows, everything was there together with the heartfelt beseeching. Purim was special in this way. I will never forget how, after the entire night of the tisch, the Rebbe would dance, clearing away any thought of Haman and his like. At the last moments, he would stand at the door of the shul, his hand on the mezuzah, his voice raised in song. We would all be dancing, and he would drive us on with the words, "Tzama lecha nafshi, My soul thirsts for You" (Tehillim 63:2). One total unit of devotion to shivisi...it was all the same.

Text Copyright © 2007 by [Torah.org](https://torah.org).