

What makes someone the Rebbe? Is it tremendous Torah knowledge? The ability to perform miracles and tell the future? Is it complete self-sacrifice?

How do we know who is the true Rebbe of each generation?

Why does each generation have only one Rebbe?

Must there be a Rebbe in every single generation? Why can't we suffice with the neshama within each individual person to inspire their performance of Torah and mitzvos?

Was this concept first introduced with the founding of Chassidus or was there a Rebbe in each of the preceding generations throughout history as well?

**In honor of yom habahir, Yud-Aleph Nissan, a look at the essence of a Rebbe through the lense of the Rebbe's sichos and letters.**

לזכות הורינו  
הרה"ח הרה"ת ר' משה  
וזוגתו מרת פערל שיחיו הערסאן  
הרה"ח הרה"ת ר' אברהם  
וזוגתו מרת ח'י בלומא שיחיו אזדאבא  
להצלחה רבה ומופלגה בשליחותם הק'  
לאורך ימים ושנים טובות  
מתוך נחת חסידותי אמיתי,  
בריאות הנכונה, ומתוך שמחה והרחבה!

נדפס ע"י בנם ובתם  
הרה"ת ר' אשר זעליג  
וזוגתו מרת שרה ומשפחתם שיחיו  
הערסאן

Original artwork by **Baila Goldstein** for A Chassidisher Derher.



# THE HEART OF THE PEOPLE

A journey through history  
and what we can learn about  
the role and meaning of a Rebbe

## What makes someone the Rebbe? Is it tremendous Torah knowledge? The ability to perform miracles and tell the future? Is it complete self-sacrifice?

The Rebbe has all of the above—and more—but these qualities do not capture what a Rebbe truly is. Every generation has many *tzadikim*, geniuses in Torah and activists, and they all vary in their *tzidkus*, knowledge, and self-sacrifice.

But what makes someone a Rebbe isn't one quality or another. It is not even defined by the things he does and accomplishes. It's the fact that he is the *nossi hador*, the leader of the generation. He isn't a person who reached great heights in his individual *avoda*—rather his entire being, his *essence*, is that he is a leader of Yidden, a shepherd of his flock.<sup>1</sup>

Just as a body receives life and vitality from its head, all of the Yidden receive their life-force from their *nossi*. He is our head and heart; through him, we receive all of our *hashpaa* from on-High; by connecting with him, we reveal and refresh our essential connection to Hashem. When we need someone to daven for us—he has the power to do so; when we are in trouble, he feels our pain more than we do ourselves. He is our generation's Moshiach—the essence of our soul, our *yechida*—and he helps us reveal our personal *yechida*, the spark of Moshiach in our heart.

Every human body has a head, and every generation has a *nossi hador*. “There is a continuation of Moshe in every generation,” the Zohar tells us. “There is no generation that doesn't have someone like... Avraham... Yaakov... Moshe,” as the Midrash puts it.<sup>2</sup>

But while every generation has a *nossi hador*, in some generations this role is more revealed and in some

generations less so. There were *nesi'im* who primarily served their flock in physical matters; others gave spiritual guidance; there were some who imparted *nigleh*, while others taught Kabbalah.

But our Rabbeim, from the Baal Shem Tov and on, lead their generation in all areas: in Torah, *avodah* and *gemilus chassadim*; in *nigleh* and in Chassidus; in spirit and in body. We are openly connected with them in every area of our lives.

It is impossible to capture the character of a *nossi* on paper. However, over the years, the Rebbe explained various aspects of a *nossi* through the lens of famous *nesi'im* throughout the generations. In honor of Yud-Alef Nissan, the birthday of our *nossi*, when the *mazal* of his *neshamah* and of all of our *neshamos* shines brightly, we feature a selection of these below.

It is true, as mentioned, that the accomplishments of a *nossi* are not what **makes** him the *nossi*. Nevertheless, by studying what the *nesi'im* in each generation provided for the Jewish people of their time, and how they impacted the collective Jewish consciousness, we can better understand what it means to be a *nossi* of the Jewish people, and how there are certain things that **only** a *nossi* can accomplish.

Based on the Rebbe's words in these *sichos*, we can discern what the meaning of a true “Rebbe” and “*nossi*” really is, and hopefully apply them and have a better understanding of *our* Rebbe.

In many *sichos*,<sup>3</sup> the Rebbe explains that whenever a *nossi* gives a description of one of his predecessors, or sheds light on the meaning of a *nossi* in general, the same sentiment applies also to the Rebbe who is talking. We will therefore present the following anthology of the Rebbe's teachings about preceding *nesi'im* while remaining true to the Rebbe's words in their source, leaving it up to the reader to see how they apply in our generation.

Note: We included only a few *nesi'im* from Jewish history. We intentionally did not include any of the *nesi'im* of Chassidus, for that would go much beyond the scope of a single article.

# MOSHE RABBEINU

## THE ULTIMATE LEADER

When it came time for the Yidden to enter Eretz Yisroel, Moshe begged Hashem to let him enter with them. The Midrash tells us that Hashem responded that this could not be done, for it would be akin to a shepherd whose sheep had been captured: If the shepherd returns to the palace without the sheep, people would say that he had stolen them. So too, Hashem told Moshe, you brought 600,000 out of Mitzrayim, “You must stay at their side and come [to Eretz Yisroel] *with* them,” when Moshiach comes.

This doesn't seem right, the Rebbe says. Why should Moshe have to stay at the side of the generation of the *midbar*? He was nothing like them! The generation of the *midbar* remained in the *midbar* as a punishment for the fact that they *didn't want* to go into Eretz Yisroel, with the story of the *meraglim*, whereas Moshe Rabbeinu's greatest wish was to enter Eretz Yisroel. Why should Moshe stay in the *midbar* to remain with them, when he could not be more different than them?!

The answer to this lies in the parable of a shepherd: At his very essence, Moshe Rabbeinu was a shepherd of the Yidden, a *ro'eh Yisrael*. And as a true shepherd—he cannot abandon his flock, no matter what!

This can be seen in another episode as well: When the Yidden served the *eigel*, Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu, “Go down, for *your* nation has sinned.”

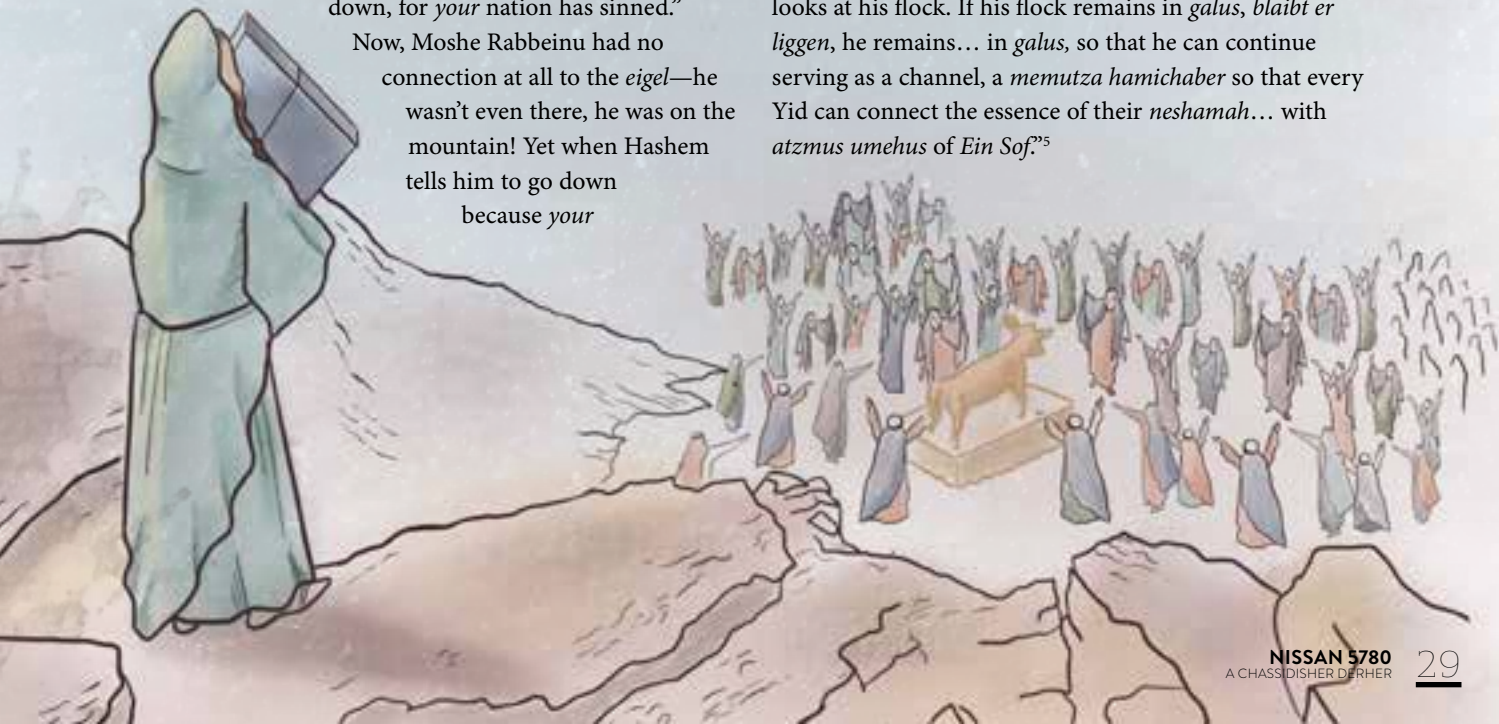
Now, Moshe Rabbeinu had no connection at all to the *eigel*—he wasn't even there, he was on the mountain! Yet when Hashem tells him to go down because *your*

nation has sinned, Moshe Rabbeinu doesn't disassociate himself from them, *chas veshalom*, because they have fallen to such lows—rather, he accepts Hashem's words, that this is *his nation*, Moshe Rabbeinu's nation!

And he gives up everything for them; he told Hashem, “אם אין, מחני נא מספרך”, if you don't save them, erase me from your Torah! Why? Because he is their shepherd! And a shepherd does not abandon his flock, no matter how low they have fallen! This is also why he remained in the *midbar*: he would not leave his flock, no matter what.

The Rebbe spoke about this theme many times, but in one *sicha*<sup>4</sup> he added a poignant point: “This is also expressed in the fact that Moshe Rabbeinu lived for exactly 120 years, unlike his brother Aharon who lived for 123: His connection to his generation was so essential and powerful that when the generation of the *midbar* passed away, he couldn't leave his flock—and he couldn't continue living without them! As soon as the last people of his generation passed away, he could no longer live!”

On another occasion, in a *sicha* punctuated with tears, the Rebbe explained that this was followed by the *nesi'im* throughout the generations: “This is true regarding every leader and *nossi* in their own generations: Notwithstanding his own level, the *nossi* puts everything on the side, and looks at his flock. If his flock remains in *galus*, *blaiht er liggen*, he remains... in *galus*, so that he can continue serving as a channel, a *memutza hamichaber* so that every Yid can connect the essence of their *neshamah*... with *atzmus umehus of Ein Sof*.”<sup>5</sup>





# YEHOSHUA

## A NEW GENERATION

### One Rebbe for Each Time

Yehoshua was the *nossi* following Moshe Rabbeinu, and the Midrash says, “the face of Moshe was like a sun, the face of Yehoshua was like a moon.” Since Yehoshua was on a lower level, Moshe Rabbeinu believed that his leadership would be diminished. He therefore informed Yehoshua that he would share the leadership of the Yidden with the 70 *zekeinim*: Yehoshua would lead in military and external matters, while the *zekeinim* would lead in internal matters. This was similar to the way that Moshe Rabbeinu had shared the burden of leadership with the *zekeinim*.

But Hashem had different plans: דבר אחד לדור ואין שני—דברי—there is only one leader for each generation—only one style of leadership for each generation—and notwithstanding the fact that Moshe is greater than Yehoshua, Yehoshua has his own path. In Yehoshua’s time, the *zekeinim* had no say whatsoever: *Take a stick and hit them on their skull*, Hashem told him. “Hashem was telling Yehoshua: Although in the times of Moshe Rabbeinu the

*zekeinim* helped lead the Yidden—you must have your own style of leadership.” As a leader in his own generation, Yehoshua must follow his own mind.<sup>6</sup>

This highlights a truth about the leaders throughout Jewish history. We must follow the leader of *our* own generation. “We demand that in this era every person must dedicate their time to spread Torah and Yiddishkeit (in general, and specifically the ten *mitvzoim*), and it all must be permeated with Chassidus, but there are those who come with the argument: We didn’t see this practice in previous generations. In previous generations there wasn’t such a *koch* in *ahavas Yisroel*. Even by the Friediker Rebbe, we didn’t see this until his last years when he came to America. How can we accept these ‘new’ *avodos*?

“To this we answer: there is only one leader per generation, not two. It’s possible that other generations did not require this *avoda*, but in our generation... the Rebbe says that in our times it is necessary to work in spreading Chassidus... and we must follow the leader of *this* generation.”<sup>7</sup>

# DOVID HAMELECH

## THE HEART OF A NOSSI

Dovid Hamelech was the ultimate king. He was given the everlasting lineage of kingship, and Moshiach, the final king, will descend from him. As the king, the entire nation was under his rule and was obligated to obey him.

But although he was such a powerful king, he was also famously humble, as he declares in Tehillim, “I am but a worm and not a man” and “My heart is empty [conquered] within me.” The Midrash points to this contrast: “We cannot figure out who Dovid is. Sometimes he calls himself a king, and sometimes he refers to himself as a pauper.”<sup>8</sup>

We find this paradox by kings in general: On the one hand, the nation must be entirely subjected to the king—to the extent that if one would disobey the king, he would be sentenced to death. At the same time, however, the king himself is specifically commanded to be subjected to Hashem.

For a Jewish king, humility and power are not conflicting qualities. On the contrary, his humility *causes* his power. The reason that Yidden subject themselves to a king (and a *nossi*) is because he is not an independent being—he stands for Hashem, and channels Hashem’s kingship to the nation. When a person nullifies himself to the king, he is nullifying himself to Hashem. And by doing so, the person receives his *chayus* (vitality) from Hashem.

Thus, the single most important quality of a king is that he should be a proper channel for Hashem’s kingship—and that is achieved through his own *bittul* and self-nullification.<sup>9</sup>

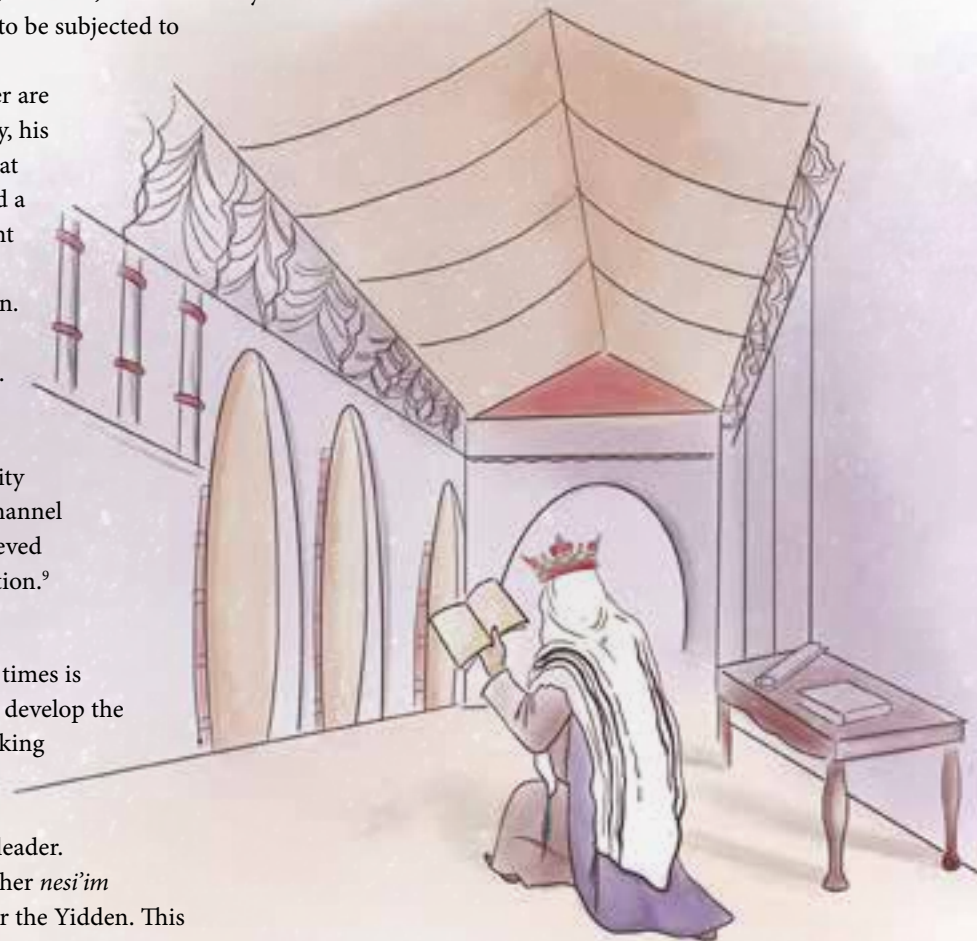
### Fighting for the Yidden

Leading the people through peaceful times is vital. It’s an important time to teach and develop the character of the nation and so on. But a king who leads his people through war, taking himself on the arduous journey along with them is the symbol of a true leader.

What makes Dovid unique among other *nesi'im* is that throughout his reign, he *fought* for the Yidden. This started from the very beginning, when he went up against

Golias: Golias was a seasoned warrior, whereas Dovid was a simple shepherd who had come to bring food for his brothers. As Shaul Hamelech told him, “You cannot go to that Plishti and fight him; you are only a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth!” Yet Dovid risked his life to stand up to him. He was victorious over Golias, and raised the morale of all the Yidden by showing that the Plisitim are nothing to be afraid of.<sup>10</sup>

This continued later when he became king, as Dovid constantly fought wars for the Jewish people (unlike his son Shlomo who merited to have a peaceful reign). Sometimes a *nossi* doesn’t need to fight wars to provide for his nation; but when it is necessary, he does that as well, as exemplified by Dovid.<sup>11</sup>



# MORDECHAI

## EMUNA

Mordechai was a great leader in many areas: He was a great Torah scholar, one of the leading members of Sanhedrin, and an adviser to the monarch who ruled the entire civilized world. We see his involvement everywhere in the Purim story: Uncovering the plot to murder the king; kindling Haman's wrath by refusing to bow to him; gathering all the Jewish children and studying with them; and communicating with Queen Esther to inform her of the decree and guiding her throughout.

However, when he is introduced to us in the Megillah, he's given a simple title: "*Ish Yehudi*." This doesn't mean that he was from *shevet Yehuda* (for he wasn't), but that he was "a man of *hoda'ah* (concession)," a person who concedes to and believes in Hashem, is *kofer* in *avoda zara*, and is the one responsible for the *emuna* of every Yid.

Every Yid has a connection to Hashem that utterly transcends understanding and intellect. Just like the relationship between a father and a son, the Rebbe says: "It's not something that *can* be explained intellectually, it's not something that *needs* to be explained intellectually, and it's not something that anyone *wants* to explain intellectually." One can find intellectual explanations for their relationship—for example, the Chovas Halevavos

explains that a son is obligated in *kibud av va'em* because

he should appreciate everything his parents did for him—yet it cannot capture the depth of the essential love between a father and son.

This applies even more so to the relationship between Yidden

and Hashem, since we are Hashem's 'firstborn' child (and only child). Even after our *neshamah* becomes a creation for itself and comes down to the world, it remains a part of *Elokus*. "[A Yid] is a part of Hashem's essence," the Rebbe says, "and when you grasp a part of the essence, you grasp its entirety. Thus, every Yid is Hashem *kevaycholl*!"

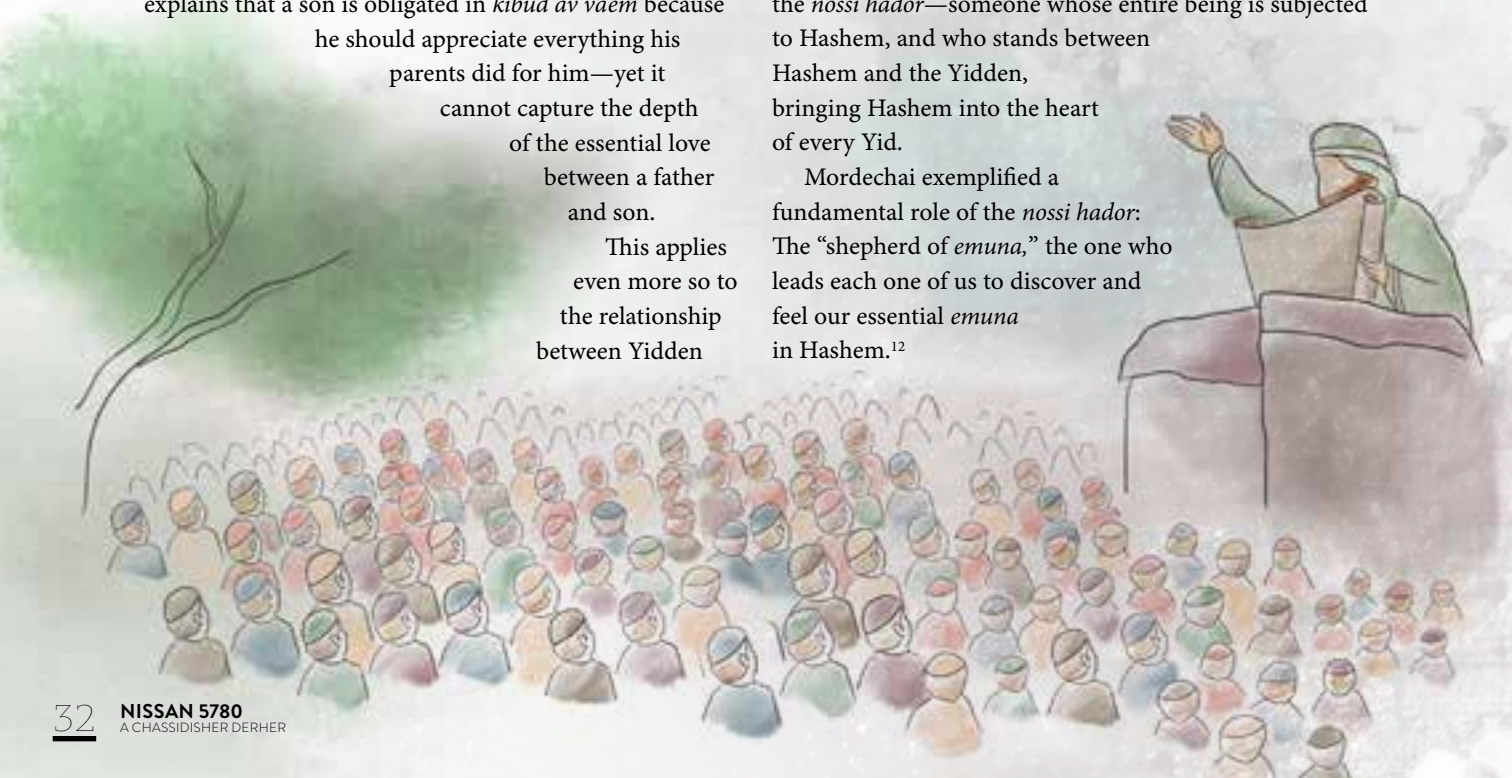
However, when Yidden are in *galus*—when Yidden are under the foreign reign of King Achashveirosh—they need assistance to feel and internalize their *emuna*. Mordechai was the *memuzta hamichaber*, the conduit who helped them reveal their essential *emuna* in Hashem.

Mordechai led by example; he "did not kneel and did not bow" to Haman, and his leadership had a tremendous influence on the Yidden.

As the Alter Rebbe explains, the Yidden could have saved themselves if they would just renounce their religion. Haman's decree applied only to those who considered themselves Jewish, and every Jew had the choice to convert to another religion and spare his life. And yet, over an entire year of waiting and agonizing for the terrible decree to take effect, *not a single person even considered* doing so. This was all due to Mordechai's influence.

Mordechai was able to accomplish this because he was the *nossi hador*—someone whose entire being is subjected to Hashem, and who stands between Hashem and the Yidden, bringing Hashem into the heart of every Yid.

Mordechai exemplified a fundamental role of the *nossi hador*: The "shepherd of *emuna*," the one who leads each one of us to discover and feel our essential *emuna* in Hashem.<sup>12</sup>



# REBBI SHIMON BAR YOCHAI

## THE WORLD ON HIS SHOULDERS

Rebbi Meir and Rebbi Shimon were part of the same generation of *tanaim*. They were both disciples of Rebbi Akiva—the only students who received *semicha* from him—and are among the *tanaim* quoted most often in the Mishnah.

Rebbi Meir is known for his tremendous depth of intellect, and the *halacha* often doesn't follow his opinion simply because his colleagues were unable to comprehend the depth of his opinion and couldn't *pasken* like him.<sup>13</sup> His wisdom was so deep that he would use *three hundred parables* for every concept, with every parable explaining the one before it.

Rebbi Akiva, their teacher, asked Rebbi Meir to sit before Rebbi Shimon, thus ranking him higher. He explained to Rebbi Shimon, "It's enough that I and your creator recognize your capabilities." Chassidus explains that although Rebbi Meir's wisdom was greater than his colleagues'—to the extent that they couldn't *pasken* the *halacha* like him—they at least *knew* how great he was. Rebbi Shimon Bar Yochai's greatness was so far beyond the other *tanaim* that *they didn't even realize* his greatness. He is the one who began the revelation of *pnimiyus haTorah*, as the author of the Zohar. His *avodas Hashem* was on an entirely different plane.

After 13 years of hiding from the Romans, during which time they climbed higher and higher in *avodas Hashem*, Rebbi Shimon and his son Rebbi Elazar emerged from their cave, and encountered people going about their daily lives. Upon seeing this, Rebbi Elazar burned the world with his eyes. From his lofty reality—a world of constant Torah study and ultimate connection to Hashem—he could not comprehend how people can simply go along with their daily lives!

And yet, everywhere that Rebbi Elazar burned, Rebbi Shimon healed. He was on an even higher level than his son, but he was able to lower himself and relate to the world on *its* level—for he wasn't just a *tzadik*, he was the *nossi*.<sup>14</sup>

For this reason, when the Jewish nation was in trouble with decrees from the Roman government, Rebbi Shimon

was the one who went to intercede;<sup>15</sup> and even when a decree came from Hashem himself, he did not hesitate:

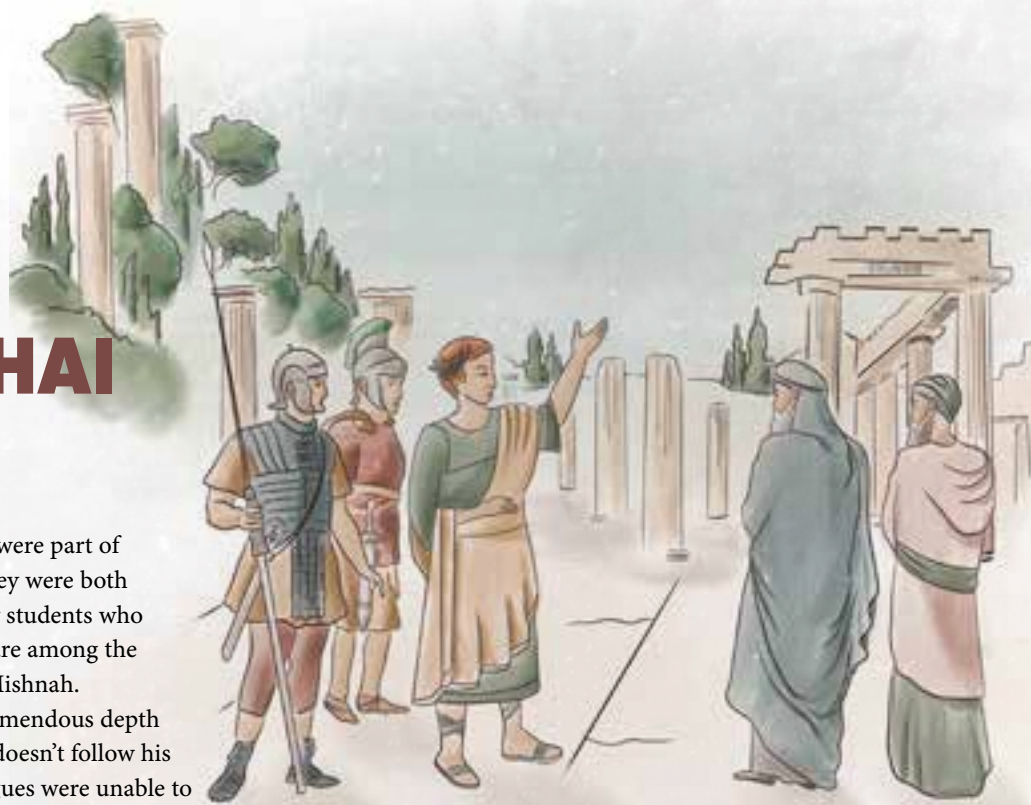
*Rashbi told his son Rebbi Elazar: Come, let us see what Hashem wishes to do in the world. They went and found an angel... and Rebbi Shimon asked him, "What do you want to do?"*

*The angel replied, "[I want to] destroy the world, for there are not 30 tzadikim in the generation"... Rebbi Shimon told him, "I beg of you, go before Hashem and tell him that Bar Yochai is on the earth."*

*The angel went before Hashem and said, "Ribono shel olam, before you is revealed what Bar Yochai said." Hashem told him, "Go destroy the world and don't pay attention to Bar Yochai."*

*When the angel returned, Rebbi Shimon told him, "If you don't go again before Hashem, I will decree that you will not return to Heaven, and you will be in the place of Uza and Azael. When you go before Hashem, tell him, "If there are not 30 tzadikkim, 20 should be enough... and if not that ... at least two should be enough, me and my son... and if two isn't enough, there is one. That is me, the tzadik, the foundation of the world."*

The Gemara explains that there are many levels in *tzadikim*: The 18,000 *tzaddikim* who "see Hashem from behind an unclear glass," the 36 hidden *tzadikim* "who see Hashem from behind a clear glass," and so on. But then there is Rebbi Shimon—the *tzadik yesod olam*, the foundation of the world. Every generation has at least one *tzadik* on this level, someone who is on a tremendously high level yet lowers himself to the world to purify it.<sup>16</sup>





# MOSHIACH



The ultimate *nossi* of all the Jewish people, *Moshiach tzidkeinu*, will also exert his influence over the Jewish people in an unprecedented way.

A *melech Yisroel*, a *nossi* in general, imparts a strong *bittul* within every Jew to *Elokus*.

However, there are levels of *bittul* and *yirah*, the greatest level will be the one *Moshiach* brings to the world and particularly to all *Yidden*.

Even *Moshe Rabbeinu* will depend on *Moshiach* for his *bittul* and *yirah*.

The way to awaken the *bittul* within a *Yid* is by activating the *yechida*, the innermost part of the *neshama*.

In the world of the *yechida* there is only one thing: Hashem.

For the *yechida* it is no challenge to give up everything for Hashem because it knows nothing else. There is nothing else worth living for.

*Mordechai* activated the *yechida* of every Jew to the point that they were *moser nefesh* for an entire year.

*Moshiach* will not just activate the *yechida* of every Jew, he will *reveal* it. It will take over our entire reality. We will think like the *yechida* thinks and see the way the *yechida* sees.

As mentioned above, the *nossi hador* is the *yechida* of the generation, the essence of its soul. This is also why the *nossi* is the *Moshiach* of the generation:

*Kabbalah* teaches<sup>17</sup> us that just as every person has a *yechida*, and just as every generation has its *yechida*, so too, the entire history of the world has a *yechida* as well. That *yechida* is *Moshiach*.

[In a broader sense, the world has all five levels of the soul: 1) *Dovid* merited the level of *Nefesh*; 2) *Eliyahu Hanavi*—*Ruach*; 3) *Moshe*—*Neshama*; 4) *Adam Harishon*—*Chaya*; 5) *Moshiach*—*Yechida*.]

As soon as we reveal our own personal *Moshiach*, the *Moshiach* of the world will reveal himself, may it be *bikarov mamesh*.



# LITMUS TEST OF A TRUE LEADER

Once, while mentioning a story related by the Frieddiker Rebbe, the Rebbe added tangentially:

The fact that the Frieddiker Rebbe was the leader of his entire generation is clear to all, beyond the shadow of a doubt. Notwithstanding that there were other truly saintly people who accomplished many great things but it is universally conceded that their accomplishments were only in their particular fields, whereas the Frieddiker Rebbe was concerned with each and every Jew in his generation. This is not meant to belittle anyone else, but it is a fact that “there is only one leader for a generation, and not two leaders for a generation.”

So vast was his dedication to Jewry, that even when the K.G.B. placed him under constant surveillance he did not desist from his efforts. His concern was so all encompassing that he even busied himself with children of whom he had no personal knowledge (even those in Brooklyn, N.Y.). In an effort to draw them closer to Torah, he sent letters and emissaries, time and time again if necessary. It so disturbed him that, contrary to his nature, he became extremely vexed and agitated over it.

In his 30 years of leadership he was the only one who worried about all Jews, men, women and children. His *talmidim* carried on with his concern and work over the next 30 years, and will continue to do so for all time...

(*Shabbos Parshas Lech L'cha 5741.*  
*Sichos Kodesh 5741 vol. 1, p. 393.*  
*Translation based on SIE.*)

1. See Igros Kodesh vol. 3 p. 331.
2. See sichas 9 Sivan 5720.
3. Most notably, Yud Shevat 5720, et. al.
4. Toras Menachem 5745 vol. 5 p. 2845.
5. 10 Shevat 5714.
6. Sichos Kodesh 5731 vol. 1 p. 25
7. Likkutei Sichos vol. 19 p. 307-314.
8. See Sichos Kodesh 5740 vol. 3 p. 221.
9. See Reshimos, kuntres 7; Derech Mitzvosecha Mitzvas Minuy Melech.
10. Sichos Kodesh 5738 vol. 2 p. 453.
11. Toras Menachem Hisvaaduyos 5743 vol. 4 p.1564.
12. Purim 5731 p. 546
13. Eiruvim 13b.
14. See Likkutei Sichos vol. 20 p. 152.
15. Meila 17,a
16. Likkutei Sichos vol. 4, p. 1235.
17. See *Kuntres Inyana Shel Toras HaChassidus* ch. 5, et. al.