

The Best Prize

“Avi, did you see the sign in the hallway of the school?”

“No, Chaim.”

“There is a contest to see who can memorize the most Mishnayos. The top prize is a set of books.”

“Wow, that’s a great prize. I must begin memorizing. I want to win.”

On the way home from school, Avi meets another friend.

“What do you have there, Yitzzy?”

“This schoolbag is a prize that I won for coming on time to school for one month straight.”

“Wow, that’s great Yitzzy.”

Avi arrives at home.

“Mom, I’m home!”

“Shalom Avi! How are you? How was school?”

“Great, Mom.”

“Everyone come to the table to eat lunch. The first one to wash gets a cookie.”

Avi thinks to himself, “Everything has a prize. A set of books, a schoolbag, a cookie.”

“Mom, can I ask you something?”

“Of course, Avi dear.”

“Why does everything have a prize? The school runs contests to help us learn or come on time. They give out prizes. When we come home to eat, you give out prizes. Does everything have to have a prize?”

“Avi, dear, you are so perceptive. Prizes are a good thing if used properly. They can be a big encouragement to do better. They can help us form good habits. However, they are not the whole story. We are really striving for something beyond that.”

“That is what I thought, Mom. I knew it in my heart.”

“This week’s parsha, Avi, tells about a request that Yaakov Avinu, our father Yaakov, made of his son Yosef, the ruler of Mitzraim. Yaakov asked Yosef to do *chesed v’emes* (kindness and truth) for him and not bury him in Mitzraim (Bereshis 47:29). Rashi comments that the *chesed* that one does with the deceased is true kindness because one receives nothing

in return.”

“Mom, isn’t there a Mishna in Pirkei Avos about this subject?”

“Excellent Avi! It is in the very first perek. Antigonos Ish Socho used to say, “Don’t be like servants who serve the Master on the condition of receiving a reward. Rather, be like servants who serve the Master unconditionally.” The highest level of doing a mitzvah is without a reward. So you see, Avi, prizes are only a step along the way. They are to encourage us to do better. However, the real goal is to do the mitzvah without any prizes.”

“Great, Mom! Give me a mitzvah to do. And don’t give me a prize!”

“Avi, you are tops. You are the best prize that a mother could ever have.”

Kinderlach . . .

Everyone loves prizes. A candy for helping Imma set the table. A cookie for washing the dishes. A bag of nuts for a perek of Mishnayos. The prizes are only a step up. What is the real reward for doing a mitzvah? “The reward for a mitzvah is another mitzvah” (Pirkei Avos 4:2). Let us all strive for the higher level. Take the best prize.

A Passing Shadow

“Did you see that, Avi?”

“What, Chaim?”

“Here it comes again! Take a good look.”

Whoosh.

The two boys watch as a sparrow streaks past them.

“Wow! That bird is flying very fast.”

“Did you see his shadow?”

“His shadow? How can you see a bird’s shadow? He moves too quickly. You can see the shadow of a wall, or a tree. They are stationary and only move slowly, as the sun moves through the sky. But the shadow of a bird moves as fast as the bird. How can you see it?”

“The time approached for Israel to die” (Bereshis 47:29). The Medrash Rabba (96:2) comments on the beginning of the parsha. “Our days on earth are like a shadow”

(Divrei HaYamim 29:15). Oh, they should be like the shadow of a wall or a tree! Rather they are like the shadow of a flying bird. Life passes so quickly. Eighty or ninety years may seem like a long time. However, it is nothing compared to eternity. Our time in this world is so limited.

“Yaakov lived in the land of Mitzraim seventeen years” (Bereshis 47:28). Rav Zalman Sorotzkin comments that the verse uses the word “lived”, even though Yaakov was about to die. Similarly, after Sara died, the verse uses the word “life” when speaking about her (Bereshis 23:1). Why is the death of tsaddikim referred to as life? Because their real life begins after they leave this world. They spend their years on this earth working hard, gathering mitzvos. The main reward for these mitzvos only comes in the next world. Then they have an eternity to enjoy the fruits of their labors.

Kinderlach . . .

Your whole life is ahead of you. What will you do with it? What will you accomplish? No body lives forever. But the soul never dies. The life of the body is like a passing shadow. In a flash, it’s over. You have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to gather all of the mitzvos that you can. Pack them in. You won’t regret it. You will enjoy the fruits of your labors forever and ever and ever.

Kinder Torah[®] Copyright 2002
All rights reserved to the author Simcha Groffman

Put your community on this list:
Atlanta, Bat Yam, Bayit Vegan, Beit Shemesh, Beit Yisrael, Betar, Boston, Brooklyn, Cleveland, Dallas, Detroit, Edgware, Edison, Edmonton, Effrat, Eilat, Ezras Torah, Gateshead, Geula, Givat Shaul, Givat Zev, Golders Green, Har Nof, Haifa, Istanbul, Izmir, Katzin, Kiryat Sefer, the Kotel HaMaaravi, Los Angeles, Maale Adumim, Maale Amos, Maalot Dafna, Manchester, Mattersdorf, Mattisyahu, Mea Shearim, Miami Beach, Montreal, Neve Yaakov, Philadelphia, Pisgat Zev, Ramat Gan, Ramat Shlomo, Ramot, Rannana, Romema, Rechovot, Revavah, San Simone, Sanhedria HaMurchet, Stamford Hill, Tel Aviv, Telz Stone, The Bronx, Yishuv Psagot, Unsorf, Zichron Yaakov.

Subscribe to Kinder Torah for yourself or your shul. Just \$120 per year.

Kinder Torah

P.O.B. 5338, Jlm, Israel 91052

All contributions are deductible from
Maaser Kesafim.