

ONE IS WORTH ONE BILLION!

PARSHAS MISHPATIM

Many years ago, the evil Roman Empire made a decree that the Jews in the Land of Israel could not study Torah, under the penalty of death. Then, Papos ben Yehudah discovered Rabbi Akiva teaching Torah in public. When he asked Rabbi Akiva why he was not scared, Rabbi Akiva answered with a parable:

There was a fox walking on the bank of a river. It saw a fish in the water, darting from place to place. The fox asked the fish what it was doing. The fish replied that it was going from side to side to avoid capture by the fishermen's nets. "The fox said, 'Would you like to come up on the dry land? You and I will live together...'" The fish responded, "Are you the one that they call the clever animal? You are not clever, but a fool! If we are afraid here, where we live, how much more so, would we be in a place where we die!"

*"He [Moshe] then took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the ears of the people. They said, "All that Hashem has spoken, we will do and we will listen."
(Shmos 24:7)*

the World to Come. He continued, that one Amen is 1,000 times greater than the reward for one Baruch Hu u'varuch Shemo. One Amen Yehei Shemei Rabba... is 1,000 times greater than one Amen. **And, one word of Torah study is 1,000 times greater than one "Amen Yehei**

Shemei Rabba..."!

The **Talmud** (Shabbos 88a) quotes Rabbi Simai who said that when Bnei Yisroel said "נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע", "we will do and we will listen", giving precedence to the declaration "We will do" over the declaration "We will hear," 600,000 ministering angels came and tied two crowns to each member of the Jewish people. One crown was corresponding to "We will do" and one corresponding to "We will hear." **Rashi** says that those crowns were fashioned from the radiance of the Divine Presence.

The **Beis Halevi** asks a very insightful question. The **Talmud** says that Bnei Yisroel received the heavenly crowns when they preceded saying "We will do" before saying "We will hear". Why doesn't it say that they received the crowns when they said "We will do"? After all, that response showed Bnei Yisroel's readiness to do whatever Hashem would tell them. Apparently, the order of their response was very significant. They only merited the crowns because

Similarly, Rabbi Akiva told Papos that a Jew without Torah is like a fish out of water. Without Torah, a Jew would die a spiritual death. (**Talmud** Brachos 61B)

For every word of Torah that we learn, we receive unimaginable reward! The **Talmud** (Shabbos 127A) states that there are specific mitzvos for which one is rewarded in this world, yet the main reward is reserved for the World to Come. The greatest of those mitzvos is learning Torah.

Rabbi Simcha Zissel zt"l of Kelm said that it would have been worthwhile for Hashem to have created the entire universe for 6,000 years so that one Jew would say Baruch Hu u'varuch Shemo, just once, after hearing Hashem's name recited. Rabbi Simcha Zissel states that the reward for one "Baruch Hu u'varuch Shemo" is guaranteed eternal pleasure in

they first said “We will do” and afterwards said “We will hear”.

The **Zohar** says that “We will do” referred to the acceptance to do mitzvos. “We will hear” referred to the acceptance to learn Torah.

The **Beis Halevi** explains that there are two aspects of Torah learning. One is the practical consideration of learning, to know what to do and how to properly fulfill the mitzvos. After all, if you don’t learn the laws relevant to the mitzvos, you won’t know what to do and how to properly do it. The second is the mitzvah to learn Torah, solely for the sake of learning Hashem’s Torah.

Ben Dama told his uncle, Rabbi Yishmael, that he had learned the entire Torah. He wanted to know if now, he would be permitted to study Greek wisdom. Rabbi Yishmael answered him by quoting a pasuk, “‘This Torah scroll shall not depart from your mouth, and you shall contemplate in it day and night.’ Go and search for an hour that is neither part of the day

nor part of the night, and then learn Greek wisdom.” In other words, Rabbi Yishmael told ben Dama that he was forbidden to learn Greek wisdom. Rabbi Yishmael explained that there are two aspects of the Torah. One is to learn what mitzvos to do and how to do them. Beyond that, there is a mitzvah for men to learn Torah just for the sake of learning Hashem’s Torah. It is true that ben Dama had already learned whatever he needed to properly fulfill the mitzvos. However, there is a separate obligation to learn Torah for its own sake and that learning has no end.

Had Bnei Yisroel said “וְנִשְׁמַע וְנַעֲשֶׂה”, “we will listen and we will do” it would have seemed that they were only accepting the obligation to learn Torah in order to know how to properly fulfill the mitzvos. That would have been only one acceptance of the Torah. By saying it in the reverse order, they were demonstrating that they were willing to accept both aspects of Torah; Learning Torah to fulfill the mitzvos as well as learning Torah for its own sake. Therefore, Bnei Yisroel were crowned with two heavenly crowns for both of their acceptances.

**We have a mitzvah to learn Torah to know how to fulfill the mitzvos.
Above and beyond that, is the mitzvah to learn Torah for its own sake.
That obligation is infinite! So is its reward!**

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Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.

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