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by Rabbi Yaakov Finestone

MORE PRECIOUS THAN GOLD OR DIAMONDS!

PARSHAS VAYETZE

In 1799, 12-year-old Conrad Reed found a 17-pound rock, yellowish in color, in the creek on his farm. His family used it as a doorstop for three years. Conrad's father became curious and brought the rock to a jeweler who told him that the rock was actually a gold nugget. Conrad's father did not understand its value and sold it to the jeweler for $3.50. The true value of the gold was about $3,600 [In Jewish law the sale would have been nullified since Conrad's father did not understand its value and the Jeweler underpaid him by a considerable amount]. Nowadays, that nugget would be worth over 1 million dollars.

Mr. Reed had something very valuable. Since he did not appreciate its value, he lost the opportunity to become wealthy, as he was vastly underpaid for it.

"And take heed of a 'light' mitzvah as of a 'heavy' one, for you do not know the reward of mitzvos" (Pirkei Avos 2:1)

It says in **Pirkei Avos**, *"And take heed of a 'light' mitzvah as of a 'heavy' one, for you do not know the reward of mitzvos"* (Pirkei Avos 2:1) Hashem gave us the opportunity to perform multiple mitzvos. If we appreciate the true value of every mitzvah, then we will be heedful and not squander our time. We will rush to do as many mitzvos as possible.

Rabbi Elazar Menachem Man Shach zt"l, once told a story based on the written records of the Jewish community in Vilna.

The Vilna Gaon's wife went collecting tzedakah for the poor, together with another woman. The two women made a pact that whichever woman would die first, would come to the other in a dream and tell her what the Next World was like. The other woman passed away first and as she had promised, she came to the Vilna Gaon's wife in a dream. She said that she was not permitted to disclose the details of what the Next World was like. However, since she had promised to come, she had received special permission to reveal one detail. Once, when the Vilna Gaon's wife and this woman had been collecting tzedakah, they had gone to visit a certain woman to solicit funds. The woman was not home. Sometime later, they saw her on the other side of the street. In the dream the friend said, "At that point, you raised your finger and said, 'Let's go over and speak to her.' We crossed the street and obtained a donation. Every step of our walk was recorded as a merit for both of us. You received an additional merit just for raising your finger towards the woman that was coming towards us."

Rav Schach zt"l concluded the story, **"Nothing is lost. Every word that we say, and everything that we do is recorded above and has an impact for eternity!"**

How can we understand that we get rewarded for doing an act that seems so insignificant? **Rabbi David Ashear** (Living Emunah 4) wrote a wonderful story illustrating this.

A poor family had to send their son, Jacob, to collect tzedakah for their basic needs. Jacob wanted to become a doctor and his loving father saved a few dollars for that purpose, each time Jacob brought money home. One wintry day Jacob was having a difficult time walking in the freezing cold. He knocked on a door which was opened by a young lady. The lady did not have any money. Just then, her father screamed from upstairs and told her not to give this fellow any money as too many collectors came to their door. The young lady felt very bad that she could not help. She felt that she should at least offer Jacob a hot

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drink. She made him a cup of hot cocoa. The cocoa was delicious and the hot drink invigorated Jacob. Fast forward 22 years. Jacob was a top doctor in his field. One day a patient was admitted into the hospital with a life-threatening disease. Jacob recognized the name as that of the same young lady who had given him the hot cocoa on a bitter cold day, many years before. Jacob went out of his way to help the young lady. He personally paid for some expensive medicines and paid for a plane ticket to fly in a specialist. One year later, this young woman was totally healed. The hospital gave her a bill for a few hundred thousand dollars. On the bottom of the bill was written. "Paid in full, with a cup of hot cocoa." That small gesture 22 years earlier had made such a difference to Jacob that he repaid this young lady many, many times over. This story beautifully illustrates how, likewise, all our actions, even seemingly insignificant ones, are unimaginably precious to Hashem. Hashem rewards us for each of them many times over.

The **Alter of Kelm** zt"l said that it would have been worthwhile for Hashem to create this world and have it continue for 6,000 years, if one Jew would recite "*Baruch Hu U'Varuch Shemo*", blessed is Hashem and blessed is His Name, just once in his lifetime. Every "*Amen*" that we say is worth more than 1,000 times more than that. Every "*Yehei Shemei Rabbah Mevarach L'olam Ul'olmei Ol'maya*", May Hashem's great Name be blessed forever and ever, is worth more than 1,000 times saying one amen. Every word of Torah is worth 1,000 times more than that! That means that learning one word of Torah is worth one billion times more than saying *"Baruch Hu U'Varuch Shemo"*. And it was worthwhile for Hashem to create an entire world for 6,000 years just for one Jew to say *"Baruch Hu U'Varuch Shemo"*, once!

What an amazing reward we can receive for something as easy as responding *Amen*, *Baruch Hu U'Varuch Shemo, and Yehei Shemei Rabbah Mevarach L'olam Ul'olmei Ol'maya*. And we have so many opportunities every single day to do so! And every single word of Torah that we learn is so precious to Hashem**!** We can "grab" many opportunities to learn Torah. Each extra minute or two that we have, we can use to learn Torah instead of wasting that time. While waiting on a line in a store, waiting at a doctor's office, waiting for a chupah to start, … instead of "killing time" we can "maximize our Torah learning"!

*A new Polish minister was appointed who imposed heavy taxes on the Jews. A number of people came to the **Chofetz Chaim** zt"l for advice on what to do. The Chofetz Chaim zt"l said that the best advice is recorded in the **Talmud** (Sanhedrin 98B). Rabbi Eliezer asked, "What can a person do to be spared the agonies of the times before the arrival of the Moshiach?" Rabbi Eliezer answers, "Let him study Torah and do acts of kindness."*

Every single mitzvah that we have is so very precious and our reward for doing it is unimaginable! **Tosefos Yom Tov** (Pirkei Avos2:1) says that there is no reward possible in this world that could adequately pay for a mitzvah that we do. The reward will come in the World to Come. However, we still do get some reward right away.

Even a "simple" mitzvah such as answering *Amen* to a bracha, is very precious. We should not let any mitzvah opportunity pass us by. Especially, in our challenging times, we should put more emphasis on learning Torah and performing acts of kindness which can protect us from the "birthpangs of the Moshiach"!

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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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