

Shimmy and the Spider

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Toras Avigdor Junior

Adapted from the teachings of Rav Avigdor Miller z"l

"Bye, Mommy!" Shimmy and Yitzy said as they started to walk out the front door on the way to cheder.

"Wait, Shimmy, I want to talk to you for a minute." Mommy took Shimmy aside while Yitzy waited by the door.

"Shimmy, your new rebbe called last night after you went to sleep," Mommy said. "He says that you seem to be talking to your friends a lot in class, and it's disrupting other boys."

"But Mommy," Shimmy protested. "I'm not the only one who was talking. A lot of other boys were talking. Why is my rebbe only calling you?"

"First of all, Shimmy," Mommy said, "How do you know he only called me? He didn't say who else he called. And besides, it doesn't matter if other boys are talking too. That's not an excuse to talk during class. I want you to try to be on your best behavior today. You love learning. Save the conversations for recess, okay?"

"I'll try," Shimmy said. "It's just so hard to control myself sometimes. We had such a fun summer vacation and I want to tell everyone about it."

"During recess," Mommy repeated. "Now hurry off to cheder. Have a great day learning!"

That evening after dinner, Totty called Shimmy aside.

"Shimmy," Totty said. "Your rebbe called again. He said that you were talking again in class today. What happened?"

"Well right when we got to cheder, Chezky told me that his Zaidy and Bubby bought him a fifteen-speed mountain bike for his birthday. So I just needed to know more about it!"



“Shimon,” Totty said.

“I know, I know, I could have talked to him about it during recess. But I just couldn’t control myself. What am I supposed to do? I need to talk during class. That’s how Hashem made me.”

“Shimmy, come outside. I want to show you something.”

Shimmy followed Totty out towards the park near their house. As they arrived at a maple tree near some park benches, Totty pointed up.

“Take a look at that,” he said.

“Wow!” exclaimed Shimmy. “That is the largest spider I have ever seen!”

Shimmy and Totty stared for a moment at the massive spider working on his massive web.

“Now take a look at that web,” Totty said. “Look at how detailed and intricate it is.”

“It really is incredible,” agreed Shimmy.

“Now, how do you think the spider learned to make webs like that? Do you think he sat in a classroom where a spider teacher stood all day explaining how to spin a web?”

“Of course not,” Shimmy laughed. “Hashem gave spiders the instinct to know how to create webs.”

“That’s exactly right,” said Totty. “And not only that, they instinctively know when and where to place their webs. And to sit in the middle and wait for fat juicy bugs to get caught in it so they can eat them. Not to mention the incredible *neis* that the spider is even able to produce a sticky silk from which the web is made.

“Now, let’s say someone told a spider not to make a web. Would the spider be able to listen?”

“Well no, because spiders don’t understand English.”

“Imagine for a second that the spider could understand you. Could you convince him not to make a web?”

“I don’t know, but I’d guess he’d do it anyway because that’s how Hashem made him.”

“Exactly right!” smiled Totty. “Now let’s talk about how Hashem made you.”

Shimmy looked confused.

“Hashem gave you *bechirah* - the power to choose between right and wrong. And he gave us a mitzvah in the Torah, **וּבְחִירָתָּ בְּחַיִּים** - choose life! We are commanded to use our power of choice to choose eternal life by doing Hashem’s mitzvos.

“We are not spiders or ants or honeybees who automatically do what they do without giving it any thought. We are human beings to whom Hashem has given the ability to think before we act and make a decision about whether or not to do something.”

“But it’s so hard,” Shimmy said.

“Nobody said it was easy,” Totty said as they turned and started walking back to the house. “But it is doable and it is very rewarding. I know that you have the ability to not be disruptive in class, because Hashem Himself gave you that ability. And I have confidence that you will be able to make the right decision tomorrow and sit quietly while your rebbe is teaching.”

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

Takeaway:

Bechirah is an important mitzvah and an opportunity that only we have. Only we can make our days worthwhile by choosing to do the right thing!



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