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permission from his parents to go on the exciting retreat.

The weekend was pleasant enough and the boys were having a great time. A common practice at these retreats was the workshops that were held on various topics of Judaism. Jeff decided to check out the workshop on *Shechitah* - ritual slaughtering, and spent a number of hours watching with fascination how an animal is rendered kosher. Upon leaving the workshop, he caught up with a bunch of his friends who had just come out of the "*Tzitzis*" workshop. They were proudly displaying brand new pairs of *Tzitzis* on their shoulders and recounting some of the things they learned. Jeff was envious. He didn't get any souvenirs from his workshop.

As they walked, they approached a wooden bench on which a man with a black beard was sitting and watching them. "Hey guys," the man suddenly called out, "Where did you get those cool *Tzitzis*?"

The boys proudly called back, "At the *Tzitzis* workshop."

The man grinned broadly. "That's amazing. Do you know that the *mitzvah* of *Tzitzis* is one of the most unique *mitzvos* in the entire *Torah*." The boys shrugged, obviously not knowing. "*Tzitzis* is one of the only *mitzvos* that as soon as you put it on in the morning, you collect *mitzvos* every second of the day. All you have to do is put them on, and every moment that you wear them, you get a *mitzvah*. Can you imagine - getting *mitzvos* for doing nothing other than wearing a piece of clothing?"

The boys had to admit; that was pretty cool. They knew a little about *mitzvos* but they didn't know how easy it was to collect them by simply wearing *Tzitzis*. Then, the man looked at Jeff and asked, "Hey, where's your *Tzitzis*?" Feeling a bit ashamed, Jeff blushed and said, "I didn't go to the *Tzitzis* workshop. I went to the *Shechitah* workshop instead."

But the man continued smiling. "Well, wouldn't you want to collect *mitzvos* all day long like your friends, here? Why don't you go get yourself a pair of *Tzitzis*?" Jeff said that he would and they walked away. No sooner had he arrived back home in Baltimore, did he convince his father to take him to the local Jewish bookstore and buy a pair of *Tzitzis*. He explained how "cool" this *mitzvah* was and even his father got into the swing of things. He bought a pair for both of them and they walked out smiling.

More than thirty years later, Jeff, now Moshe to all his acquaintances, still recalls how one little comment about a "cool" *mitzvah* turned his life around. That man sitting on the bench with the black beard - who, he later found out was **Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser Shlit'a** - could not have known how his words affected Jeff until they happened to meet at a family wedding, and Moshe recounted his amazing journey and his ultimate discovery of *Yiddishkeit*. Now, married with a beautiful family, Moshe is a pillar of his community and synagogue and wistfully recalls that although his father never reached the level of religious observance that he had, there was one *mitzvah* that he held especially dear; from the moment his father bought it until the day he passed away, he wore his *Tzitzis* with pride and dedication, and never stopped performing the "cool" *mitzvah* of *Tzitzis*.

משל למאדבר דומה

ויאמר ה' אל אברהם לך מאד צד וממולדתך ומבית אביך אל הארץ אשר אראך וגו' (יב-א)

משל: The Olympic athletes braced themselves for the final round of the long-jump competition. One by one, each athlete took his turn. One jumped 8 meters. Another bested him by jumping 8.5 meters. But the third athlete captured the Gold medal by jumping a full 9 meters and the crowd thundered their applause.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, a man ran onto the track. Was this another competitor? Could he outdo the Gold medalist? With a flourish, the man pulled his belt off his pants and placed it on the ground, a mere meter from his feet. Then, with a mock show of effort, he heaved himself over the self-made mark and crashed to the ground! He then scrambled to his

feet and with a beaming smile, thrust his arms victoriously into the air. He continued to wave to his "adoring" fans as security personnel led him away.

נמשל: Explains **R' Mordechai Chaim of Slonim ZT"L**, *Avrohom Avinu* was tested with ten נסיונות, each one more difficult than the next. And he passed each one with flying colors. For thousands of years, our ancestors faced trials and tribulations that we, today, could not even fathom. And they came through like champions. But we, who think we face difficulties, have no clue what it means to endure real difficulties, have no clue what it means to endure real נסיונות - and yet, we delude ourselves and expect adulation and reward for the little that we do!

ואברכה מברכך ומקללך אאר

ונברכו כך כל משפחת הארמה (יב-ד)

When *Hashem* tells Avrohom that He will bless "those who bless you," it refers not only to someone who blesses Avrohom himself, but also to someone who blesses one of his descendants. (חולין מט.)

R' Yechezkel Levenstein ZT"L cites this *posuk* in a letter he wrote to show that blessing one's friend is a very worthwhile action. When you bless another person, you are offering a few short words, in return for which the Almighty gives you His bountiful blessings. When one greets a fellow Jew with a hearty "*Sholom Aleichem*" or "Good Morning," you are blessing him, and as a result, *Hashem* will bless you. For this reason, it is fitting to give a blessing for success to one who embarks on a business venture or undertakes a new job. For in essence, you are not only helping to add to your friend's success, but you are in fact, helping yourself, as well.

Although he was ill and very weak, **R' Chatzkel Sarna ZT"L**, *Rosh Hayeshivah* of Chevron, exerted himself one *Motzei Shabbos*, a few weeks before his death, to go to the *yeshivah* to *daven Maariv*. As he was walking up the steps, he and the person accompanying him realized that the students had just finished praying. The other man paused unsure if the *Rosh Yeshivah* wanted to go straight home, but R' Chatzkel continued up the steps.

"Why are you troubling yourself?" asked his companion. "They have already finished *davening*."

"Praying with the congregation is the fulfillment of a rabbinical obligation," said the *Rosh Yeshivah*. "But blessing the students to have a good week is the fulfillment of 'ואהבת לרעך כמוך' - '*Love your fellow man*,' which is a *Torah* commandment."

TORAH GEMS

ויהי ריב בין רעני מקנה אברהם

ובין רעני מקנה לוט וכו' (יג-ז)

Rashi writes: "*Since the shepherds of Lot were wicked and allowed their animals to graze in the fields of others, the shepherds of Avrohom would criticize them for this theft. They (shepherds of Lot) would answer, ' (Hashem) gave the land to Avrohom but he has no children to inherit him. Lot will be the inheritor, and thus, this is not considered stealing. ' In response, the posuk states: 'And the Canaanim and Perizim were then living in the land' - Avrohom had not yet taken possession of it.*"

R' Ovadia Seforno ZT"L gives an alternative explanation as to why the *posuk* connects these seemingly unrelated words - "*the Canaanim and Perizim were then in the land*" - to the feud between the shepherds of Avrohom and Lot. It is clear that this dispute had nothing to do with Avrohom and Lot themselves. They were above the fray and refused to get involved in petty arguments between the staff. Avrohom's insight into human affairs made him realize that were he to attempt to break up the fight, it could quite possibly have the opposite effect and end up dragging him down to their level. This he could not do, for aside from the obvious reason, Avrohom had a "business" to run. He was in the "business" of creating believers in the One and Only G-d, *Hashem*. His "clients" were the local Canaanim and Perizim. How would it look for his own reputaion as a Man of the Lord, and for "business" itself, were he to become involved in silly and inconsequential disputes? This would undoubtedly turn "customers" away. Hence, the *posuk* tells us that although the shepherds were fighting, Avrohom never got involved since "*the Canaanim and Perizim were then in the land*."

מעשה אבות ... סימן לבנים

אם מחוט ועד שרוך נעל וכו' (יד-כג) – ובמדרש רבה: אתה אמרת אם מחוט – חייך שאני גותן לבניך מצות ציצית ע"כ

Growing up in Baltimore, Maryland, in the mid-70's, Jeff would describe his religious situation as "Conserv-odox" at best. His parents claimed to be somewhat observant but it seemed that they could not make up their minds. On *Shabbos*, they would turn on lights in the house but they would not drive their car to *shul*. They would never mix meat and dairy at home, but eating at non-kosher restaurants was just fine. Jeff felt confused by all these contradictions, and was increasingly turned off from the whole business.

His friends told him about an upcoming weekend retreat in the Catskill Mountains, sponsored by NCSY and held in a place called Camp Tagolah. They were all excited about going and even though there would be some religious activities there, they felt they could deal with it. Jeff, too, became excited and received