

## They brought the Mishkan to Moshe. (39:33)

The *Midrash* offers a perspective on the concept of reward in *Olam Hazei*, this world. *Klal Yisrael* was asked to donate towards the *Mishkan*. Everyone came forward with his free-willed offering. The *Midrash* relates that a student of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai left his *yeshiva* and moved to *chutz la'aretz*, the diaspora. He returned a while later a wealthy man, having successfully navigated the world of commerce, earning a pretty penny. Apparently, Rabbi Shimon's remaining students manifested envy concerning this student. They, too, indicated a desire to leave the *yeshiva* and attempt to be successful making it in the world of business. After all, why should they not also be wealthy?

Rabbi Shimon was acutely aware of their desire to leave. He brought them out to a valley, not far from the *yeshiva*. He began to pray, "Valley, valley fill up with golden coins." The valley "complied," filling up with an enormous amount of gold! He then turned toward his students and said, "If it is gold which you are seeking – here is all the gold you would ever need. Take whatever you want, but, remember one thing – whoever takes gold now is actually appropriating his portion from the World to Come. The only remuneration for Torah study is in *Olam Habba*. If you decide to "collect" it while you are here in this world you are taking your *nitzchius*, eternity, and squandering it here (author's free translation).

This *Midrash* presents us with a number of questions. First, are we to believe that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's students would be moved by money? Would they be willing to leave their esteemed *Rebbe* and travel to *chutz la'aretz* just to earn money? Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was a giant among giants. How are we to understand the allusions in the *Midrash*?

**Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl**, offers an insightful explanation to this *Midrash*. He suggests that the student who returned a wealthy man did not set up shop as a business man. Absolutely not. He returned to the *bais hamedrash* once again, attending his revered *Rebbe's shiurim*, discourses, as if he had never left. There was, however, one difference. Now, he was rich. He was no longer a poor student attending Rabbi Shimon's *shiur*. He was wealthy – and he probably had not missed out on that much.

We now understand why they were envious. They had never left. As a result, they did not have the means for donating gold and silver to various charities, as did the student who had left. He was similar to them in learning, but, in charitable acts, he was way ahead of them. He had achieved the best of both worlds. This is why they were jealous of his achievements. He had taken a break from the rigid schedule of Torah learning that they had been maintaining. Yet, he was now back with them and, quite possibly, just as proficient in his knowledge – and, unlike them, he was able to carry out acts of charity and kindness. When you think about it, why would anyone not be jealous? Why not me?

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was acutely aware of what coursed through the minds of his students.

They were not simply looking for a way out, an easy way to make some money. His students would never exchange the *bais hamedrash* for material wealth and power. It would take much more to motivate them to leave the hallowed halls of Torah study. It was the opportunity to satiate themselves from both tables: Torah and *maasim tovim*, good deeds. While in the *bais hamedrash*, they were unable to enhance their Torah study with acts of kindness, because they lacked the wherewithal. If they could take some time off, however, to earn a good living and then return to the *bais hamedrash* – would that not be optimal? Would that practical application not elevate their level of Torah study?

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai brought them outside the walls of the *bais hamedrash* and filled up a valley with gold and silver: “*Nu* – take all that you want! Perform your *mitzvos*. Carry out your good deeds! But, remember: whatever you take, it is your *Olam Habba* that you are taking. Do not think that one can grab *Olam Habba* by force. One must earn it. Giving up Torah, just so that one can earn the *Olam Habba* associated with *maasim tovim* is not the way to earn *Olam Habba*. In fact, you should be aware that, had your purpose in life been to support Torah study and carry out acts of charity and kindness, Hashem would have provided you with the ability and wherewithal to do so. If He has not, it is because you are destined to learn – learn – and continue learning! Your portion in *Olam Habba* is based upon uninterrupted Torah study. No wealth, no enhancements – just simply Torah study in its unhindered way. If you want both, then remember that you are diminishing your reward in *Olam Habba*. It will never be the same.”