ב"ה

**Unit 1 –** זריזות **– The Test of What’s REALLY Important.**

**(אבות ד':ב') רץ למצוה ......שמצוה גוררת מצוה הוי**

“Run to do a mitzvah…..for one mitzvah leads to another” (*Avot* 4:2)

**Essential Questions:**

**EQ #1 - Why do I *run* to do certain things and push off others?**

**EQ #2 - What does *how* I do something say about what is really important to me?**

The Midah of זריזות is really the question of priorities – What is important in life? Whatever is important to us we run to, things less important we tend to avoid.

**Text Study:**

﻿בן עזאי אומר: הוי רץ למצוה קלה כבחמורה ובורח מן העברה .שמצוה גוררת מצוה. ועברה גוררת עברה.ששכר מצוה- מצוה. ושכר עברה עברה (אבות ד':ב')

Ben Azzai says: Run to do any mitzvah and run away from any aveira – Because one mitzvah leads to another mitzvah while one aveirah will lead to another aveira – Because the reward for a mitzvah is a mitzvah, and the reward for an aveira is an aveira.(Avot 4:2)

This text encapsulates our entire lesson. Ben Azzai is saying that whatever you RUN TO, that is what you have made important in your life. If you RUN to do a mitzvah, that is what YOU are about and therefore one mitzvah will of course lead to another! The opposite is also true….

The reward for living a life where one RUNS to do a mitzvah is they will lead a life which is filled with Mitzvot – goodness and G-dliness. The opposite is also true….

Below we will use various resources to try and flesh out the points made in this Mishna:

**הוי רץ למצוה קלה כבחמורה - “Run to do any mitzvah!”**

[Video Clip – What Gets You Up In The Morning?](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=volIlLCZ3nM&feature=related)

**Discussion Questions:**

* What motivates the people in the commercial to get up in the morning?
* Why does Nike want to convince you that it is a good idea to get up in the morning for sports or exercise?
* Fill in the blank: I get up in the morning because \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* What Tefilah do we say first thing in the morning which helps us focus on why we should get up?
* As Jews what do you think should be the reason we get up?

The things that are most important in life we have to PUT FIRST! What happens if the less important things are given priority?

Video Clip – [FIRST THINGS FIRST!](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lpau5YXk46Y&feature=related)

[Another version here!](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4XWsaqmAoLg&feature=related)

[And here by Steven Covey (the original)](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VDxKLSyksI)

**Activity:**

Before showing the students the video clips above, the teacher can perfom this exercise for the class in the same way that [Steven Covey does it](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VDxKLSyksI)! Instead of using the Big Rocks which relate to his model (business), use the Big Jewish Rocks – Tefilah, Chesed, Learning Torah, etc. The little rocks can be things that kids enjoy but are insignificant in comparison – Television, Internet, Video games, Sports, Enjoying Junk Food, etc.

After the teacher has done this exercise the students should create a power point presentation in which they identify the “Big Rocks” and “Small Rocks” of their life and then perform the above experiment with their big rocks and small rocks. What do they put in first? What happens if they reverse the order? What is the lesson of the exercise?

Instead of a power point the teacher may want to have the students bring in their own materials and do the actual experiment in class.

**Identifying the Big Rocks:**

In order to help us remember the “big rocks” – We have to consider the “big questions” like why was I born? Teacher – Have students answer the following question, then continue with the story and the parable below.

The main reason I think I was brought into this world is in order to…. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

This story addresses that question:

**Story – Diamonds and Dead Fish**

Once upon a time there was a poor man who heard that in a faraway land, on the other side of the deep and dangerous sea, there is a place where diamonds were as plentiful as dust -- one need only bend down, scoop them up, and fill one's pockets.

After a long and arduous journey, the man arrived in this wondrous land. Everything that had been said about it was true! Diamonds of all sizes were strewn around everywhere -- even the sand was comprised of billions of tiny glittering gems. A group of children gathered to watch the strange stranger kneeling on the ground and stuffing his pockets with stones and pebbles, but our friend was too busy to notice them.

To celebrate the end of his poverty, the traveler ordered a luxurious dinner in the most expensive restaurant in town. Feeling generous, he handed the waiter a small-sized stone and exhorted him to keep the change. Needless to say, he spent that entire night washing dishes in the kitchen to pay for his extravagance.

He quickly learned that these pebbles, each of which would be worth millions back home, were utterly worthless. Here, the currency with which people paid for goods and services was fish. In fact, few people remembered that fish were originally consumed as a food. No one was bothered by the stench which emanated from their wallets, pocketbooks and money closets. Indeed, a reeking establishment exuded the sweet aura of old money.

Once he overcame the disappointment of his lost dream, our traveler was revealed to be a most resourceful and ambitious individual. He worked hard, invested wisely, and before long he was one of the wealthiest people in the land. His businesses were headquartered in the most rancid section of old downtown and his private vaults held thousands of tons of fish.

Finally, it was time to return home. He telegraphed his family: "Am rich. We shall never want for anything in our lives. Prepare triumphant homecoming." He loaded his fortune on a fleet of ships, and set sail for his hometown.

Family and friends, dressed in their best, awaited him eagerly at the seaport. Of course, there was nothing that could be done with his shiploads of rotted fish except sail back a few miles from shore and dump them into the sea.

But later that day, as he was undressing for bed, a few specks of dust were shaken out of his trouser pockets and sparkled on the floor of his home. He and his family never again wanted for anything in their lives.

The soul, in its abode on high, hears wondrous tales of a faraway land. To get there, it must cross a deep and treacherous sea. Great treasures, it is told, are literally free for the taking in this place. A coin given to charity, a prayer uttered, a candle lit to usher in the Shabbat, a kind word extended to a troubled fellow -- the higher realms, lacking physical bodies and a material reality, can only dream of such treasures.

The soul descends into the material world and discovers that everything that had been said about this place is true. Diamonds litter the streets. Wherever one turns, await countless opportunities to do mitzvot, good and G-dly deeds. One need only bend down to the ground and fill one's pockets.

Yet the value of these "diamonds" are not appreciated in this alien land. "Riches" of an entirely different sort beckon, so that when the time comes to return, many a soul finds itself lugging home shiploads of fetid fish.

But no soul can traverse our world without picking up at least a few mitzvot along the way -- gems which enrich the heavens and make the entire trip more than worth its while...

([Adapted by Yanki Tauber for Chabad.org](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/76719/jewish/Diamonds-and-Fish.htm))

**Discussion Questions:**

* What do the diamonds in the story represent? Why are they described as diamonds?
* What do the dead fish in the story represent? Why are they described as dead fish?
* Why do people forget about the diamonds and focus on the dead fish?
* What is the lesson of the story?

**Story – The Fox and the Vineyard**

A sly fox passed a lovely vineyard. A tall, thick fence surrounded the vineyard on all sides. As the fox circled around the fence, he found a small hole in the fence, barely large enough for him to push his head through. The fox could see what luscious grapes grew in the vineyard, and his mouth began to water. But the hole was too small for him. So what did the sly fox do? He fasted for three days until he became so thin that he managed to slip through the hole.

Inside the vineyard the fox began to eat to his heart's content. He grew bigger and fatter than ever before. Then he wanted to get out of the vineyard. But alas! The hole was too small again. So what did he do? He fasted for three days again, and then just about managed to slip through the hole and out again.

Turning his head towards the vineyard, the poor fox said: "Vineyard, O’ vineyard! How lovely you look, and how lovely are your fruits and vines. But what good are you to me? Just as I came to you, so I leave you..."

And so, our Sages say, it is also with this world. It is a beautiful world, but--in the words of King Solomon, the wisest of all men--just as man comes into this world empty-handed, so he leaves it. Only the Torah he studied, the mitzvot he performed, and the good deeds he practiced are the real fruits which he can take with him.

(Adapted from the Midrash by N.Mindel in “The Complete Story of Tishrei”)

**Discussion Questions:**

* The fox is really us. How do we try and get “fat”?
* How can this story help us determine what is really important in life?
* After having read “Diamonds and Fish” and “The fox and the Vineyard” would your answer to the question above change

**Activity:**

This is a more mature activity but with proper guidance, the teacher can help the students consider what five things they want their own great, great grandchildren to know about them. This is a different take on the popular – [Write your own eulogy exercise](http://www.wethechange.com/what-is-your-legacy/) done by adults to help them focus on what is really important in life.

Example:

I want my great grandchildren to know:

* That I woke up every morning thankful to be alive!
* That I loved to laugh and make others laugh.
* That I gave Tzedaka whenever I could and to whoever was in need.
* That I was a good friend and I did my best to honor and respect my parents
* That I tried my hardest to do the Mitzvot and live a life dedicated to others.

This exercise can be done as a power point, poster- board, lecture, class discussion, Informal circle share time, etc.

An example the teacher may want to show the students (if mature enough) is:

[The Last Lecture](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wVFmFof6aXg&feature=related) and [Here](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8SwZQlzZRtk&feature=fvwrel)

**שמצוה גוררת מצוה – “Because one mitzvah leads to another mitzvah..”**

Video Clip – [A Chain of Kindness](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZVUYi3nb0fk)

[One act makes a difference and leads to another!](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8I7Wk14VWK4&feature=related)

**Activity:**

In this activity we want to concretize the concept of how one Mitzvah leads to another. In other words we want to show how Mitzvot are contagious! [Here](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0PZBBYRN1Vs) and [Here](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eu9UtVaWYaI&feature=related) are examples (online) that show how one good thing leads to another. There are three suggested ways to accomplish this:

**Suggestion #1** – Have the students create a physical chain with strips of paper. On each strip of paper write and illustrate a mitzvah. Then attach it to another, creating a paper chain (similar to a sukkah decoration) Each student should make 3-5 strips and then the chain should be hung in class.

**Suggestion #2** – Have the students write and illustrate and cartoon (on poster board or using computer) which shows how one mitzvah naturally leads to another. Ex. – A boy was on the way to school and saw a rock in the middle of the sidewalk. He bent down and moved the rock out of the way so that nobody would trip. A woman walking down the street at the same time sees this act of kindness and remembers that her aunt has not been feeling well and decides to visit her after work. As her aunt is escorting her out of the house, thanking her for her visit, the mailman is coming up the walkway, and overhears the aunt expressing her thanks with a smile. The mailman understands what happened and as he drives away in his mail truck he remembers that he hasn’t called his mother in a long time. He immediately gets on his cell phone just to say hi to Mom and tell her he loves her. And so on…..

There is a children’s book called “Dov’s Mitzvah” which this idea is taken from. If you would like to borrow it, please email me.

**Suggestion #3 –** Similar to #2, but instead of writing and illustrating it – Act it out and film it!

**ששכר מצוה- מצוה – Because the Reward for a Mitzvah is the Mitzvah!**

One way to understand this statement is that a life lived one mitzvah to the next is a beautiful, meaningful life and therefore – “The reward for a mitzvah is the mitzvah!” As the Mishna goes on to say the opposite is also true…

The following Music Video by Michael Jackson shows the inherent contrast of a life dedicated to Kindness and goodness and one dedicated to greed, hatred and selfishness.

[Man in the Mirror](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PivWY9wn5ps&feature=fvsr)

[Video with Lyrics](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wUrqFkR7QlI)

Another way to emphasize this same point is with the following parable. Before reading the poem, the teacher may want to have a map of Israel available as a visual resource.

**Two Seas in Israel**

There are two seas in Israel. One is fresh, and fish are in it. Splashes of green adorn its banks. Trees spread their branches over it and stretch out their thirsty roots to sip its healing waters. Along its shores the children play. The river Jordan makes this sea with sparkling water from the hills. So it laughs in the sunshine. Men build their houses near to it, and birds their nests; and every kind of life is happier because it is there. The river Jordan flows on south into another sea. Here no splash of fish, no fluttering of leaf, no song of birds, no children's laughter. Travelers choose another route, unless on urgent business. The air hangs heavy above its water, and neither man nor beast nor bird will drink. What makes this mighty difference in these neighbor seas? Not the river Jordan. It empties the same good water into both. Not the soil in which they lie; not the country round about. This is the difference: The Sea of Galilee receives but does not keep the Jordan. For every drop that flows into it another drop flows out. The giving and receiving go on in equal measure. The other sea is shrewder, hoarding its water jealously. It will not be tempted into any generous impulse. Every drop it gets, it keeps. The Sea of Galilee gives and lives. The other sea gives nothing. It is named “The Dead”. There are two kinds of people in the world. There are two seas in Israel.

(Based on “The man nobody knows” by Bruce Barton)

**Discussion Questions:**

* What type of ‘sea’ do you think is happier and more fulfilled? Why?
* How can the משל of the two seas be applied to the idea of “The reward for a mitzvah is the mitzvah itself”?

**Activity:**

In order to appreciate how a mitzvah is its own reward, each student should make a list of 20 mitzvot that she is going to do throughout a specific day. Some of them can be routine (mitzvoth she already does) but at least half should be things that she does not do regularly and on that day she should go out of her way to do them! After each of the 20 items, the student should briefly record her feelings about how it felt. At the end of the day, the student should record a ‘journal entry’ of her experience. Some questions to focus on:

* What mitzvoth were most meaningful to me? Why?
* How do I feel now that the day is over? Does a day focused on mitzvoth feel differently than a regular day?
* What would I like to do differently next time? Are there other mitzvoth that I would like to add?
* Could I see how some of my mitzvoth had a special effect on me and on other people? Explain: