

Never play favorites. That is rule number one for parents and teachers...and is also one that is seldom kept. The truth is, this directive is one which G-d Himself abides by. It is written in Deuteronomy (Ch. 10 v. 17) “[I am God] that does not favor nor accepts bribes”. Hashem doesn’t show favoritism. For this reason, the *gemara* in this week’s *amud* tells us that the angels filed a complaint with Hashem. In the Priestly Blessing we are blessed by the *Kohanim* “The Lord shall show his favor towards you” (Numbers Ch. 6 v. 26). The angels asked, “how can You fulfill this blessing when You had already committed and declared that You do not favor [anyone] nor accept bribes”? The *gemara* records that Hashem responded, “How can I not show [the Jewish people] favor? I wrote in the *Torah* that one is obligated to say the Grace after Meals (*bentch*) when they are completely satisfied, and the Jewish people are particular to *bentch* even when they eat only the size of an olive or an egg”. This is referring to the Rabbinic obligation to *bentch* after eating this amount of bread.

Rav Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg (1884-1966) asks two questions on this *gemara*. Firstly, he asks, if we are not biblically required to say the blessing after eating such an amount, how can we say the blessing. Why is it not considered a blessing in vain? Secondly, he asks, how does this answer the angel’s question? Why does this not constitute a “bribe” of sorts?

Rav Weinberg answers these two questions with a historical tidbit. He recalls that when he was a child there were people who were so poverty stricken that they became known as “*Shabbos* Jews” because they virtually remained hungry throughout the week, only eating a decent meal on *Shabbos*. Yet, despite their extreme impoverishment, they were often the first to jump at the opportunity of hosting a guest who needed a meal for *Shabbos*. One would imagine that after practically starving throughout the week, giving away some of their meager food on *Shabbos*, and only eating what was left, in the best case scenario, the amount of an olive, that they weren’t satisfied. However, said Rav Weinberg, this was not the case. Despite all of the above, there was extreme contentment and satisfaction from their eating because it although meager in quantity, included what they loved so much, kindness. With only partially filled stomachs, they found great joy in the *k’zayis* (olive sized bread) and were indeed able to *bentsch* from a place of great satisfaction.

Rav Weinberg concludes that such an attitude unleashes a Divine quid pro quo. Hashem declares, “My dear children, by attaining satisfaction from your noble acts of excessive kindness, I too must respond by showering you with excessive kindness as well”. It is therefore not considered a blessing in vain, they truly felt complete satiation, and it is acting in such a way that is not merely considered a “bribe”, but an approach to life which “requires” Hashem to respond in kind, going above and beyond, acting with us in a different manner.