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THE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF COMPETITION AND REWARDS IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS *

Part 1

The proliferation of contests and the intensification of competition

In recent years the level of competitiveness and the use of contests and rewards to induce this competitiveness in our schools have increased dramatically. Every self-respecting school promotes a host of contests and competitive programs (e.g. *middos* contest, *mishnayos baal peh*) often highlighting the thrill of being the best and the great prizes one can win more than the value of the task itself. While the benefits of these programs are fairly obvious, there are often unintended negative consequences that some people may be unaware of.

The underlying attitude shared by many teachers and parents in promoting competition and contests is that anything that gets a child to behave in a desirable manner (coming to *davening* on time, learning well, etc.) will help him develop good habits and cannot possibly have a downside. This view seems to be supported by the statement of *chazal* that *metoch shelo leshmo bo leshmo* (one who develops the habit of doing a positive act for extrinsic reasons will eventually come to do it with intrinsic motivation). Often quoted too are the words of the *Chinuch* (*Mitzvah* 15) that *achrei hapeulos nimshuchim halevovos* (a person's heart follows his actions). These *divrei chazal* would indeed seem to justify an emphasis on superficial positive behaviors without any need to concern ourselves with the internalization of the values associated with these behaviors. We can just sit back and "let nature take its course," as the positive behaviors are magically internalized.

Contests are, therefore, seen as an important and even indispensable educational tool since they induce competitiveness which, in turn, can be effective in promoting desirable behaviors. It is rare for a parent or teacher to even consider the possibility of contests and competition having negative consequences (perhaps with the exception of the concern that weaker students who never win may just give up trying).

Many people carry this idea further to include overtly negative motivators. Whatever it takes to get the student to do the required behavior is assumed to be an astute educational move.

* לזכר נשמת א"מ הרה"ג רבי אליעזר סורוצקין הכ"מ, ר"מ בישיבת טלז בארה"ב ומיסד קרית טלז-סטון בארץ ישראל, שהשקיע כל כוחותיו להשריש בתלמידיו "א גישמאק" בלימוד התורה. נלב"ע כ"ח מנחם אב תשס"ז.

The father of a 17 year old bochur who dropped out of yeshiva shared with me his grave concern over his son's inappropriate dress, speech, music, hair style, etc. However, he did have one piece of good news, he assured me. He was able to get his son to agree to learn with a chavrusa for one hour every day. "How did you manage that?" I wondered out loud. "Simple," he responded. "He desperately wanted to take driver's ed., and I told him that I would only agree if he learned every day for an hour. He got furious, but he had no choice but to agree."

I have related this story to many teachers and the majority of them think that the father acted wisely. They even assert that there is a good chance that this *bochur* will begin to learn *leshmo* as a result of being coerced to learn! Similarly, in many schools if a student is caught lying he may be required to copy over a relevant *perek* from a *mussar sefer* with the expectation that the lesson will be internalized; this in spite of the coercion involved.

Chazal's attitude toward "aversive conditioning"

It seems surprising that a teacher would believe that there is a point to using force, threat of punishment, or "blackmail" to teach a *talmid* a *chinuch* lesson. Of course, if the "lesson" being taught is that the teacher is more powerful than the student and that he has the power to hurt or deprive the student, the teacher **will** succeed and perhaps one can justify this attitude. From *chazal*, however, it seems clear that *chinuch* lessons are intended to be internalized within the context of a positive *rebbe-talmid* or father-son relationship.¹ How a lesson is taught can be as important as the lesson being taught. It is for this reason that the *Chazon Ish* explained the *halacha* that a parent shouldn't discipline out of anger, because the memory of the anger will last much longer than the "lesson" the parent is trying to teach.²

A dramatic example of the importance given by *gedolim* to the (unintended) impact of the method used to teach a lesson – as opposed to the intended lesson – is found in the *Igros Moshe*³ where Rav Moshe strongly condemns the (common) practice of teachers encouraging students (often "encouraging" via threats) to "snitch" on other students who misbehaved. Rav Moshe forcefully rejects all attempts to justify this "educational tool" based on the teacher's intention to help the misbehaving student and to

¹ **עלי שור**, ח"א, עמ' רס' – דוקא האבות הם המקשרים את הבנים לתורת א-ל חי, ודוקא הקשר העמוק בין אבות ובנים הוא המכוון את הילדים אל דרך השם. ספר **דרכי החיים** (רבי מיכל יהודה ליפקוביץ) ח"א, עמ' כט' – כשהאבא בוחן את הילד בשבת, צריך לראות שהילד יצא בתחושה שהאבא מרוצה ממנו. ובעמ' עג' מביא בשם **הגר"ח מוולאז'ין** – בזמן הזה קשות אינם נשמעים, ומי שאין טבעו לדבר רכות... פטור ממצות תוכחה. ובעמ' קכב' – ההרגשה אצל הרב צריכה להיות שכולם חשובים לו כבניו. וכן לראות באיזה אופן להביא למצב שיהיה לתלמיד אהבה לרבו. ובספר שמושה של תורה מביא שמרן **הגר"א"מ שך** (עמ' רמח') אמר בשם **רבי איסר זלמן מלצר** – כל כווד המשקל שבחינוך מונח בגישה של הרב אל התלמיד... על המחנך להתאמץ למצוא את הדרך, את הפשרה המתאימה, כדי להתאהב על התלמיד. ועי' קונטרס הנפלא "חנוך לנער" בספר **"מנחת נתן"** (הרב נתן חיים אינפלד, ב"ב תשס"ז). ועי"ש בעמ' רי' במכתב מאת **רבי שלמה וולבה** – "יסוד ההצלחה בכל חינוך הוא שהמחנך יאהב את המחונכים באהבה אמיתית שהמחונכים מרגישים בה... לצערנו לא כל המחונכים מתנהלים לפי כלל זה, וזה גורם להרבה מחונכים נזק נורא" ובעמ' רכא' מהחזון **איש** "יש לגלות אהבה וחיבה לתלמידים... רק כך אפשר להשפיע עליהם תורה ויר"ש.

² **מעשה איש**, ח"ז, עמ' לא'.

³ יו"ד ח"ב, סי' קג' וח"ד, סי' ל'.

prevent further misbehavior. The bottom line, says Rav Moshe, is that the child will learn that it is acceptable (or even commendable) to speak *loshon horah*.

In a discussion I was *zoche* to have with Hagoan Rav Michal Yehuda Lefkowitz *shlit"a* in Bnei Brak on the 20th of Sivan 5767, I related to him the incident mentioned above, where a parent “convinced” his “at-risk” son to learn every day by making it a condition for being permitted to take driver’s education courses. When I told him that many teachers consider this a wise move, he responded that; “Anyone who thinks this doesn’t understand *chinuch*.”

An “at-risk” youngster recently shared with me an incident that highlights this pervasive attitude of using any means to promote proper external behavior in the mistaken belief that the values usually associated with that behavior will automatically become internalized:

“Sammy” is a 19 year old Yeshiva dropout who is very interested in music. He recently visited a Yeshiva that caters to “at risk” bochurim. When the head of this Yeshiva heard about his interest in music, he told this bochur that he has connections with people in the music industry and he can introduce the bochur to some of them. The bochur was very excited with this. But then the Rebbe introduced a condition – I’ll only do this if you agree to come to the Yeshiva to learn an hour a day. This condition flooded the bochur with memories of the unrelenting pressure his parents put on him to learn – the pressure which drove him away from yiddishkeit. He was very hurt by what he described as the Rebbe’s attempt at “manipulation and blackmail.”

Chazal’s attitude toward competition

It is clear from *chazal* that rewards play a role in the *chinuch* of young children. The *gemara* in *Taanis* (24a), for example, relates approvingly of a *melamed* who used fish to encourage unmotivated students to learn. There are also the well-known comments of the Rambam in his introduction to *Perek Cheilek* where he speaks of various incentives that students require as they mature, with little children getting treats and older ones getting clothing and even older ones being motivated by honor.

However, when *chazal* sanction the use of prizes they don’t seem to be speaking of prizes within a competitive framework. Rather, they are referring to “prizes” used to encourage individual *talmidim*.⁴

Competition has a significant aversive component,⁵ albeit usually not at the same level as threats of withholding privileges or punishments. It is often assumed that

⁴ עי' ספר **דרכי החיים** ח"ב, עמ' סד' – התחרות מביאה בעיות רבות, אבל לתת עידוד ופרס לתלמיד על הצטיינותו זה אפשרי וטוב, אבל ללא פרסומת ופומביות בזה, שזה מביא לקנאה ותחרות.

⁵ See “Inspiring or Destructive? Competition in the Yeshivos and Day Schools” by Rabbi Mordechai Nissel, *The Jewish Observer*, May 2007, pp. 18-27.

competition is only problematic for weaker students whose self-esteem (and eventually also their motivation and productivity) will likely be negatively impacted by a competitive environment. Therefore, if we are only concerned with the best interests of the better students (a questionable approach at best⁶) and the “production” of *talmidei chachomim* then perhaps it may be worth sacrificing the weaker students. However, a careful review of what our *gedolim* have said on this subject makes it clear that their concern regarding the destructive impact of competition is at least equally directed toward those who win the competitions. The *Steipler*, for example, discouraged the use of (even non-competitive) prizes for young children in order that they not become habituated to learn for the sake of prizes.⁷

The previous Slonimer Rebbe was particularly opposed to emphasizing to a child his superiority over others (the major appeal of winning a contest) as this is destructive to his character. This is especially damaging when it is done in a public and competitive manner. Even when a prize is deemed absolutely necessary it should be kept to a minimum and great care should be taken that the feelings of other students should not be hurt.⁸

Similarly, Rav Chaim Kanievsky criticized those who encourage children to excel by telling them that they are very bright (*baalei kishron, metzuyonim*) even if it is true and they do it with good intentions. He explains that this encourages the children to become *baalei gaivah*, and to suffer setbacks when they enter competitive yeshivos where they are no longer the top student in the class. Eventually, says Rav Kanievsky, they either stop learning or suffer severe emotional breakdowns.⁹ It is heartbreaking for me to see so many *bochurim* who were told by their parents or teachers that they are *iluyim* or that they are destined to be the next Chazon Ish who then go on to suffer the consequences predicted by Rav Kanievsky.

In addition to the negative impact of competitiveness on the *middos* of the “winners” they also experience a great deal of destructive stress and tension from the

⁶ עי' ספר **דרכי החיים** ח"א, עמ' עה'.

⁷ **ספר חנוך לנער** (צבי ירבוך, תשס"ג, עמ' לג) **הגר"ח קנייבסקי** – "אבא זצ"ל מאד לא אחז מלימוד בשביל כסף, ואף לתת פרסים לילדים לא החזיק, כדי לא להרגילם ללמוד בשביל הפרס. פעם אחת הרב מפוניבז' סיכם עם קבוצת בחורים, שעל כך וכך דפים יתן כך וכך כסף, תרומת נדיב אחר, והחזו"א שלח לומר להם שלא יקחו. היו שלא שמעו בקולו ואולם הגאון ר'... שמע בקולו, ולכן באמת הצליח יותר מהם." [וכן מובא **בדרכי החיים**, ח"ב, עמ' ריג]. ובספר **אורח חיים (רבי חיים סג"ל)** עמ' צב' – שאלתי את רב שך [אם לחלק את הכתות במתיבתא לפי כשרונותיהם של התלמידים] והוא אמר בזה הלשון: "פארוואס אפטיילן? עס איז נישט גוט אפצוטיילן" [למה לחלק? זה לא טוב לחלק]. אז אמרתי לו שזה טוב בעד המצויינים, והוא ענה, "ניין, עס איז פאר די גוטע אויך נישט גוט. מען דארף לערנען צוזאמען..." .. [לא, גם בשביל המצויינים זה לא טוב, צריכים ללמוד ביחד].

⁸ **ספר נתיבי חינוך** – האדמו"ר מסלנים, עמ' מב-מג – ובכלל עדינות הנפש ראוי למנוע כמה שאפשר את ענין ההצטיינות לילד טוב והפרסומת מסביב לזה המשחיתה את הילד מילדותו, וגם כאשר חייבים לפעמים להשתמש בזה, יש להשגיח שזה יהי' מעט שבמעט, ובאופן שלא יפגעו שאר החברים, ושלא יהי' מתכבד בקלון חבירו, שמשחית ביותר את הנפש. וצריך בענין הזה התחכמות גדולה להזהר מזה, ושהילד ירגיש שקבלת ההצטיינות אינה משום שכר או גיאות, אלא כעידוד להבא.

⁹ **ארחות יושר, מרבי חיים קנייבסקי** – הורים שמכניסין בלב בניהם שהם בעלי כשרון ומצויינים והם מהכי טובים ומוצלחים אע"ג שזה נכון ואע"ג שכוונתם לטובה... אעפ"כ יצא שכרם בהפסדם כי מכניסין בלבם גאווה... וסופן שיהיו שנואין מכולם... כשנכנסין אח"כ לשיבה ושם יש הרבה טובים מהם... נכנסין למשבר כידוע. והם מפסיקין ללמוד ומהם נכנסין לשגעון... (מובא בספר "ילקוט החינוך בדרכי אבותינו", ר' שמעון ואנונו, 58-59). ושם בעמ' 446 מובא שבהספדו של **הגאון רבי שלמה זלמן אוירבאך** אמר אחד מבניו, "שמעולם [אביו] לא אמר לילדיו תגדל להיות גדול, כי זה יוצר לחץ לא בריא... אלא כך הי' אומר תמיד: אסור להיות עם הארץ." ובספר **מגד גבעות עולם** להרב מיכל זלמן שורקין, ח"ב (תשס"ה) עמ' כג' – שמעתי מהגרמ"פ זצ"ל "אין לנו הרבה נחת מהעילויים."

need to keep winning. Since winning is what is emphasized by the very nature of competitions, someone who tasted this “glory” will feel pressured not to give it up. Those who least can afford these types of pressure (e.g., someone with precarious self-esteem) are the most susceptible to it. To them, not winning often becomes much more than a deprivation of an additional victorious experience. Rather, it is experienced as a painful and shameful failure.¹⁰

A well respected bais medrash bochur came to therapy because of a very disturbing symptom. Any time he ran into difficulties in his learning he would immediately lose all interest in learning. It was much more extreme and long-lasting than the more common negative reaction to frustration in learning. This bochur recalled that in his years in elementary school and Mesivta (in one of the more competitive New York yeshivos) he took first prize in most of the contests. Yet, he vividly recalls the dread with which he anticipated the announcement of each new contest. He felt compelled to enter, yet was terrified of losing his number one spot. His teachers sincerely believed that these contests were contributing greatly to his shteiging. In truth, it was undermining his emotional health to the point where he was no longer able to learn.

Competitiveness as a manifestation of *chitzonius*

Many *gedolim* have characterized our times as a generation that emphasizes the glamorous and superficial, with a strong need to impress others.¹¹ Even when we are judging our own progress our judgment is influenced by society’s increased focus on superficiality and instant results at the expense of internal, more gradual growth. Schools also compete with each other on this basis and this has driven teachers to seek any means to increase short-term output with insufficient consideration for internalization of values.

*A teacher in a mainstream yeshiva in New York asked his 7th grade students what they would do if they had to choose between actually **being** successful in their studies and being **perceived** by others as being successful, and 65% preferred being perceived as successful!!*

¹⁰ In fact, losing first place may be more painful to some *talmidim* than being punished. See my article “Understanding and Treating Perfectionism in Religious Adolescents” published in *Psychotherapy*, Vol. 35, 1998, pp. 87-95 and reprinted in *Essential Readings on Jewish Identities, Lifestyles and Beliefs*. Edited by Stanford M. Lyman. NY: Gordian Knot Books, 2003, pp. 191-207. An edited version of the article is available at www.DrSorotzkin.com

¹¹ **מכתב מאליהו**, ח"ב, עמ' 171 ... מצינו בדורנו, דור של עיקבתא דמשיחא, שהוא בבחינת ערב רב – חיצוניות, כדברי הגר"א ז"ל. ועי' **במתנת היים**, קנינים א' עמ' סח-סט – רוב הנסיונות שפוגשים את הבן תורה בביהמ"ד טובים סביב הרגשת מעמדו בין חביריו וההשתדלות למצוא חן בעיניהם... המפריע בביהמ"ד לשמחה הוא "קנאה", ר"ל התחרות על מציאת חן, ההורסת כל רגש של שמחה בחלקו של בן תורה... ואין זה קנאת סופרים אלא קנאה פסולה אשר עליה נאמר "ורקב עצמות קנאה", ומאבד כל החשק להמשיך... והרקב הוא שאינו מקנא בעצם הלימוד אלא במה שאחרים אוהזים מחבירו יותר ממנו.... שמעתי פעם מהמנהל דגייטסהעד הגה"צ רבי חזקיהו אליעזר קאהן זצ"ל, אם אדם רוצה לבחון אם הקנאה... הוא מקנאת סופרים או מדה רעה... יחשוב בדעתו אילו הי' אותו חבר עוזב את הישיבה האם הי' שבע רצון מזה או לא. ועי' גם בספר **עלי שור**, ח"א עמ' לו-לז.

Does *metoch shelo leshmo bo leshmo* and *achrei hapeulos nimshuchim halevovos* happen automatically?

As mentioned above, the advocates of competition justify their approach with the *divrei chazal* that emphasize the benefits of external behavior, seemingly without any concern for the need for intrinsic motivation.

Many people seem indeed to understand these sayings to mean that any and all *lo leshmos* always automatically becomes *leshmo* and, therefore, any incentive, prize, competition or even threat is legitimate as long as it produces the desired behavior. Likewise, the *Chinuch's* well known saying that a person's motivations follow his actions is also understood to be an automatic phenomenon with little or no limitations or qualifications. I have long asserted that this is clearly not the case. I have met countless people who were pushed or who pushed themselves to learn or *daven* and the like for many years as a means of avoiding criticism and/or gaining approval, and even did it well, yet at some point they lost steam with no evidence of internalized motivation. It is clearly necessary for the person to have some minimal degree of intrinsic motivation first or, at the very least, to have a strong desire for the development of such motivation. Only then can the person's actions further enhance his intrinsic motivation.

Recently, I was pleased to be shown that this very same point had been made by the late *mashgiach* of the Ponevich Yeshiva, Rav Chaim Friedlander zt"l. He states that it is obvious that the *Chinuch's yesod* that a person's motivations follow his actions can only apply when the person identifies with the ideals associated with those actions. He relates that Rav Yisroel Salanter made this same point citing evidence from the Cossacks. The Cossacks were the elite troops of Europe. They were drafted at a young age and served for 30 years before retiring on a government pension. During their many years of army service these troops were highly disciplined, energetic and productive. However, after retiring, these soldiers spent the rest of their lives in a drunken stupor. What happened to the good habits that they practiced for 30 years?! Since they were forced to join the army and never identified with these values, answers Rav Yisroel, their external behaviors could not have the power to influence their internal values. Contrast this with the common, naive belief that forcing someone to behave in a certain way will magically cause him to internalize the values associated with that behavior!¹²

¹² **שפתי חיים**, מועדים ב, עמ' שמו' - לימד החינוך יסוד גדול בעבודת האדם - המעשה החיצוני משפיע על הפנימיות. **ואולם זה ברור ופשוט שכאשר האדם אינו מזדהה עם המעשה החיצוני, אז אין שום יכולת השפעה פנימית לאותו מעשה**, וכפי שהמשיל הגרי"ס סלנטר זצ"ל לאותם בני איכרים רוסיים שגויסו לצבא הצאר, והם בעודם בביתם מורגלים היו בלכולך ובחוסר סדר, ואולם באותן שנים ארוכות ששירתו בצבא הרגילים להתנהג בנקיון ובסדר. והנה לכששוחררו ניתן היה לצפות שמאחר שהורגלו לסדר ונקיון, כך ינהגו גם בשובם לביתם בכפר, ואולם לא כל כך היה, אלא שבו אל אותו אי סדר ולכולך שבהם נהגו קודם גיוסם. שואל הגרי"ס, היתכן?! אלא פשר הדבר הוא, מאחר וגיוסם לצבא היה בעל כרחם, א"כ כל פנימיותם היתה מנוגדת אל אותם מעשים חיצוניים שהורגלו בהם בצבא, ובשעה שהאדם אינו שלם ומזדהה עם מעשיו החיצוניים אזי אין בכוחם להשפיע על פנימיותו. [וכן הובא בשם רבי יוסף ליב ננדיק **המשגיח דקלעצק** בספר פנינים משולחן גבוה, פר' נשא, עמ' מב']. ועי' גם במכתב **מאליהו** ח"ב, עמ' 40-41 - מי שהוא... קטן, נצרך הוא לאחרים שיאכילו אותו. אבל גם הם יכולים רק לשים המאכל בפיו: לבלוע - צריך הוא בעצמו... אם הילד אינו רוצה לאכול, וכופים אותו לבלוע המאכל בעל כרחו, סוף סוף הוא מקיא גם מה שאכל. כך מי שלבו אינו מקבל התורה, ואינו אוהבה כשמתקבץ במוחו חומר רב של ידיעות שהוא מתנגד בלבו לקבלתן, אפשר שיתפתח בקרבו ח"ו כח של שנאה ודחיפה, עד שסופו גרוע מתחלתו. ובעמ' 57-58 - מהו ערכם של מעשים טובים חיצוניים שאנו עושים מתוך הרגל והחינוך מבלי שיבטאו הכרה פנימית של רצון לעבודת ה'?... מצד אחד אנו מוצאים שמעשים כאלה חשובים הם מכמה פנים... ממעשה המצוות גרידא... אפשר שתצמח גם פנימיות מתוך החיצוניות... לעולם יעסוק... אבל מצד השני מוצאים

Kinas sofrim tarbeh chochma

A *maamar chazal* that seems to directly endorse the educational use of competition, is the oft-quoted *gemara* in *Baba Basra* (21a) that *kinas sofrim tarbeh chochma*, the envy of *melamid* (Rashi) promotes knowledge. This is universally used to justify the encouragement of competitiveness among students. Most people incorrectly assume that the *gemara* is discussing the educational benefits of competition between *talmidim*. The *gemara* is, in fact, discussing the question of *hasogas gevul*. In most circumstances, a person is not permitted to open a competing business that encroaches on someone else's livelihood. Nonetheless, according to one opinion in the *gemara*, a town can replace the community *melamed* with a superior one because *kinas sofrim tarbeh chochma*, i.e., the competition will encourage *melamid* to sharpen their skills. Nowhere does the *gemara* apply this principal to students.¹³ In the above mentioned discussion with Rav Michal Yehuda Lefkowitz he confirmed that the *gemara* does not apply this principle to students and he doesn't know how it came to be applied to *talmidim*. (It is noteworthy that while this principle is commonly applied to students where the *gemara* never applied it, it is rarely if ever applied to *melamid* in the manner that *chazal* actually said it).

Even *seforim* that do discuss *kinas sofrim* in regard to students always make a distinction between healthy and unhealthy *kina* (e.g., Rav Matisyohu Salomon, *Matnas Chaim, Kinyonim*, Vol. 1, p. 68-69;¹⁴ Rav Henoch Lebowitz, *Chidushei Halev, Vayechi*, 49:16¹⁵ and Rav Shlomo Wolbe, *Alei Shur*, Vol. 1, pp. 36-37.). In healthy *kina* the achievements of others inspires someone to try and achieve more without any need to outdo others.¹⁶ In unhealthy *kina* the main motivation is beating the other person. In the above mentioned discussion, Rav Michal Yehuda Lefkowitz categorically stated that, in our times, competitiveness is never of the positive variety and that it is, therefore, the responsibility of educators to eliminate competitiveness in schools since it discourages serious learning and causes the worst kind of emotional problems "that no doctor can

אנו מספר מאמרים שנראים כאילו נוגדים הם בחריפות למעשים כאלו... ישע' הנביא מכריז (כט:יג)... מצות אנשים מלומדה... מכאן שבשל קיום מצוות בהרגל והינוך, מנבא הנביא על הסתרת הבינה מישאל – שהיא אבידת הפנים... [וכן ידוע ש]אף שהתנהגו הפלשתיים כצדיקים... והיו מצויינים בעדינות הנהגתם ודרך ארץ שלהם, העיד אברהם אבינו שכל זה לא יועיל להפוך את מהותם הפנימית לטוב, והיו חשודים ברציחה ממש. וקשה למה לא השפיע מעשיהם על פנימיותם? [ותירץ שיש שתי מדרגות בלא לשמה]. הראשונה שלא לשמה הסותרת לפנים, והשני' זו שמסייעת לפנים... אם יש בו יראת שמים... אבל בלי [יסודות מוצקים של יראת שמים] אין המעשים החיצוניים אלא מרחיקים את האדם ממהותו האמיתית.

¹³ עי' גם במהרש"א שם. ובשיחה עם רבי שלמה וולבה ביום יב' סיון תשנ"ו הוא אמר לי ש"קנאת סופרים תרבה חכמה" הולך רק על מלמדים ולא על תלמידים.

¹⁴ מובא בהערה 11.

¹⁵ עי' בחידושי הלב, ויחי, מט:ז, בשם הבית יוסף [שאמר לגבי מידת העזות] שאין להשתמש במידות רעות אפילו לעבודת השם. ואף שהאורחות צדיקים כותב שלפעמים נכון להשתמש במדה רעה, צ"ל שאין כוונתו למדה הרעה עצמה. לדוגמה – "המדה הרעה של קנאה היא שעינו צרה בהצלחת אחרים, ורוצה ששום אדם לא יצליח חוץ ממנו. והמדה הטובה שבקנאה היא שנקראת קנאת סופרים. וזוהי כבר מדה אחרת לגמרי, שהאדם רוצה ושמה בהצלחת חברו, והצלחתו זו משמשת לו לציור חושי ולדוגמא לעוררו ולעודדו, שגם הוא ישתדל להצליח כמותו" [צריך רק להשתדל]. אך גם במדה הטובה של קנאת סופרים יכולה להביא לעצבות ויאוש, מזהיר החידושי הלב (ויצא ל:ח), "לפיכך, שומה על האדם להכיר ולדעת את עצמו, כמה הוא יכול לסבול..."

¹⁶ וכעין זה הסביר בחידושי הלב, וירא יח:א, את הגמ' ביומא (לה): "הלל מחייב את העניים", עי"ש.

cure.”¹⁷ He told me that he is against the use of “student of the week” designations, so common in schools today.

The impact of competitiveness on *chanoch lena'ar al pi darko*

It should be obvious that the unhealthy *kinas sofrim* promoted by the prevalent spirit of competitiveness is a direct contradiction to the idea of individualized *chinuch* as promoted by the oft-quoted *posuk*, *chanoch lena'ar al pi darko* (*Mishlei*, 22:6). Inherent in the competitive enterprise is the belief that everyone included in the competition is capable of achieving the same goal. After all, we wouldn't hold a sports competition that included 10 year olds together with 20 year olds. This leads to frustration when some of the students find themselves incapable of the same level of achievement as some of the other students. It can also lead to a situation where a *Rebbi* can't suggest to his *talmid* to do something slightly different than the others without the *talmid* feeling insulted.¹⁸

¹⁷ וכן כתב בדרכי החיים, ח"א, עמ' שסה' – ...הסיבה לאי הצלחה בלימוד, היא... קנאה באחרים, ואע"פ שאמרו חז"ל "קנאת סופרים תרבה חכמה", אולם בזמננו אין אנו יודעים מהי המידה לכך... ולכן יכול לצאת ממנה דברים גרועים מאד, ויש להיזהר. (עמ' שסו') – עלינו ראשי הישיבות למנוע שלא יהי' תחרות בישיבה, אמנם אמרו חז"ל "קנאת סופרים תרבה חכמה", אך חושבני שבזמננו אין מי שיגיע לדרגה זו של תחרות מועילה... המתח והתחרות גורמים לכל המצבים הירודים ביותר... (עמ' שסז) – וצריך כל אחד ליתן דעתו על כך להתרחק מהתחרות... ועי' ח"ב, עמ' סד' – התחרות מביאה בעיות רבות, אבל לתת עידוד ופרס לתלמיד על הצטיינותו זה אפשרי וטוב, אבל ללא פרסומת ופומביות בזה, שזה מביא לקנאה ותחרות. (עמ' שט') – כמה חללים נופלים רח"ל בשיבות מכך שאין יחס של "שבת אחים גם יחד"... ומה עושה התחרות? האם היא עושה שיהי' יותר התמדה, יותר שקידה? היא גורמת למתחים ומשברים עד כדי כך שנכנסים למחלות רח"ל... רבי מיכל יהודה ליפקוביץ מספר בספר "בינת המדות: פרקי הדרכה", עמ' 20 (בינת הלב: ירושלים, רבי יצחק לורינג, תשס"ז) שגאון אחד שכשהי' ילד קטן הגיע עם אביו להפך חיים שיצא בהתפעלות מהילד וברכו. ואמר הח"ח לאביו שלא יגלה מעלתו של בנו. הוסיף הח"ח וסיפר כי הגר"א אמר על עצמו כי לולא שנתפרסם הי' משיג השגות יותר גדולות ממה שהשיג.

A well-known Rosh Yeshiva once asked me to suggest to a *talmid* that he take a certain course. When I ¹⁸ replied that the student would be much more likely to accept this idea if it came from his rosh yeshiva, he responded that he couldn't make this suggestion without the *talmid* being deeply insulted. The *talmid* would feel that his rosh yeshiva considers him less than the others. I believe that the highly competitive environment found in some yeshivos can play a significant role in creating this type of problem.

Part 2

Non-competitive prizes and incentives

In part 1 we discussed the harm that could be caused by competitive contests and by competition in general. What about prizes or incentives which are not competitive? Such prizes would seem to have the benefit of being an incentive for students to achieve more without the downside of competition.

While Rav Michal Yehuda Lefkowitz and other *gedolim* urge us to eliminate induced competitiveness they do not suggest the total elimination of non-competitive rewards.¹⁹ In fact, rewards may be necessary when we ask students to perform tasks that have no initial intrinsic interest. Rewards probably became part of the educational system for the purpose of motivating children to do tasks that were not initially inherently interesting. The goal was to move away from the use of extrinsic rewards as quickly as possible by promoting the inherent value of and interest in the task. It is for this reason that the most effective *rebbeim* put in so much effort to develop in their *talmidim* a *geshmak* in learning. However, when teachers saw how effectively rewards induce short-term performance they became deluded as to the long-term value of this type of motivation. Over the years this has become the primary method of promoting educational accomplishments even for tasks that are inherently interesting or could become interesting over time. The need to promote internal, intrinsic motivation seems to have been forgotten.

Many teachers assert that they see no problem with someone learning or doing *mitzvos* for the sake of a reward. After all doesn't the *gemara* say that a person should begin learning *shelo leshmo* (for extrinsic motivations) and that eventually he will come to learn *leshmo* (with intrinsic motivation)?²⁰ So why should we even concern ourselves with this issue.

Metoch shelo leshmo bo leshmo

However, this is not such a simple matter. In fact, every time the *gemora* declares that *metoch shelo leshmo bo leshmo*, *Tosfos* comment that this principle has to be qualified because the *gemora* says elsewhere that learning *shelo leshmo* will become poisonous to the person and that it would be better if the person who learns *shelo leshmo* was never born!²¹ *Tosfos*, therefore, distinguish between different types of *lo leshmos*, some that indeed lead to *leshmo*, and others that are poisonous. *Tosfos* in different places give somewhat different examples of the different types of *lo leshmo*, but one of the distinguishing factors seems to be that the benign form of *lo leshmo* involves benefits a person is seeking for himself (e.g., to be honored) and the toxic form is where he is

¹⁹ ע"י הערה 17 והערה 4.

²⁰ לעולם יעסוק אדם בתורה ובמצוות, אפילו שלא לשמה, שמתוך שלא לשמה בא לשמה. - פסחים נ: גזיר כג: סוטה כב: סוטה מז: סנהדרין קה: הוריות י: ערכין טז:.

²¹ אמר רבא (ברכות יז.) "כל העושה שלא לשמה נח לו שלא נברא" או "נעשית לו סם המוות" (תענית ז.).

primarily seeking to feel superior over others (*lehisyaer*) or even to provoke (“*shtoch*”) others (*lekanter*)²²

This is very different than the common perception that all forms of *shelo leshmo* are benign and will automatically become *leshmo*. Rav Dessler emphasizes in many places in his *Michtav MeEliyahu* the inherent dangers of *lo leshmo* and the limited situations where we can expect a *lo leshmo* to become *leshmo*. *Lo leshmo* itself is dangerous, says Rav Dessler,²³ and he decries the common misconception that all forms of *lo leshmo* automatically transform into *leshmo*. The truth is, says Rav Dessler, that there has to be an element of *leshmo* (at the very least, a strong desire to learn *leshmo*) that already exists in the person’s motivation, and it is this kernel of *leshmo* that then develops into a more substantial form of *leshmo*.²⁴

Why the proliferation of contests and prizes?

As noted above, the use of contests and prizes seems to have increased dramatically in recent times. Some attribute this to the general *yeridas hadoros* – among the students who are less motivated to learn, and/or among the teachers who are less capable of inspiring. Even those who recognize the danger of using extrinsic motivations for older students, feel that with younger students it is both necessary and harmless. It is necessary, they assert, because children are incapable of doing things *leshmo*. Now, it is certainly true that children are incapable of reaching the same level of *leshmo* as adults can²⁵ but the Vilna Gaon emphasizes that it would be a mistake to assume that they are incapable of any level of *leshmo*.²⁶ At the very least, the teachers should be **promoting**

²² ע"י תוס' פסחים נ: , תענית ז, ברכות יז. לפי תוס' בסוטה כב: (לפי הסברם של הרד"ע – רבינו דוד עראמה – והבנין שלמה – רבי שלמה קלוגר – [ב"ספר הליקוט] על הרמב"ם הל' ת"ת, ג"ה והל' תשובה פ"י] גם כשלומד להתעשר או שיקרא רב ולהתכבד, נוח לו שלא נברא, וכ"ש ע"מ לקנטר. ועי' בלקט שיחות מוסר מהרב יצחק אייזיק שר, עמ' שמא'–שמב' – "מה שאומרים הז"ל ש'הלומד ע"מ לקנטר שנוח לו שלא נברא' – אין הכוונה שכל תחילת לימודו הוא רק ע"מ לקנטר. אלא גם אם על ידו מצטער אדם אחד מישראל, גם זה קרוי לומד ע"מ לקנטר!"

²³ **מכתמ"א, ח"א עמ' 135** – שלא לשמה לבד מסוכנת. אף אם יחשוב מחשבת צירוף לנקודת לשמה, כל זמן שאינה מתגלית נקודה זו בתוקף עדיין לא עברה הסכנה. מי שעבודתו חיצונית בודאי מחוסר הוא בפנימיות... והדברים שנשארו חיצוניים, הם חילול גדול ונורא.

²⁴ **מכתמ"א, ח"א עמ' 24** – "אמר... רש"ז שהכונה שמתחלת עסקו בתורה שלא לשמה תהי' מחשבתו להגיע לידי לשמה... שלא כל שלא לשמה יביא לידי לשמה. רק אם עיקר השאיפה היא טהורה, ומסתייע בשלא לשמה שיקל לו לעמוד כנגד יצרו הרע... עמ' 230 – אנו רגילים במאמר "שמתוך שלא לשמה בא לשמה", אבל טועים בפירושו. לא השלא לשמה מביא את הלשמה, אלא נקודת הלשמה מרככת את בחינת השלא לשמה, עד שנקל אח"כ להתגבר עלי' ולגרשה... זוהי העלת ניצוצות הקדושה שבתוך הטומאה – להעלות את הפנימיות שנפלה אל החיצון, דהיינו העלאת נקודת הלשמה שבתוך השלא לשמה. ובכאן היא הסכנה כי יבטלם ח"ו בתוך הטומאה לגמרי... וכן בלב אליהו, בראשית עמ' עד', וכן מובא **מרבני אברהם אחי הגר"א** בספר "אבות משולחן רבותינו" (מאת ר' שמעון ואנונו ירושלים תשס"ב) עמ' 109. ובלקט שיחות מוסר **מרבני יצחק אייזיק שר**, עמ' שמא'.

²⁵ יש דרגות רבות בשלא לשמה (יראת עונש, לזכות בשכר לעוה"ב, לעוה"ז, כדי שיכבדוהו) ודרגות שונות בלשמה, וכמוכן שאין שכר המצווה שוה בכלום. וכן במתנת חיים (מאמרים ב', עמ' של-שלא') שהלא לשמה של לשם שכר הנצחי "הוא סיוע תמידי להביא אותנו לידי שמחה בעשית המצוה [הדגש הוא על השמחה ולא על ההרגל], וזה עדיף משאר עניני שלא לשמה התלויים במצבים וסיבות חיצוניים". ועי' במכתמ"א ח"ב, עמ' 28 – "יש שני גדלים בלשמה, לשמה גמור הנובע מאהבת השם גמורה, ואהבתו את התורה נובעת מאהבתו לנותן התורה (מהר"ל) ולשמה של אהבת התורה... משום שנהנה מאד ומאושר מלימודה (נפש החיים) [והקדמה לספר עגלי טל]... והנה הבחינה השני' הזאת נקראת 'שלא לשמה' לגבי מדרגת האהבה הטהורה... שלא לשמה זה מביא לידי הלשמה הגמור". (ועי' גם במכתמ"א ח"ב, עמ' 57-58).

²⁶ **גר"א, אבן שלמה פ"ו סע' ו** – וצריך להנכס בילדותם ללמוד לשם שמים, ואל ישיגה על האומרים כי הנער אין צריך לזה חס ושלוש. אדרבה... [ובכ' סיון תשס"ז אמר לי מרן רבי מיכל יהודה ליפקוביץ שזה שייך גם בזמנינו.]

the intrinsic value of learning rather than the extrinsic value (more on this last point below).

Another problem with learning with extrinsic motivations says the Vilna Gaon, is that if the person doesn't achieve his *lo leshmo* goals (even if he is indeed learning) he will likely be greatly disappointed and lose his motivation to learn.²⁷ It is for this reason that many *gedolim* were against the use of prizes and other forms of extrinsic motivation, even for younger students, so that the students should not become dependent on these forms of motivation.²⁸ Other *gedolim* are more accepting of the **non-competitive** use of prizes – advocating *seforim* as prizes rather than cameras and the like - for children as a means of showing recognition of and appreciation for the child's efforts and encouraging him to maintain his efforts in the future.²⁹

Rav Dessler, however, emphasizes the danger of the person remaining with these external motivations, never reaching the level of *leshmo*. The ultimate goal of these "tools," says Rav Dessler, is for them to become obsolete.³⁰

Are prizes meant to be incentives or positive associations?

²⁷ גר"א פירוש משלי [מובא בספר "אבות משולחן רבותינו" מאת ר' שמעון ואנוני ירושלים תשס"ב, עמ' 613] – אבות ה:טז - "כל אהבה שהיא תלויה בדבר, בטל דבר בטלה אהבה" – אל יבהילך יצרך הרע לומר מה יזיקך אם תלמד לשם הנאה [חיצונית] או רבנות... ונפשך תלהט ללמוד באהבה וחיבה וחשקך בתורה יתרבה, תשיב לו על דבריו ואל תתאו למטעמותיו, כי... לאחר שיפנה היצר הרע ממך לא תתלמד כלל כמו שאומר התנא "כל אהבה שהיא תלויה בדבר..." ובדומה לזה ראה במתנת חיים, מאמרים ב', עמ' שכח' – [הוא מביא מרבינו חיים ויטאל שעצלות הוא תולדה של עצבות] ועוד מגלה לנו יסוד גדול, שמדת העצבות נובעת ממה שהאדם אינו משיג בקניניו הבלי העוה"ז והיינו, שלא השיג את השלא לשמה הדוחף אותו. חז"ל אמרו שלעולם ילמד... אמנם צריך חיזוק שלא יפול הרוח אם לא ישיג מה שרצה להשיג... ומי שלא השיג את הדבר הצדדי מה שרצה ע"י התורה ולא נפל רוחו מזה, הרי זה נכנס לכלל לימוד תורה לשמה.

²⁸ ראה הערה 7. ומרן הגר"א שך אמר "היתכן לקחת כסף בשביל לימוד תורה? אין לכרוך לימוד תורה בתשלום ותמורה כספית." הגר"ח קנייבסקי הוסיף שפעם חולקו פרסים למצטיינים ובקשו לתת את הפרס לגר"ש ברמן, ומרן החזו"א הורה לו שלא ילך לקחת את הפרס (שימושה של תורה, ב', עמ' נד').

²⁹ ספר דרכי החיים ח"ב, עמ' סד' – התחרות מביאה בעיות רבות, אבל לתת עידוד ופרס לתלמיד על הצטיינותו זה אפשר וטוב, אבל ללא פרסומת ופומביות בזה, שזה מביא לקנאה ותחרות. ובעמ' נח' – לא לתת מתנות כפרסים כמו מצלמה וכדומה, אלא זכויות לקניית ספרים. ורבי אשר וייס אמר ש"אין ספק שיש טעם לפגם בחלוקת כספים לאלו שאמורים לגדול שונאי בצע, ולכן... חלוקת ספרי קודש... עדיף..." – משפחה, ד' סיון תשס"ו, עמ' 25. ובספר מסורת החינוך (ב"ב, תשס"ה) מביא שמרן רבי אליעזר שך תמיד הי' נותן מיני מתיקה לילדים שבאו להבחן או לקבל ברכה כדי שיהיו דברי תורה עריבים עליהם [ונראה שנתן את הממתקים לילדים שנבחנו ללא קשר לרמת הצטיינותם במבחן] (עמ' פ') - "כי הדרך להגיע לתחילת קיום המצוות היא לטעום, להרגיש את מתיקותה ולראות בחוש, מה האושר הטמון בה" (עמ' עד). ולכן המליץ להעניק פרסים לילדים כדי להרבות שקידתם ולקדמם בלימודיהם... (עמ' פא). לעומת זאת, לא ראה בעין יפה את חלוקת הפרסים לבני ישיבות, שתכליתם ללמוד תורה לשמה "שאין זה כבוד שמים שאברכים ובהורים יתפרסמו כמי שהלימוד הוא בשביל הפרס... אף שלעולם ילמוד אדם אף שלא לשמה וכו', מ"מ אין ערוך לגודל התועלת וההצלחה מהלימוד בלי פרסומים. ואם טוב הוא בשביל ילדים קטנים, לא טוב הוא לגדולים (עמ' פא)". במקום זה אמר להאריך בהענקת מילים טובות ומעודדות, ללא גבול. דעתו היתה, שככל שנצליח להגביר את החושת הערך העצמי בלבו של התלמיד, כך נצליח לשנות את התנהגותו לטובה (עמ' פב).

³⁰ מכתב מאליהו, ח"ב, עמ' 170 - אולם שבירת הכלים כזו היא תיקונם, שלכך נוצרו לעזור את האדם בעבודתו עד שלא יצטרך להם עוד... (ועי' גם ח"ב, עמ' 172). ראה גם בשער הגמול לרמב"ן (ד"ה שנו חכמים, ג' כתות) כשהוא מסביר את חומרת עונשם של אלו "שנתנו חתימתם בארץ חיים, והם הפרנסים המטילים אימה יתירה על הציבור... אע"פ שאינו מחטיא אותם אלא מוליכן בדרך ישרה, אלא שעל ידי זה הציבור מכוונן דעותיהם ומעשיהם לעבדתו [של הפרנס] ולא לעבוד אדון הכל". ולפי זה מלמד או הורה שמשמש באיזמים כדי "לעודד" ילד להתנהג בצורה הולמת הוא בסכנה להכניס את עצמו בסוג זה של מנהיגים. ויותר מזה, שימוש מופרז של פרסים ותחרות גם כן יכול להביא את החניך "לעבודתו של הפרנס" או של התחרות, במקום עבודתו של "אדון הכל".

The Lakewood *mashgiach*, Rav Matisyohu Salomon *shlita*, has provided us with an incredible insight into *chazal*'s true intentions in sanctioning the use of *lo leshmo*. The function of prizes is typically understood to be an incentive, i.e., to motivate students to do things they otherwise would not necessarily be motivated to do, or that they would only do half-heartedly. The prize giver hopes that the prize will motivate the reluctant students to enthusiastically participate in the task. (The underlying assumption is that as the behavior becomes habituated the extrinsic motivation will automatically transform into an intrinsic motivation, a very dubious assumption at best as discussed above).

The *mashgiach* cites a Zohar that relates the following incident:³¹

A student approached Rav Yochanan and requested to become his talmid with the condition that he becomes wealthy. Rav Yochanan agreed and he told his other talmidim to call this new student "Reb Yossi the rich man." The student indeed learned Torah and was successful. However, he complained that he only has the reputation of a rich man but not the money! Soon after, a man who inherited a fortune gave it to Rav Yochanan who in turn gave it all to his student - whom he now called Reb Yossi Ben Pazi (paz = gold). Now Reb Yossi learned with simcha. As he delved into the depths of the Torah and experienced the delight of learning Torah he began to bemoan his obsession with riches; "I should learn for the glory of Hashem and not for riches!" He returned all the money to Rav Yochanan to distribute to poor people.... And this is what chazal meant, concludes the Zohar, when they said a person should dedicate himself to learning Torah and mitzvos shelo leshmo because via the shelo leshmo he will come to do it leshmo.

The *mashgiach* calls our attention to the fact that when Reb Yossi was being called a rich man he was merely successful in his learning but he wasn't yet learning in a state of *simcha*. It was only after he actually achieved his dream of being rich that he started learning *besimcha* and this *simcha* allowed him to delve into the depths of Torah and experience its delights and to come to the realization that he should learn for the glory of *Hashem*! The *mashgiach* concludes that the main purpose of *lo leshmo* in learning Torah is to create an association between learning and a *simcha shel mitzvah*. This will allow the person to delve into the depths of Torah and recognize its truth, which will, in turn, bring him to learn *leshmo*.

In *va'adim* that the *masgiach* gave on this topic he emphasized a few points:³²

- One sees the importance of learning Torah *besimcha* because that is the only way to come to learning *leshmo*.
- The purpose of *lo leshmo* is **not** to serve as an incentive or as a motivator, rather it is to create an association between learning and *simcha*.
- Reb Yossi's *lo leshmo* was actualizing his dream of being wealthy rather than a competitive desire to be better than others. That type of *lo leshmo* doesn't lead to

³¹ מובא במתנת חיים, מאמרים ב', עמ' של' - שלא', בשם ספר צרור המור (פ' וירא יח:ז).
³² "טייפ" מ"ועד בעניני היגוד" (מס' 15) ו"טייפ" מחורף תשס"א בענין "לא לשמה" (ועד מא').

- happiness and so it doesn't lead to *leshmo* [it is what *Tosfos* refer to as “*al menas lekanter*”, which *Tosfos* say is the type of *lo leshmo* that leads to destruction].
- Since the purpose of the prize is to associate learning with *simcha* it is important to give the prize as soon as possible since the learning that takes place before the prize is given doesn't lead to *leshmo*. This recommendation is in sharp contrast to the usual approach which sees prizes as incentives and, therefore, an attempt is made to “squeeze out” as much performance as possible out of the students before giving the prize (to get the most bang for the buck, so to speak).³³

What are we selling?

Even when it is necessary to use prizes as incentives, why do we need to emphasize and highlight the *shelo leshmo* aspect of the child's motivation?

Rav Yechiel Yacobson, the noted Israeli *mechanech*, relates the following incident:

A friend of his who runs a large chevras Tehilim was bragging about the size of his yearly budget for prizes. Rav Yacobson challenged his friend's sense of accomplishment since the children were motivated solely by the prizes and snacks. His friend disputed this assumption and suggested that they ask the children why they come to chevras Tehilim. Rav Yacobson responded, “If you don't realize that the children will respond with what they think you want to hear, rather than with what they really feel, you should not be in this line of work.” Instead Rav Yacobson suggested telling the children that their madrich is trying to convince a child in the neighborhood to attend but the child is reluctant to do so. The madrich should ask the children to write an anonymous letter to this boy explaining to him why it is a good idea to participate. The friend followed up on this suggestion and was shocked to discover that almost every one of this very large number of children in a number of Tehilim groups emphasized in their letters the prizes and snacks as the reason to attend. Hardly anyone mentioned an intrinsic value to the activity. Rav Yacobson then suggested trying the same experiment in the girls' Tehilim groups, predicting that the vast majority of the girls would give ruchnious'dike reasons to participate and indeed this was the case.

*Rav Yacobson offered to show his perplexed friend the explanation for the difference between these two groups. He took his friend to one of the boys' groups and they observed the madrich placing a large box of snack on his desk and waving a new type of snack in front of the children, exclaiming, “Isn't it worth it to come to chevras Tehilim? Look at the new snack we have today!” The madrich was **promoting** lo leshmo.*

Next, Rav Yacobson went with his friend to observe the girls' group. The madricha did not get anywhere near the snacks and did not mention a word about it. Instead, she emphasized the spiritual value of their activities and the Chesed

An article was written a while back in a *chareidi* publication based on this *va'ad* of the *mashgiach*.³³ I believe that the author of the article missed this crucial point that prizes are **not** meant to be incentives.

they were doing for Klal Yisroel by their participation. Almost incidentally, as the girls left the group at the end, one of the girls handed out a bag of snack to each participant.

It may, in fact, be that some of the girls were primarily motivated by the snack, but at least the *madricha* was promoting the spiritual value of saying *Tehilim* and not the snack. It should be obvious that the girls are much more likely to develop a *leshmo* motivation for saying *Tehilim* than the boys.

Research on the impact of prizes and rewards on intrinsic motivation

There is a great deal of scientific evidence documenting the detrimental impact of (even non-competitive) rewards and prizes on the development of intrinsic motivation. The issue is undoubtedly complex with many different variables interacting to determine when and to what degree rewards undermine the development of intrinsic motivation. None the less, I feel that it is worth highlighting some of the research findings if only to counteract the widespread belief that rewards are always helpful and never harmful.³⁴

- Rewards are effective in promoting desired behavior. However, when the rewards are terminated the behavior returns to its pre-reward level (Deci, et al., 1999).
- Performing for rewards often makes people feel that they are being controlled. This undermines feelings of autonomy which in turn undermines intrinsic motivation. Therefore, offering rewards for performing a pleasant activity actually decreases the intrinsic attractiveness of that activity. In one experiment, students worked individually on an interesting puzzle for an hour. The next day one half of them were paid \$1 for each piece of the puzzle they completed and the other half were not paid. During the third session neither group was paid. During a free break, the unrewarded group showed a stronger tendency to work on the puzzle than the rewarded group (Deci, et al., 1999).
- According to Leon Festinger's theory of "cognitive dissonance" (see Aronson, 1999), people like to believe that they are logical and do sensible things. If they do something for which they do not receive a tangible reward, they assume that they are intrinsically motivated and so they focus on the inherent value of the

³⁴ The references for the research finding to be summarized below are listed here in alphabetic order:
-Aronson, Elliot, (1999). *The Social Animal* (8th Edition). NY: Worth/W.H. Freeman.
-Deci, E.L., Koestner, R., & Ryan, R.M. (1999). A meta-analytic review of experiments examining the effects of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 125, 627-668.
-Gneezy, U. & Rustichini, A. (2000). A fine is a price. *Journal of Legal Studies*, 29, 1-17.
-Henderlong, J., & Lepper, M.R. (2002). The effects of praise on children's intrinsic motivation: A review and synthesis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 128, 774-795.
-Lepper, M.R., Corpus, J.H., & Iyengar, S.S. (2005). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in the classroom: Age differences and academic correlates. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 97, 184-196.
-Lepper, M.R., Henderlong, J., & Gingras, I. (1999). Understanding the effects of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation-Uses and abuses of meta-analysis: Comment on Deci, Koestner, and Ryan (1999). *Psychological Bulletin*, 125, 669-676.
-Ryan, R.M., & Deci, E.L. (2000). Self-determination and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55, 68-78.

- task. If they do receive a reward or prize, they are more likely to assume that they are being motivated by the extrinsic reward and thus, they are less likely to develop intrinsic motivation.
- According to some studies, rewards can enhance intrinsic motivation when given for activities that have little or no **initial** intrinsic interest (Lepper et al., 1999).
 - Giving rewards unexpectedly and not as a promised incentive, can be an effective means of conveying appreciation for a task well done, and is less likely to undermine intrinsic motivation. The same is true if one avoids the use of an authoritarian style and pressuring expressions. Emphasizing the interesting or challenging aspects of the task, acknowledging the good performance without giving rewards and providing choices of how to do the task are all methods of encouraging behavior without undermining intrinsic motivation (Deci et al., 1999).
 - There are, of course, various levels of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Students who do homework because they appreciate its value for their chosen career and those who do so because they are trying to gain their parents' approval can both be considered extrinsically motivated but the former certainly contains a more potent feeling of choice and are thus likely to develop a more stable and long-lasting intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).
 - Children who measure personal success by comparing themselves to others [an attitude clearly promoted by competition], rather than by focusing on individual accomplishments, may not be well equipped to deal with later situations in which others show superior performance (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002).
 - An example of unintended consequences of incentives is found in a study conducted in a chain of day care centers in Haifa, introduced to deal with the problem of parents coming late to pick up their children. It was announced that any parent arriving more than 10 minutes late would have to pay \$3.00 per child for each incident. After the fine was enacted, the late pick ups more than doubled! Why did this incentive backfire? First of all, the fine was too low. It was actually a cheap price for baby sitting. A higher fine would have likely worked, but at the cost of provoking plenty of ill will among the parents toward the school. Another problem was substituting an economic incentive for the moral incentive of feeling guilty. For a few dollars the parents could assuage their guilt. Furthermore, the small size of the fine sent a signal to the parents that late pick ups were not such a big problem (Gneezy & Rustichini, 2000).
 - Even praise, which is universally assumed to have only a positive impact, has been shown in a number of studies to sometimes be ineffective and at times even harmful. When children continue to exhibit praised behavior in order to sustain the attention and approval of the parent or teacher, the motivation is purely extrinsic and is likely to dissipate as soon as the parent or teacher is no longer present to provide approval. As one researcher noted "the most notable aspect of a positive judgment is not that it is positive but that it is a judgment" (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002).
 - Similar to the impact of prizes, praise often produces an "overjustification" effect leading children to believe that their efforts were motivated by the desire for adult approval rather than for the enjoyment and value of the activity itself. In addition,

if praise indicates to children that they are valued because they have met with such a high standard, they are likely to fear that they would be considered worthless if they fail to meet that standard (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002).

- Praise has to be sincere to be effective. The perceived sincerity is usually dependant on the quality of the relationship. If it is not a positive one the praise is likely to be experienced as manipulative and controlling. Global judgments (“you are an angel”) can lead to self-criticism and even attempts to self-sabotage future performance. Following failure, children who have been praised for their ability, showed less enjoyment, persistence, and performance compared to children who were praised for effort (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002).

Summary

The widespread and indiscriminate use of competition and rewards often has the unintended negative consequence of reducing one’s intrinsic motivation. I have documented the critical comments of many *gedolim* regarding the educational use of competition and prizes and summarized some of the research findings in this regard.

It is clear that rewards are often necessary to motivate children when dealing with tasks that are initially uninteresting. However, if we are cognizant of the likely negative consequences of the indiscriminate use of extrinsic rewards, then we would use the minimum amount necessary and emphasize the inherent value of the tasks we present to our children. We would use more praise and less tangible rewards, more *seforim* and less cameras, etc. We would seek other means to inspire and motivate children. Developing a warm and respectful relationship with students and setting an inspiring example has been proven to be the most effective means to promote the internalization of values.³⁵ We would strive to shift as quickly as possible from *lo leshmo* to *leshmo*.

Even when using verbal praise, teachers and parents need to be cautious that the child doesn’t continue to perform just to gain approval. Rather we need to stress the inherent value of the accomplishment. It is for this reason that I have often suggested that when a child tells a parent or teacher, “You should be proud of me because I...” he should be told, “You should be proud of yourself!”

Most of all, we would not be lulled by the false hope that the *lo leshmo* will magically transform itself to *leshmo* without any attention or effort on our part.

[Note: A collection of Torah sources that I compiled on this topic is available by sending me a request via email at bensort@aol.com]

³⁵ ראה הערה 1.

Rayan and Deci (2000) found in their research that parents who were more autonomy-supportive promoted greater religious identification, as opposed to introjection, in their offspring and that teens who have been exposed to cold, controlling maternal care were more likely to develop materialistic orientation,