

CHILDREN FASTING ON YOM KIPPUR

by Joshua Kruger

The Story

"I love Yom Kippur" said Daniel to his grade 3 classmates. "I get to eat all the treats I want while my brother and sisters are all fasting! It's good to be the youngest!"

"You shouldn't be all excited about Yom Kippur!" said his friend Natan, "and I don't think that you should be eating candies when everyone is fasting!"

"Yeah," agreed Eitan, "It's a day to fast and daven, not celebrate!"

"I'm gonna try to fast the whole Yom Kippur this year!" announced Natan, "or at least as much as I can!" Natan looked at the chocolate bar in his hand, "Dear chocolate bar, we will have a little time away from each other, but I promise I'll be back after the fast!"

Eitan smiled, "We're only 8 years old. I don't feel ready to do a whole fast, but I want to practice. I'm going only going to try to only have two meals and no snacks. Let's ask Rabbi Cohen."

Discussion

Q: What is the connection between our story and the parasha?

A: Parashas Acharei teaches the laws of Yom Kippur, including the requirement to fast (Yoma 74b on Vayikra 16:29).

Q: Which of the boys is right?

A: Surprisingly Daniel is right! While it is certainly encouraged for children to practice fasting on Yom Kippur before their bar or bas-mitzvah, it is forbidden for a child do any kind of fasting until they turn nine, and they are only allowed to perform a complete fast at age 11 (Shulchan Aruch 616:2). This means that even trying to eat breakfast and lunch a bit later is not permitted for the boys who are 8 years old.

Q: Why is it alright for a child to eat treats on Yom Kippur?

A: Rav Nissim Karelitz (Chut Shani, Vol. 4, Chap. 95) writes that this is permitted. It is important to remember that Yom Kippur is a Yom Tov and a joyous day. We believe that Hashem will forgive our sins. It is a day that should be celebrated and it is appropriate to give children treats for this reason.

Note that Rav Moshe Sternbuch (Teshuvos VeHanhagos Vol. 5, no. 188) writes that one should not give candies to children on Yom Kippur (his reasoning is that although it is permitted for children to eat, this is only because they need to eat, and the permission does not include treats). The general custom is to be lenient in the matter.

Back to Our Story

Rav Cohen sat down with the boys and explained to them the rules about Yom Kippur for those under the age of bar mitzvah.

Although the boys were a little disappointed to find out that they weren't allowed to fast, secretly Natan was a bit relieved to hear that he wouldn't not have to be separated from his chocolate bar - even for one day.

(Written by Josh and Tammy Kruger, in collaboration with Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer, and based on his following teshuva: <http://www.dinonline.org/2010/09/16/treats-on-yom-kippur>)