



ZISHE THE STRONGMAN

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In this story based on the life of Polish strongman Siegmund Breitbart, children are introduced to various kinds of strength, including the gentle strength that comes from kindness.

Zishe's greatest power, from a Jewish perspective, was in his capacity to make a *mitzvah* (a moral obligation or commandment) his own. Whether taking part in *bikkur cholim* (visiting the sick) or following the precept of *tza'ar ba'alei chayim* (compassionate treatment of animals), Zishe showed his real strength. Children can participate in the same kinds of *mitzvot* (the plural of *mitzvah*) as Zishe.

Help your children find opportunities for actions that benefit others, perhaps by:

- Assisting in preparing a meal for a family with a new baby;
- Calling a relative who is ill;
- Making a get-well card for a friend;
- Caring for a pet while a neighbor is out of town;
- Constructing a simple bird feeder to place outside.

With practice, children come to know the value of performing *mitzvot* and the pleasure that goes with them. The distinguished 2nd-century Rabbi Ben Azzai advised that we should run to perform even a minor *mitzvah*, since what may seem the smallest of good acts has positive effects. And, he added: *Mitzvah goreret mitzvah*—one *mitzvah* leads to another.

JEWISH IMMIGRATION

At the time Zishe was performing, a great wave of Jewish immigration to the U.S. was in progress. Jewish newcomers to the country quickly became known for their intelligence, studiousness and business acumen, but generally not for their physical prowess. It is wonderful for children to hear Zishe's story and recognize that people of all races, cultures, and religions, can excel in areas once thought to be outside their purview.

When Zishe performs acts of strength and kindness, Golda Meir visits Jews in the U.S.S.R., the United States Senate confirms Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel marches with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. we take note, and, perhaps, feel a sense of pride. What traits do Jewish role models possess and what might they have in common? Who is a role model for your family? Pj

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