

## **And do kindness and truth with me. (47:29)**

*Rashi* teaches that the kindness one performs for the deceased is *chesed shel emes*, kindness of truth. Under such conditions, one executes his duties for the express purpose of performing an act of *chesed*. There are no thanks, no accolades, no payment whatsoever. It is all *l'shem Shomayim*, for the sake of Heaven. When it comes to acting on behalf of one who is deceased, the reward is unusual. I think the reason is simple. When we act kindly to a fellow Jew, the individual, for the most part, is acutely aware that he is the recipient of a favor from the benefactor; therefore, if he is a *mentch*, decent human being, he acknowledges the favor and is grateful. If however, no one is around to acknowledge the favor, because it is a *chesed shel emes*, Hashem “steps in” to repay the kindness. This is especially true in the case of a *meis mitzvah*, one who has no one to bury him, who has died alone with neither family nor friends. It is a special *mitzvah* to address whatever burial needs are involved. Indeed, the *Kohen Gadol*, High Priest, who is not permitted to contaminate himself for anyone, may be involved in the burial of a *meis mitzvah*.

The following story, which has made the rounds, is a verified incident which supports the notion that *chesed shel emes* is a *chesed* which is Divinely rewarded. It was winter in upstate New York. The weather was frigid, and the forecast was calling for a snowstorm, especially in the higher elevations. A Jewish fellow, who earned his living as a salesman, saw the ominous clouds and realized that if he was going to make it home before the storm, he had better leave early from his last appointment. Under normal circumstances, it was a five-hour drive home via the N.Y. State Thruway. Regrettably, today was not going to be “normal circumstances.”

It started snowing earlier than expected and with an uncommon vengeance. Soon, the roads were snow covered and slippery. The salt trucks were hardly making a dent in the snow accumulation. The howling wind was freezing the ground, making driving treacherous. The salesman trudged on in the almost invisibility. He had to make it home. Suddenly, his chances of making it home that night were diminished, when the highway was closed and all cars rerouted. Now he had to find a motel where he could weather out the storm. Apparently, he was not the only one looking for a room, because every hotel in the area was booked solid. People were even bedding down in the lobbies. After inquiring from one of the hotel managers if there was any place in the neighborhood where he could obtain sleeping arrangements, he was told to try a nearby nursing home. They might have an extra bed.

It was not going to be pleasant, but the other choice was sleeping in his car. He followed directions to the “village,” where he found the nursing home. Yes, they had extra beds but, no, they were not available to anyone who was a non-resident. The Jewish fellow would not give up. He needed a place to sleep. He would pay. The manager said, “Keep your money. We do not accept transients.” Finally, the salesman wore him down, and he was allowed to sleep on the couch in the manager’s office.

The next morning, the salesman thanked the manager for his kindness; he took out his wallet and

was about to pay. The manager refused payment, saying that they were not in the business of renting rooms – or couches. “But I insist. I must pay. I am Jewish, and that is the Jewish way. When someone is kind to us, we demonstrate our gratitude,” the salesman declared.

“You say that you are Jewish. Great! Perhaps you can help us with a problem. One of the residents, a Mr. Goldberg, died six days ago, leaving no family and no contacts. As I was going to have the body interred in the local cemetery, I checked his records, which stated that he had stipulated in his contract upon entering the nursing home, that should he die, his remains must be interred in a Jewish cemetery. We are allowed to keep a body up to six days prior to burial. It is a G-d-send that you are here. Can you take his body with you and bury him in a Jewish cemetery?”

By now, the salesman understood that the snowstorm and his ending up in this nursing home were no coincidence. Hashem had guided events, to enable him to be the *shliach*, agent, to carry out the last wish of the deceased. The body was placed into a coffin and fit into the salesman’s minivan, and he was off in search of a Jewish cemetery. The first two cemeteries were very apologetic, but their plots were all designated and paid for. They did not have a “potters field” section in their cemeteries. He kept on going. Meanwhile, he called a friend who was an *askan*, lay person, involved in many communal endeavors. The friend informed him that the German immigrant community had a section in their cemetery set aside specifically for such cases. He plugged the address into his GPS, and he was on his way. About an hour later, he stood before the director of the *Chevrah Kaddisha*, Jewish Sacred Burial Society, who confirmed that they, indeed, had an area of their cemetery designated for *meisei mitzvah*. The salesman presented the paperwork that he had obtained from the nursing home. The director gave one look, and he almost passed out. After a few moments, he calmed down and was able to speak.

“Thirty years ago, a man came to the *Chevra Kaddisha* and presented us with a check for thirty thousand dollars. He had a simple request: We should set aside a section of our cemetery for anyone who needs burial and has neither family nor funds. That was the only time we met this person. During the last thirty years, we have helped many Jews who died alone. Do you know who this elusive benefactor was? He was none other than the deceased who is lying in your van!”

*Shlach lachmecha al pnei ha'mayim u'brove hayamim timzaenah*, “Cast your bread on the face of the water, because in the abundance of days you will find it” (*Koheles* 11:1).