

## **If your brother becomes impoverished. (25:39)**

Everyone wants to be charitable, to share with those who are less fortunate than he is. It is one of those *mitzvos* that make us feel good. After all, what could be wrong with helping another Jew? Perhaps that is the first mistake: “helping another Jew.” *Tzedakah*, popularly known as charity, is not just about helping someone else, but rather about feeling that person’s pain. When one “helps,” he is still separated from the beneficiary. He is fine, but the “other guy” is in need. True *tzedakah* does not distinguish between “me” and “him;” “us” and “them.” *Tzedakah* binds the two together. It creates a fusion of “selves” as the benefactor feels the needs of the beneficiary.

Sensitivity for another Jew’s pain, as well as joy for another Jew’s happiness, is the hallmark of a *baal chesed*, person who exemplifies the Torah ideal of lovingkindness. In his book, *A Touch of Warmth*, Rabbi Yechiel Spero relates a moving story which carries with it a profound, underlying message that goes to the core of what it means to understand another Jew’s emotions: *Rav Shmuel* and *Rav Meir* had been *chavrusos*, study partners, for over fifty years. Their *chavrusashaf* generated a friendship that was consummate.

One morning, R’ Shmuel appeared unwell. R’ Meir urged him to see the doctor immediately. R’ Shmuel agreed and, after undergoing a thorough examination, was told by the doctor that he should prepare himself for some very grim news. He was suffering from an incurable disease which would end his life within six months. R’ Shmuel informed his *chavrusa* that the doctor had told him that he had only six months to live. With his usual stoicism, he went back to their *Gemora* study.

R’ Shmuel was a *tzaddik*, righteous person, who lived a life of total commitment to Hashem. He accepted his fate without complaint, without emotion, and without self-pity.

A few weeks went by. One day after they finished learning, R’ Shmuel asked R’ Meir to stay for a few moments. He had a request to make of him: “I know that when I die many people will want to eulogize me. I ask that no one be allowed. I am undeserving of accolades. There is, however, one thing which I will allow to be said of me – that I strived to feel another Jew’s pain as if it were my own, and that I rejoiced at another person’s *simchah*, joyous occasion, as if it were my own.” R’ Meir was stunned by this statement. They had learned together for so many years, and he was just beginning to appreciate his friend’s exalted spiritual nature. Of course, he agreed to honor his friend’s request.

The six month diagnosis was sadly proving to be true. The months went by and R’ Shmuel was literally wasting away. Wracked with severe pain, his body was a shadow of its former self. Yet, he never cried out; he never complained. He accepted Hashem’s decree with resolve and made every day and every moment count. One day, R’ Meir came to visit his friend and discovered him weeping uncontrollably. The bitter weeping was something that R’ Meir had never expected to see emanating from R’ Shmuel. Manifesting such emotion was atypical of the man who had been his closest friend for over half of a century.

R' Meir looked at R' Shmuel and asked him what had brought on such an extreme outpouring of emotion. R' Shmuel replied, "Throughout my life, I have always felt someone else's pain as if it were my own. I have come to realize that I have been wrong all of this time. I feel **my** own pain more than someone else's. I have never felt **such** pain for someone else!" Imagine – R' Shmuel was on such a high spiritual level that this bothered him to such a great extent!

A few weeks later, R' Shmuel passed on to his eternal reward. R' Meir shared this story with those who assembled at R' Shmuel's funeral to pay him his *kavod acharon*, final respects.

The story is moving; the lesson is compelling. Do we ever think about this when we are in pain, or when our hearts are filled with personal joy? This *tzaddik* realized how difficult it really is to be a true *nosei b'ol im chaveiro*, "carry the yoke together with his friend."