

## If your brother becomes impoverished... you shall strengthen him. (25:35)

The *Pele Yoetz* writes: “*Chesed*, performing acts of kindness, is a pillar of the world. It is one of those *mitzvos* whose fruits are eaten in this world, but whose principal remains for him (generating reward) in *Olam Habba*, the World to Come.” The *Chafetz Chaim* writes that the performance of *chesed* can engender such incredible merit that it has the power to overwhelm the *Middas HaDin*, Attribute of Strict Justice. *Rebbetzin* Miriam Shmuelevitz, wife of the venerable *Rosh Yeshivah* of Mir Yerushalayim, was very involved in a successful *chesed* organization that reached out to Jews all over Yerushalayim. I will present the following story, which is well-known, with a different twist, in order to impart a powerful lesson which will hopefully carry an inspiring message.

A young *kollel* fellow who had been suffering the pain of abject poverty was gifted a box of food for *Succos* from the *chesed* organization – fish, chicken, soup, salad, *challah* – sufficient to serve his growing family. Tears rolled down his face as he saw this *manna* from Heaven. One half hour before the *Yom Tov* was to commence, he heard a knock at his door. He opened the door to greet an impoverished woman, begging for “something” for *Yom Tov*; “Perhaps, you might be able to share some food with me? I have nothing. Whatever you can give me will be a lifesaver,” she said. “I would love to help you,” he began, “but I myself just received my *Yom Tov* package – barely enough for my family.” “Surely, you can give a poor woman something?” she pleaded. “I really have nothing. This is the first time that we received a package of food that was designated specifically for *Yom Tov*. My children have looked forward for some time to eat a piece of chicken, to savor some hot soup. I would love to help you, but my children...” he said.

A war raged within him. On one hand, he wanted so much to help this woman. On the other hand, he had so little, he had nothing to spare. Back and forth he went, until he decided to go to the fridge and take out the chicken, cut off a piece, and share it with the woman. So, they would all eat less. It was still more than they would otherwise have had. He went to the refrigerator, opened the door, and almost passed out! There before his eyes lay his two-year-old son, blue in the face. He had somehow crept in, and, since he was small, he fit on a shelf as the door closed on him. Immediately, they called *Hatzalah* who miraculously revived the child. The paramedics told him, “*Reb* Yaakov – you were just given a child as a gift. Five more minutes, and we would not have been able to save him.” The *kollel* fellow certainly gave the chicken to the woman who “indirectly” had played a role in saving his son’s life.

What are we to learn from this story? *Rebbetzin* Shmuelevitz asked the *Rosh Yeshivah* for his insight. *Horav Chaim, zl*, said, “Obviously, the simple, most straightforward lesson to be derived is *Tzedakah tatzil mi’ma’ves*, ‘Charity saves from death.’ By giving charity to this poor woman, the *kollel* fellow performed a *mitzvah* which ultimately catalyzed his son being saved from death. There is another – even greater – lesson to be derived from here. This *Kollel* fellow was granted a ‘final test’ to determine if he was worthy of being his son’s father. A ‘final test’ is not a simple

test. It is the last opportunity granted to a person to give him a chance to save himself – or others close to him – from death. If he passes the test, he has earned a *zechus*, merit, for life. If *chas v'shalom*, Heaven Forbid, he fails... Our young man was fortunate to have passed the test and saved his son's life. What if he would not have passed the test? What if he would not have opened the refrigerator? *Baruch Hashem*, he did."

*Horav Meir Abuchatzera* was riding in a car together with his aide, when he suddenly looked up from the *sefer* he was reading and said, "Stop the truck behind us (on the highway). It was a massive Coca Cola truck. His driver could not fathom what *Rav Meir* wanted with the Coca Cola truck, but one did not question the holy *Rav Meir*. Everything that he did was by Heavenly design and for a holy purpose. When they cut off the truck, the driver came out in a "somewhat" upset mood. "What are you doing?" he screamed. "You are on a highway. Traffic must move." *Rav Meir's* aide asked the driver for a bottle of Coca Cola. The driver began to scream, "For this, you stopped me? I do not sell retail to individuals. You want soda – go to the store!" "But, I am so thirsty," the aide pleaded. "I will pay you fifty *shekel* for the bottle." The driver turned away angry, and both vehicles continued on the highway.

Five minutes later, the truck driver lost control of the truck, which crashed, causing one fatality – the driver. *Rav Meir* commented, "I sent him one 'final test.' I saw the *Malach HaMaves*, Angel of Death, dancing on his steering wheel. I tried to save him by according him one last opportunity to perform *chesed*. Sadly, he did not rise to the occasion; this resulted in his failing the test."