

Atone for Your People Yisrael that You have redeemed. (21:8)

The *Midrash Tanchuma (Haazinu)* quotes the *Toras Kohanim* concerning the above *pasuk*: *Kapeir l'amcha Yisrael*, "Atone for Your People Yisrael." This applies to the living; *asher padisa*; "that You have redeemed," refers to the departed. This teaches that the living redeem the deceased. Therefore, it is our custom to memorialize the memory of the departed on *Yom Kippur* by praying for them, setting aside *tzedakah*, charity, in their behalf. I might think that *tzedakah* has no effect once a person passes on from this world. Thus, we learn from *asher padisa*, through the medium of *tzedakah*. The *Midrash* continues describing the transformative effect that *tzedakah* has on the soul of one who has left this world.

The following story, related by *Rav Yitzchak David Bamberger* (Quoted by *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*), a distinguished Torah leader of the Manchester, England, Jewish community, concerns a Jew by the name of *Ephraim Aronson, zl*. *Reb Ephraim* was a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, who survived the Holocaust and emigrated to England from his native Poland. He spent most of his time engrossed in Torah study and became close with a number of *rabbanim* in Manchester. Sadly, *Reb Ephraim* and his wife were not blessed with progeny. When he passed away, she attempted to memorialize his soul by bringing cake and a check to *Rav Bamberger* to distribute among the members of his *Kollel* on the day of *Reb Ephraim's yahrzeit*.

This practice continued annually for a number of years. One day, the widow presented herself to *Rav Bamberger*, completely distraught. Apparently, her husband (his soul) appeared to her in a dream and asked, "Why did you forget me?" She woke up suddenly and realized that her late husband's *yahrzeit* had passed the previous week. She was shocked, but, somehow, she had lost track of time and forgotten his *yahrzeit*. *Rav Bamberger* realized that he, too, had forgotten the *yahrzeit*, and he immediately set about to correct the lapse in memory.

The above incident is just one of many which underscore the *z'chus*, merit, one can create for the souls of the departed. This is especially true when it is a son who provides the *z'chus*. Not only is he providing *nachas*, spiritual satisfaction, for his parent, he is also being *mekayeim*, fulfilling, the *mitzvah* of *Kibbud Av v'Eim*, honoring parents, which does not end with the parent's demise. Every *mitzvah* that one executes in this world in honor of the deceased catalyzes incredible merit for the *neshamah*, soul, in *Olam Habba*, the World to Come.

The *Maharsham, zl (Berzhoner Rav)*, was an unusual *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, whose level of Torah erudition was peerless. Following his wedding, he continued his work with a small cattle business. He spent most of his time engrossed in study, but he would go in every now and then to earn some money to support himself. One of his suppliers was a trusted businessman who provided him with wood. The man went daily to the forest and returned in the evening with a load of wood, for which he was immediately reimbursed. This went on for years until the man passed away. After the *shivah*, seven-day-mourning period, was concluded, the man (soul) appeared to the *Maharasham* in a dream. The man said that he would continue providing wood for the

Mararasham, as he had in the past. The *Maharasham* told him, "But you are no longer here. Go to your eternal rest." This went on for a number of nights, with the same vision and dialogue. Every morning after he experienced this dream, the *Maharasham* would light a candle in memory of this man's *neshamah*. He followed this with the study of *Mishnayos*, also in the man's memory.

After a while, the man appeared to the *Maharasham* and said, "I am here to inform you that I will no longer be 'visiting' you. I have come in the past because, until now, I have been unable to ascend from the world of *tohu*, emptiness, so that I could reach my final rest. I suffered greatly in this transitional stage, feeling as if I was alive, but knowing that I was not. Every time that you lit a candle, studied *Mishnayos* or gave charity to benefit my soul, "they" granted me a respite for a few days. After a few days, I was awakened and sent back to endure the pain. I would escape and run to your house to be spared from my ordeal. My term has ended, and I am now permitted to move on to my resting place. I offer you my eternal gratitude for what you had done for me. It meant so much and was so beneficial for my *neshamah*."

We suggest an alternative understanding of "this applies to the living; this applies to the departed." According to the *Tanchuma*, the message is: the living have an obligation to redeem, to bring merit for those who no longer can do so themselves. Perhaps *Chazal* are teaching us that the living should learn from the dead, take heed, and alter their lifestyle. The *Ponovezher Rav*, *zl*, taught, concerning the *halachah*, that one does not return from the cemetery on the same path/road that he originally entered. He should take a different way out. (It is not always possible.) The *Rav* explained that one should not leave the cemetery in the same manner, with the same attitude, that he had when he entered. When one leaves the presence of death, when he sees before his very eyes that nothing is forever and that a hole in the ground is what one may expect (if he is lucky), it should spur him to change: his *davening*; his learning; acts of *chesed*. He should not be the same person upon leaving the gravesite as he was when he arrived.

The living atone for the departed by changing their own lives as a result of the lessons they have derived from coming in contact with the departed. What greater *z'chus*, merit, can a *neshamah* have than the merit of catalyzing the spiritual/moral alteration of a fellow Jew?