

If the man has no kinsman to whom the debt can be returned. (5:8)

When one has sworn falsely against a monetary claim and subsequently confesses, he pays the principal plus a fifth to the one against whom he has sinned. If the one against whom he has sinned has died, he pays his heirs. A male convert who has had no children since his conversion, or a female convert who has not married or given birth to children, has no heirs. If one has sinned against them and they die, since they have no heirs, the money is given to the *Kohanim*. *Chazal* (*Bava Kamma* 109a) asks "Do you have a person in *Yisrael* who has no redeemers?" (There has to be family somewhere.) This refers to a convert who died with no heirs.

The story is told that when the *Ger Tzedek* of Vilna, Count Valentin Pototsky, *zl*, was in prison awaiting his execution, the holy Avraham ben Avraham, as he was now called, was visited by the *Gaon*, *zl*, *m'Vilna*, with whom he had become very close. The *tzaddik* was weeping profusely. The *Gaon* expressed surprise, "Why are you crying? You should be filled with joy that you are able to give up your life *l'shem Shomayim*, for the sake of Heaven."

The *tzaddik* responded, "I am not crying because of the impending execution. I weep because I have no roots among the Jewish People. I do not have a father, and I do not have children or siblings." The *Gaon* replied by quoting the *pasuk* from *Yeshayah* (44:6) *Ani rishon v'Ani acharon*, "I am first and I am last and besides Me there is no G-d." The *Midrash* states: "I am first – I have no father; I am last – I have no son." The *Gaon* added: "I am first – I am father to those who have no father; and I am last – I have no son – I am better than ten sons."

Very poignant, but a question still remains: Why is the son/family member called a *go'eil*, redeemer? He should be called an heir. The concept of *geulah*, redemption, applies to redeeming land. Here the Torah is addressing the concept of inheritance. Thus, the convert has no inheritors. *Horav Zev Weinberger, zl*, derives from here that every son who survives his father/parent is not only an heir, he is also a *go'eil*, redeemer, because he has the power through his Torah study and *mitzvah* performance to redeem and bring his father's *neshamah*, soul, into *nitzchiyus*, eternal life.

A well-known *Chazal* relates an incident that occurred with Rabbi Akiva, which teaches the enormous benefit of a son's *Kaddish* recital for the soul of his departed father. Rabbi Akiva came across a *neshamah*, soul, suffering enormous torments in the Eternal world. He searched for the long-lost son of this man and taught him to recite, *Yisgadal v'Yiskadash Shmei Rabbah*, "May His great Name be exalted and sanctified." With these words, the father's soul was released from its suffering in Purgatory, and it was now allowed to enter *Gan Eden*.

Obviously, the story has profound esoteric meaning. How sad it is that so many Jews who are estranged from their religion are unaware of this most basic and poignant act of honoring the memory of one's parent. What is even sadder is that, by ignoring the spiritual needs of their

departed parent, they are simultaneously hurting themselves. Children and parents – their personalities remain networked – sort of an interface. The direction a child takes in life affects the parents' spiritual state. Since we are connected to them, what happens to them affects us. Thus, by “helping” to “redeem” them, we are redeeming ourselves.