

And do kindness and truth with me – please do not bury me in Egypt. (47:29)

Chesed shel emes, true kindness, or kindness of truth, is a fundamental concept in Jewish life. It underscores the importance of performing acts of lovingkindness for others for the sake of “kindness,” for Heaven’s sake, and not for any form of remuneration. For the most part, it pertains to the compassion and respect inherent in preparing the deceased for burial. The *Chevra Kaddisha*, Jewish Sacred Society, is charged with seeing to it that every Jew is accorded a proper and dignified burial. *Chesed shel emes* highlights the selfless and unconditional love that one should exhibit towards others – at all times – and especially during times of sorrow and loss.

Chesed shel emes is a broad term which can have a profound meaning far beyond the actual preparation of the deceased for burial. To lay someone’s mind to rest, to assuage one’s anxiety would also enter under the rubric of *chesed shel emes*. The following story demonstrates this idea.

A number of years ago an elderly woman, a widow for many years, passed away, leaving no biological offspring. Her funeral which would take place in Yerushalayim, was not expected to draw a large crowd. She had kept to herself and had little family. Furthermore, it was a chilly winter day. The family conducted the funeral in the most dignified manner, despite the lack of a crowd. The family was taken aback to see a prominent *Belzer Chassid* follow the *mitah*, coffin (which is actually a stretcher) who asked to recite *Kaddish*, mourner’s prayer, for the deceased. The *Shivah* was, for the most part, a quiet affair. The only mourner was the deceased’s older sister. One day the *Belzer Chassid* who had attended the funeral, appeared in the *Shivah* home and asked to address those assembled in the home.

He began, “I am certain that you wonder why I attended the funeral and why I asked to recite *Kaddish*. Truthfully, I am filled with pent-up emotion and I ask that you listen to me. I came to *Eretz Yisrael* shortly after the Holocaust alone, without any family or friends. A few *askanim*, activists, welcomed me and placed me in an orphanage together with other children in my predicament. The *nifteres*, deceased, was the *eim ha’bayis*, the surrogate mother, in charge of the children. We were a troubled group of children. Without a mother, we really did not care about personal hygiene. She saw to it that we bathed and changed clothes daily. She even combed through our hair, searching for lice.

“One day, as she was combing through my hair, getting rid of whatever lice had made their home there, I broke down in bitter weeping. The *eim ha’bayis* asked me what was wrong. She thought that she had hurt me. I allayed her fears, saying that she was so good to me, just as if she would have been my mother. How could I ever repay her kindness? This is why I was crying. She replied, ‘If you want to show your gratitude to me, promise me that you will recite *Kaddish* in my memory. I have no one else.’

“Fifty years passed. Mere hours prior to her funeral, the deceased appeared to me in a dream. She said, “*Mein kint*, my child; the time has arrived for you to repay your debt of gratitude. The time has come for you to say *Kaddish* for me.

“I immediately arose and attempted to inquire if anyone knew anything at all about her, and if, in fact, she had passed away, or was this just another meaningless dream. I stepped out to *daven* and, as I was walking to *shul*, I came upon a sign announcing her funeral. I was all shaken up and immediately came here to say *Kaddish* for my ‘mother.’”

The *chassid* continued to repay his debt of gratitude for the entire year, saying *Kaddish* thrice daily, and learning *Mishnayos l'iluy nishmasah*, to perpetuate her soul. On her *Yahrzeit*, he lit a candle in her memory. He never divulged to his children the reason and for whom he was doing this. This *chassid* was himself *niftar*, returned his soul to his Maker, in 2021. His name was *Rav Yitzchak Landau, zl, meshamesh b'kodosh*, aide to the *Belzer Rebbe, Shlita*, and to the previous one, *Horav Aharon, zl*, as well.

The name of the *nifteres* was Tziviyah Savitsky, A.H.