

Good Shabbos Everyone. In this week's parsha Ki-Sisa, the Torah tells us about how Hashem commands Moshe Rabeinu (our teacher) to take a census of the Jewish people. The method of taking the census was for the Bnai Yisroel - the Jews to give a half shekel coin as they walked by in a processional.

When describing the type of coin to be given, the Torah says "This shall they give," (Shemos 11:13) The commentator Rashi cites the Midrash, explaining that Hashem showed Moshe a coin of fire and Hashem said to Moshe "Like this shall they give." (Midrash Tanchuma, Ki-Sisa 9) The Noam Elimelech explains a deeper explanation of this Midrash: Money is like fire, it can be either beneficial or destructive, depending on how it is used. (Cited by Stone Tanach, p. 212)

Let us discuss this week the power of giving Tzedakah - charity, which is one of the most beneficial uses of money. The following amazing true story illustrates the power of Tzedakah.

Rabbi Avraham Braun walked quickly out of Yeshivas Ohr Somayach in Monsey, New York. He had meant to get out earlier to attend a simchah in Queens, but one thing had led to another, and now he was running really late. Despite his hurry, the sight of a motorcycle parked in the yeshiva's parking lot made Rabbi Braun stop short. Who could it possibly belong to? As far as he knew, there were no students currently in the yeshiva who owned a motorcycle. After a few short seconds, though, Rabbi Braun put the mystery out of his mind. There was no time to wonder about it now.

Rabbi Braun returned to Monsey shortly after midnight. As he pulled into the yeshiva parking lot, he noticed a shadowy figure climbing onto the motorcycle. Curious, he quickly parked his car and ran over. The young man atop the motorcycle looked familiar. Ilan Gamilla (not his real name) had learned in the yeshiva over six years before. Born in Israel, the young man had grown up in the States, and he had seemed to enjoy his studies here in the yeshiva. Rabbi Braun wondered about his six-year-long disappearance-and wondered, too, about what had brought him back now. "Shalom aleichem, Ilan!" he said heartily. "It's been a long time,"

"It's nice to see you too. Rabbi Braun. Sorry it's been so long. I've been living in Boston for the past six years," Ilan explained. "I just recently moved back to New York and I decided to come up here tonight to visit friends and learn a little." Ilan glanced around. "I was on my way home. Rabbi Braun, but since I've met you .." The young man reached into his pocket, took out his wallet, and extracted a few bills. "Here. It's some tzedakah. Please put it to good use." "Thank you so much, Ilan." Rabbi Braun blessed the former yeshiva student, and then stepped back as Ilan put the motorcycle into gear and roared away.

The phone rang in Rabbi Braun's office a week later. "This is Rabbi Yehudah Friedman," the caller told him. "Last Wednesday night, a young man named Ilan paid you a visit." "Yes, that's right," Rabbi Braun said. He was gripped with foreboding. "Has something happened?" "He'll be okay," the other rabbi said quickly. "Apparently, a man driving a van rammed Ilan's motorcycle from behind at high speed, just before the George Washington Bridge. Some how, Ilan ended up with just a few ribs broken and an injured leg. He's lucky to be alive. I was visiting Jewish patients in the hospital, and I happened to come across Ilan. He gave me your name and number and asked that I contact you."

"I appreciate that you took the time to call me. Could you give me his phone number in the hospital?" Rabbi Braun asked.

As soon as the other rabbi hung up. Rabbi Braun dialed Ilan's number. "It's Rabbi Braun. How are you doing?" he exclaimed, as soon as he heard Ilan's voice. "Oh, Rabbi Braun, it's just unbelievable. They can't believe I made it through that accident." Ilan's voice was hushed. "I was thrown ... I don't know how far, but quite a few feet."

Rabbi Braun was quiet for a moment. "Do you remember the last thing you did before you left me on Wednesday night?" he finally asked. "Wednesday night ... yes, I remember. You gave me a blessing." Said Ilan

"That's the last thing I did. What was the last thing you did?" Now it was Ilan's turn to be silent. "I gave you tzedakah." he said softly. "That's right. [The Sages tell us] Tzedakah tatzil mimaves-charity saves from death."

That evening. Rabbi Braun drove to Hackensack, New Jersey to visit Ilan in the hospital. He found the young man lying in bed, aimlessly folding a pile of papers into squares as tears ran down his cheeks. "Oh, Rabbi Braun," he gasped, as he caught sight of his visitor. He straggled to sit up, quickly wiping away the tears. "Thanks so much for coming."

"What's wrong, Ilan?" Rabbi Braun asked gently. He glanced at the papers in Ilan's hand. "Why are you crying?" "I just got the police report." Ilan swallowed hard. His hands clenched the creased papers on his lap. "They say that debris from my motorcycle was strewn over 192 feet of the highway. The remains of my motorcycle were found under the van, and fragments of my helmet were found in the van's windshield. Can you imagine? How could I possibly have ended up with so few injuries? How is it that I'm still alive?"

"I told you already, Ilan. Tzedakah tatzil mimaves - charity saves from death." Ilan looked up at Rabbi Braun, his gaze intent. "Let me tell you something. I graduated from high school twelve years ago. Do you know what they wrote as the caption next to my picture? "Tzedakah tatzil mimaves. That's what they wrote." "Why did they pick that quote?" Rabbi Braun asked curiously. "Because I was always in charge of the money-raising campaigns for tzedakah during high school."

"But why that verse?" Rabbi Braun insisted. "There are so many other verses that talk about the importance of tzedakah, without any reference to saving from death."

"I wondered about that myself," Ilan admitted. He looked around at the hospital bed, at his bandaged leg, at the police report in his hand. And then he looked back at Rabbi Braun. "For twelve years, I couldn't understand it. Until now." (Visions of Greatness, Volume VI, Rabbi Yosef Weiss) The idea of "tzedakah tatzil mimaves" - "tzedakah will save one from death," is hinted to in this week's parsha. The word "half" of the "half-shekel", referred to in the parsha as "Machzis", is spelled in Hebrew as Mem - ches - tzadi - yud - sav. The three middle letters ches - tzadi - yud spell CHATZI - which also means half. If the three middle letters are removed, the remaining letters are Mem and Sav - which spell Mes - dead. Thus, by giving the CHATZI shekel - by giving tzedakah, one adds the letters ches - tzadi - yud, and one cancels out Mes - death.

This idea is further hinted to in the parsha, when the Torah refers to the purpose of the half-shekel as to "atone for your souls." (Shemos 30:15) By giving tzedakah, we can atone for the bad we have done in life. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**

A Refuah Shleimah to Shusha Malka bas Golda "Anyone who brings merit to the masses, no wrongdoing will come into his hands."

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