

Good Shabbos Everyone. The Torah this week alludes to a concept in Judaism which is important for all of us to keep in mind daily. Namely: According to the Torah, a destitute person is considered as if he not among the living. As the verse states "For all the men are dead." (Shemos 4:19) Rashi explains that those people had become impoverished and a poor person is accounted as if he is dead.

There are many explanations as to why a poor person is considered dead. However, we will focus our discussion this week on only one of the inspirational aspects of this concept: Through giving Tzedakah, one can fulfill the tremendous mitzvah of saving someone's life, because in effect, by giving charity to a poor person, one can "revive the dead."

Not being able to afford the wagon fare, Reb Duvid of Lelov set out by foot to visit his rebbe Reb Elimelech of Lyzhansk. As he trudged along the highway, Reb Duvid was overtaken by a carriage in which rode a Jewish merchant who was a well-known magnate from Warsaw.

The coach slowed down, and when Reb Duvid learned that it too was headed for Lyzhansk he asked its owner whether he could travel with him, and was told to climb up. The rich man took Reb Duvid for a pauper, and made fun of him as they traveled, but the passenger uttered not a word. And so it was throughout the journey — the rich man spouted insults and laughed, but Reb Duvid kept silent.

As soon as they arrived at Lyzhansk, the rich man went straight in to speak with Reb Elimelech; Reb Duvid preferred to spend a little time meditating and preparing himself spiritually for the encounter with his rebbe. When Reb Duvid finally entered, Reb Elimelech spent some two hours talking with him.

Leaving the rebbe's study, Reb Duvid approached the rich man, and said: "You may as well take to the road, for I have yet to stay here for some time. One thing more. When on your way home you hear a voice screaming, follow that voice, and then you will know what you are to do."

Having seen that the rebbe had spoken with Reb Duvid at such length, the rich man had already realized that his passenger was no ordinary person, and now that he heard these words he noted them well.

As he passed by a forest halfway home, he suddenly heard someone screaming out in Polish. Reb Duvid's parting words came immediately to mind. Leaving the highway, he drove deep into the forest until he saw before him a nobleman in a carnage, which was sinking in the mire together with the struggling horses that were still harnessed to it. He tied one end of a thick rope to his own carriage, which he had left standing safely in a dry spot, and the other end to the carriage of the unfortunate stranger, jumped up on to the driver's seat, and whipped his horses into action.

Within a few minutes the floundering carriage was drawn up into safety. The nobleman had spent quite some time in the mire, and was now not only filthy but shivering from cold. The merchant covered him with a warm cloak and gave him food and drink until he felt better.

Hearing that the nobleman was from Warsaw too, he offered to take him there in his carriage, and invited him to rest in his home until he had completely recovered. On their arrival he gave the nobleman a warm change of clothes, prepared him hot beverages and a square meal, and then allowed him to sleep off the effects of his ordeal. In the morning, a new man, the nobleman thanked his benefactor and left happily.

A few days later he called for the merchant and asked him: "What recompense can I offer you for all that you have done for me? For if you had not come along and saved me, I would either have drowned in that swamp, or perished of exhaustion." "I am in need of no recompense," answered the merchant. "It suffices for me that I was able to save a man from death; that alone is my reward."

"Then at least give me your name and address," said the nobleman, "so that I will always be able to remember who my benefactor was." And he made a note of these details in his diary.

Years went by, and the restless wheel of fortune came full circle. The wealthy Jewish merchant found himself so impoverished that he was forced to sell not only his business, but even his mansion, his precious furniture and his costly clothes, in order to provide himself with the most frugal necessities.

When he had nothing left to sell, he was reduced to knocking on doors to beg for alms. He tramped from town to town and from village to village, living in this wretched condition for ten whole years, until he quite forgot that he had ever been rich.

His long and luckless wanderings eventually brought him back to Warsaw. By now he felt no shame in his fallen estate even in his hometown, whether he was begging from door to door or stopping passers-by in the street. One day he saw some dignitary riding past in a magnificent carriage. He approached it, as he was accustomed to do, removed his hat, bowed his head, and put out his hand in expectation of alms. The dignitary — who was nothing less than the governor of the Warsaw district — looked at him steadily, and said: "Jew, come here, please."

The poor fellow took fright, and ran away as fast as his weary legs would carry him. The governor told his valet to run after him, and to bring him back by force. When the Jew was duly stationed in front of him, the governor said: "Do not fear, I will do you no harm. I only want you to tell me your name." This the frightened man did. "Do you recognize me?" asked the governor.

"No," said the pauper. "Then let me remind you," continued the other. "Do you recall that many years ago you saved the life of a certain nobleman in the forest outside Warsaw?"

"Yes, I remember," said the pauper. "Very well, then: I am that nobleman. I am the man you saved ... But tell me, what brought you to the sorry state you are in?" The beggar told him all that he had gone through, and the governor promptly wrote him out a check for two thousand rubles. The former merchant immediately opened a trading business, and Hashem smiled upon his enterprises, so that before long he had attained the prosperity that had been his in happier days.

Now in the course of these years Reb Elimelech had passed away and had been succeeded by the celebrated Chozeh of Lublin, and Reb Duvid of Lelov had likewise gained renown as a tzaddik and a leader of men.

The merchant decided one day to visit Reb Duvid, without knowing that this was the same penniless passenger whom he had insulted so many years earlier. But the tzaddik recognized him as soon as he stepped over his threshold, and asked him to recount whatever had befallen him in the course of all those long years.

When he had listened to the merchant's account of all the vicissitudes of his life, Reb Duvid said: "You should know that on the day that you insulted me, the Heavenly Court pronounced a death sentence upon you. Knowing of this verdict, I went in to see Reb Elimelech in order to see how we could have it annulled.

We managed to arrange for a compromise — that you become impoverished, since a pauper is accounted as if dead, and your sin would thereby be expiated. However, since you did me a great favor by bringing me to Lyzhansk in your carriage, I made every effort to do you a favor in return — that after a period of ten years had elapsed your misfortunes would come to an end, and you would be restored to your former position." From A Treasury of Chassidic Tales, Parshas Shemos R.S.Y. Zevin, U.Kaploun, trans.)

There are many lessons which we can learn from this story. One thing is however for certain: Life is a intricate web of divine intervention. That means to say that we usually cannot understand why things happen to us in life. Surely then, when it comes to others' misfortune, we should not try to figure out why misfortune has befallen them. Rather, we should take the opportunity to help others out of their financial mires. By doing so, we can save the lives of others. **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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