

Helping and Maintaining Our Relationship with the Deceased – Part 2

Learning Torah is the greatest single merit — it can heal the sick and even change the laws of nature.

Learning Torah is the greatest single merit *l'iluy neshama*, **seven times more beneficial** for the *neshama* than for one to only lead the *davening* or say the *Kaddish* (Yosef Omitz from Rav Yosef Norlingen, a contemporary of the *Bach* in the 1600s).

The *Zohar* explains that — “Every facet of creation, from the lowliest creature to the loftiest angel, continues to exist **solely** through the spiritual life force emanating from the toil in Torah.” (*Bereshit* 47a and *Vayeishev*, brought by the *Nefesh HaChaim* in section 4).

And the *Nefesh HaChaim* says — “Acceptance of the yoke of the *Torah hakedosha lishma l'amita* (holy Torah with complete purity) elevates oneself above this entire world.” (4:18).

Many *gedolim* (great Torah scholars), like the *Netivot* and the *Yesod v'Shoresh Ha'Avodah*, requested in their *tzva'ah* (final will and testament) that their **sons, students, and friends** should all learn *mishnayot* for the *zechut* and *tikun* of their *neshamot*. Rebbe Akiva Eiger even asked that this request be publicized in the newspaper — “My **students** and my **friends** should learn all throughout the first year, one *perek* of *mishnayot* every day for the *zechut* of my *neshama*, and then on the *yartzeit* every single year.” (*L'iluy Neshama*, p. 38).

The **Radvaz** in his *tzva'ah* (final will and testament) spelled out the critical importance of learning Torah with a remarkable request to his sons — “Be careful to learn a *daf* (full page) of *gemara* every day that you say *Kaddish*. And if there is any day that you, G-d forbid, have to miss this learning [of *gemara*], be extremely careful (*tizharu me'od me'od*) **not** to say *Kaddish* on that day at all, because it will not give any *nachat ruach* to my *neshama* at all. Be careful with this.” (Ibid. p. 37).

Mishnayot learning has been universally adopted as a customary practice for those wishing to help *l'iluy neshama* (*Aruch HaShulchan*, *Yoreh De'ah* 376:13, *Be'er Heitiv Orach Chaim* 1:6).

While every mitzvah helps *l'iluy neshama*, *mishnayot* learning [the letters of “*mishnah*” spell out “*neshama*”] seems to particularly help. (*Divrei Sofrim* 1:376:353).

Mishnayot help to achieve a *kaparah* (atonement) — both for the one learning them, and for the one that they are being learned for. (*Chidah* and Rav Tzadok HaKohen quoted in *The Neshama should have an Aliya*, p. 57).

HaRav Shafitil, the **son of the Shelah**, in his *tzva'ah* (final will and testament) wrote — “Fortunate is the one who is familiar with *mishnayot*. I have a tradition that whoever is **expert in mishnayot** **will never see the opening of Gehenom.**” (Brought at the end of *Yeish Nochalim*).

The *Chafetz Chaim* wrote in *Torat HaBayit* — “I saw in the sacred writings how much they praised the learning of *mishnayot*, since it is the foundation of *Torah She'ba'al Peh* (the Oral Law). They wrote that **Asher ben Yaakov Avinu** is the appointed official in charge of *mishnayot*, and whoever is well-versed in *mishnayot* will not even see the opening of *Gehenom*.” (End of sixth chapter).

Rabbi Hebel discusses different customs for learning *mishnayot* — learning particular *mishnayot*, learning according to the name of the *niftar*, learning individually or with a *minyan*, etc. In any case, the *Gesher HaChaim* assures us that — “whatever combination of *mishnayot* [one chooses

to] learn will certainly provide a tremendous benefit *l'iluy neshama*." (*The Neshama should have an Aliya*, pp. 58-63).

Motzaei Shabbat (Saturday night) is considered to be a particularly ideal time for one to learn *l'iluy neshama*. It helps the *neshama* to deal with the end of the rest and reprieve from judgment that it had just received on Shabbat. *Erev Shabbat* (before Shabbat) as well as on Shabbat itself are also emphasized as important times for learning *l'iluy neshama*. (Ibid. p. 62).

Ben Ish Chai wrote that the positive impact of *Talmud Torah* on Shabbat is enormously greater than on a weekday. (2nd year, *Shemot*).

Learning Torah is also very helpful for those that are sick. The *Machatzit HaShekel* said — While we should employ three separate *zechuyot* for one who is sick — *Torah*, *tefillah*, and *tzedaka*, we need to know that the power of Torah that protects and saves us will be the decisive factor. (*L'iluy Neshama*, p. 175).

Rav Chaim m'Volozin quotes an incident that happened to the **Taz** (one of the classical commentaries on the *Shulchan Aruch*):

"It happened to the Taz that a woman was screaming [and pleading] with him — "Please my master, my son is dying. I am pleading to the Torah of my master because G-d and the Torah are all one." He said to her — "Behold, this is what I will do for you. The words of Torah that I am presently immersed in with my student, I will give as a present to the boy. Perhaps in this *zechut* he will live, since this is what lengthens one's days." At that moment, the fever [of the boy] broke [and he recovered]. Rav Chaim, therefore concluded — "Behold, the *zechut* of immersion in Torah and connecting oneself to it, can [even] bring the dead back to life." (*Ruach Chaim* on *Pirkei Avot* 1:1).

The *Steipler Rav* said that *mishnayot* are like *Tehillim* (Psalms) for a sick person. (*L'iluy Neshama*, p. 176).

The *Chafetz Chaim* sent a message to a wealthy family in America that were considering arranging for their deceased mother to be buried in *Eretz Yisrael* — "Strengthening Torah [with the large sum of money it would cost to transport her body] is certainly a greater *zechut* than her being buried in *Eretz Yisrael*." (Ibid. p. 184).

***Siftotav dov'vot b'kever* ("the lips [of the deceased] vibrate in the grave") — one continues to get *s'char* (eternal benefit) after his passing from this world as long as his words or ideas are still being learned.**

The *Gemara Yerushalmi* spoke about the principle of *Siftotav dov'vot b'kever* — Whenever anyone says the words or ideas of one that has passed away, or learns from his *sefarim* (books), the deceased continues to "live" in this world and earn *s'char*. (*Shekalim* 2:5, as explained by the *B'nei Yissaschar*, *Kislev–Tevet*, 2:50). Some even say that the deceased is aware of and somewhat connected to the one that is repeating his teachings in this world. (*Nitei Gavreil* 2:64:11; *Zohar* — *Pinchas*).

Publishing *Chidushei Torah* (new Torah insights) of the *niftar* was, therefore, strongly encouraged by the *Steipler Rav* — "It causes a great *nachat ruach* to the *neshama* to make his *divrei Torah* available to the world. His lips will then be moving in the *kever*." (*L'iluy Neshama*, p. 65).

The *Chafetz Chaim* even applied this principle to the case of a wealthy man who strengthened many in Torah — "He merited *siftotav dov'vot b'kever*, since it was through his toil that he

supported ten exceptionally great Torah scholars that learned Torah with great dedication day and night.” (Commentary on the *Torat Kohanim*, in a footnote at the end of the introduction).

Mitzvot and learning done *l'iluy neshama* also help the doer and the learner.

Many recent *Gedolei Yisrael* held that one doing a mitzvah or learning Torah *l'iluy neshama*, for the sake of a *niftar*, lose none of their own *s'char* for this. These include **Rav Chaim Sonnenfeld** (in his *teshuvot*, *Shalmat Chaim*, *siman* 321), **Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky**, **Rav Gustman**, and **Rav Chaim Kanievsky**. (All three quoted in *Ta'arich Yisrael*, *siman* 19, #39).

These same four *Gedolei Yisrael* also held that what the *niftar* actually receives from this mitzvah or learning is not the *zechut* of the mitzvah or the learning itself, but rather the *zechut* for having **caused** these extra *mitzvot* or this extra learning to occur. (Ibid.).

In addition, **Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky**, **Rav Gustman**, and **Rav Chaim Kanievsky** all pointed out that the *zechut* the *niftar* receives for having caused this extra learning of Torah to occur is even greater if *tzedaka* is given to facilitate it. (Ibid.).

Rav Yavruv, a *talmid muvchak* (primary student) of Rav Chaim Kanievsky, and the author of *L'iluy Neshama*, said the following **in the name of Rav Chaim Kanievsky** —

It is obvious that “*b'rah m'zakeh Abba*” means that both sons and daughters have a special ability to benefit both their mothers and fathers.

While the *mitzvot* and learning of anyone that was positively influenced by the *niftar* will help for his *iluy neshama*, only the actual child of the *niftar* is referred to as *kara d'avuha*, and **automatically** helps him, independent of any positive impact that the parent had on the child.

As long as the words or actions of the *niftar* continue to have a positive influence on others (including, of course, his descendents and students), their *zechut* will continue to benefit him and help his *iluy neshama*.

Since the learner and mitzvah-doe get no less *zechut* for having done the learning and *mitzvot* on behalf of someone else, *l'iluy neshama*, there is no reason not to try to always do this.

[The *aveirot* (transgressions) of one's descendents or students will negatively affect a parent or a *Rebbe* only if they had actually caused these *aveirot* to occur].

Rav Shteinman (told Rav Simcha Weinberg) the following —

B'rah m'zakeh Abba means that **both** parents have an automatic *zechut* in **all** of the *mitzvot* that their children do, even if they didn't cause their children to do those *mitzvot*, or any *mitzvot* at all. While the parents may not get the full *s'char* for these *mitzvot* [i.e., as if they had actually done them themselves], we need to know that Hashem always gives with *rachamim* (mercy). This “automatic *s'char*” applies only with the actual children of the *niftar* (i.e. the first generation). A *Rebbe*, however, will get *s'char* for the *mitzvot* and learning of his students only if he had actually **caused** these *mitzvot* to occur.

Anyone, even one that is not a child of the *niftar*, can learn Torah or give *tzedaka* for the sake of any *niftar*. This *tzedaka* or learning must be extra and be done specifically for the sake of the *niftar*. The *zechut* of this non-child will then benefit the *niftar* like with the case of Yissachar and Zevulun, but **only** with the two *mitzvot* of *talmud Torah* and *tzedaka*. It is unclear whether a

requirement for this *talmud Torah* and *tzedakah* to benefit the *niftar* is that it be likely that the *niftar* would have done these *mitzvot* himself were he still alive.

Whether this learner or *tzedaka* giver will lose some of their own *s'char* from these two *mitzvot* is a *machloket* (argument), similar to that with Yissachar and Zevulun. The *Chazon Ish* held that one does not lose, but other *achronim* held that one does lose.

Rav Scheinberg also understood that whether Yissachar loses some of the *s'char* of the Torah that he learned in partnership with Zevulun is a *machloket* (argument).

The *Rema* (in *Yoreh De'ah*) implies that Yissachar does lose some of the *s'char*, while the *Ohr HaChaim* (in *Ki Sisa*) says that each of them actually receives the full *s'char*.

If one learned or gave *tzedaka* for two different *niftarim* — both will receive *zechut* only if both can be considered to have actually caused the learning. Hashem will then find the appropriate way to give the *s'char* that each of them will receive.

Actions done in *Olam Ha'zeh* continue producing fruit even for one in *Olam Haba*.

The *Chafetz Chaim* wrote — “The *Medrash* tells us that everyone should pursue a **permanent mitzvah for all generations**. There is no better one than having children and students who are steeped in Torah and *yirat Shamayim* (fear of Heaven) who will continue having more children and students like this. All of [the *zechut* of] one's children, students, and students of one's children will then be calculated back to the parent [or *Rav*] that began it all. There is no limit to the *s'char* in the upper worlds for one who is *zocheh* to this.

When it comes to negative consequences, the verse (*Bereshis* 4:10) says [after Kayin murdered Hevel] — “The voice of the **bloods** of your brother are crying out to me” — his blood and the bloods of all those who **would have** descended from him.

This is all the more true regarding good consequences, which are always greater than negative ones; all of the *zechut* will certainly be credited back to the one who began it all. The verse that expresses this is — “*Lokeach nefashot chacham*, The wise one collects souls” (*Mishlei* 11:30) — the real *chacham* makes sure to acquire *nefashot* (souls), because they are the acquisition that lasts forever. (End of *Torat HaBayit*).

The *Chovot HaLevavot* wrote — “Even one who approaches the spiritual perfection of the prophets will not attain the *zechut* of one that guides others to the service of Hashem. His *zechuyot* are multiplied every day and at all times by the *zechuyot* of all of those [whom he helped].

A virtually perfect person [but who improved only himself] is like one who sold a single item for ten times its value. The one who guided others [whose *zechut* is being multiplied by every one of the many that he had helped] is like one who sold a multitude of separate items for a smaller profit margin. His total profit will, however, [end up] being enormously greater than the first one...as it says — “And those who turn the many to righteousness [shall shine] like the stars, forever and ever.” (*Ahavat Hashem*, Ch. 6).

The **Gra** wrote — All of the *mitzvot* of one who was corrected by another will be credited to the one who corrected him; he will get this *s'char* as if he had done them himself. (*Mishlei* 12:14).

The *Gemara* declares that there is — “**No *menucha* (rest) for *tzadikim* even in *Olam Haba*.**” Since the actions that they did in this world never stop producing fruit, they (the *tzadikim*)

continue to go from one accomplishment to another, according to the quality of the actions that they left behind them. (*Brachot* 64a).

Medrash Rabba — “The one who loves *mitzvot* is never satiated with *mitzvot*” — Every person who runs after *mitzvot* but has no permanent mitzvah for all generations, what satisfaction do they have? You can know that this is true from Moshe. With all of the *mitzvot*, *tzedaka*, and kind deeds that he did, he still established a permanent mitzvah for all generations, as it says that he separated the first three of the refuge cities for the Jewish people. (*Vayikra Rabba*, *Acharei Mot* 22:2).

The **Alshich** wrote — Since there is no limit to the eternal benefit of *Olam Haba*, it is even possible [for us] to contribute *l'iluy neshama* for Moshe Rabeinu. And every extra bit [that we do] makes an [eternal] difference. (*Kitzur Alshich*, Esther 9:22).

The **Chafetz Chaim** wrote:

There are people who make a gravestone of expensive marble as a memorial for an eternal memory for those who have passed away. They think that this will create great satisfaction for the soul of the deceased. How mistaken are they with this thinking! In reality, after the soul of the deceased has separated from this world, it recognizes there in the world of truth, the ultimate goal of Torah and *mitzvot*. It sees that this is the precious commodity which is relevant in all of the worlds and therefore, even the smallest mitzvah that is done in this world is more precious to it than gold. The soul feels very bitter towards itself for having squandered the days of its life on the striving for empty pleasures and illusory honor that it needs to give an accounting for. If so, what type of satisfaction is it able to have when it sees that those [still alive] waste all of their energy [on an expensive gravestone]?

It would be much better for them to place down a simpler gravestone and the money that is saved should then be used to purchase *sefarim* (books) to donate to a *beit medrash* (study hall), with an inscription that it should be in memory of the soul of the deceased. Alternatively, one could establish a permanent *gemach* (free-loan fund) in memory of the soul of the deceased. Through this his soul will be greatly elevated, since every single loan that will be given out will then add more *zechut* for him.

One should [try to] vividly imagine if he were, G-d forbid, thrown into a fire or into other painful difficulties, how great would be his desire and longing for those [still] alive to intervene for his sake, with whatever means are possible, to save him from this terrible punishment. This is exactly how one should view his own ability to do for the souls of the deceased, to work with all of his abilities. This is especially [true] during the *shiva* and *shloshim* when the judgment is much more severe. We need to increase Torah, *tzedaka*, and *chesed* for them according to our abilities, and with this we [will be able to] save them from the judgment of *Gehenom*, and bring them to life in *Olam Haba*.

The **Chafetz Chaim** then quoted the *Shelah* who brought many statements from *Chazal* [to support this] and concluded — “One who gives *tzedaka* for the soul of the deceased, **even if he is not related**, and all the more so if one is related, as long as the deceased was not evil, he certainly accomplishes a great salvation and tremendous benefit for his *neshama*.

The **Chafetz Chaim** himself continued — Therefore, if one's offspring pass away, G-d forbid, during the days of their youth, and have left no descendants in this world, it is most appropriate to establish a mitzvah that will last for all generations as a memorial in their memory, if one has the ability to do so. They will then be remembered eternally for righteousness.

And even if one does not have the resources for this, one should, at the very least, donate some book that the community needs in their merit. The name [of the deceased] should be inscribed inside, and every time that someone learns from it, it will bring benefit to the soul of the deceased. (*Ahavat Chessed* — *Chelek 2, Perek 15*).

Conclusion

I want to conclude with an idea that I originally spoke about many years ago, which is very appropriate to this topic of *l'iluy neshama*. It is from the *Aish Kodesh* — a collection of talks that the *Piaszesner Rebbe* gave to his *chassidim* in the Warsaw ghetto, the notes of which he then buried before he was killed, and the ghetto was destroyed. He explained that —

“Every *neshama* (soul) that has passed away from this world [desires] to maintain a relationship with those still dwelling in this physical world of action. Therefore, besides the saying of *Kaddish* and the learning of *mishnayot* for those who have passed away, it is a tremendous kindness when we additionally keep these *neshamot* in mind while we are involved in doing *mitzvot* and learning Torah. We should not merely try to remember them, but rather bind ourselves to them in order to actually do the mitzvah and learn the Torah in partnership with them. They will thereby become “clothed” [in a sense] with a body and, in the realm of action, capable of learning Torah and doing *mitzvot* [once again] and thereby revealing a much greater level of *kedushah* (sanctity). What an incredible kindness it therefore becomes to allow some aspect of every departed soul to reside [once again] within the midst of the Jewish people, to [actually] be engaged in Torah and *mitzvot* together with those [still alive].”

The beautiful message this contains is that we actually have the ability to continue our relationship with our loved ones that have passed away, specifically with our Torah and *avodat Hashem* (service of G-d). What are they now lacking? A physical body to carry out their exalted aspirations in terms of physical actions in this present world of action. And that is exactly what we can give to them.

The boundary between *Olam Ha'zeh* and *Olam Haba* is very much a function of our intentions and awareness. When we work to learn Torah and to do various actions *l'iluy neshama* for the deceased, we find that the distance between ourselves and these souls becomes much less than we would have ever imagined. And virtually everything that G-d created in this world is a potential vehicle to be used for the *zechut* of those in the next world. It all depends upon our decision to use it to elevate ourselves and others. (*Parshat Pikudei/Shekalim*, 5700 — March 9, 1940).

The *Chafetz Chaim* wrote — “The *ikar tikun* (essential benefit) for the *neshama* is when we strengthen **learning Torah** every single day **and** also do *chedsed*. (*Shmirat HaLashon*, part 2, final section, chap. 1).

He explained — “The *middot* we express determine how [*Shamayim*] treats us” (*Mishnayot Sotah* 1:7-9). Every mitzvah which is done helps the deceased, especially the mitzvah of *chedsed*, since it awakens the trait of kindness above and then Hashem relates to the *niftar* with *chedsed* in all matters. (*Ahavat Chessed* — *Chelek 2, Perek 15*).

The final inspiration which emerges from the essay in the *Aish Kodesh* is that not only are we able to continue giving to the deceased, but there is actually a way for the deceased to be able to continue giving to us as well. The extraordinary level of Torah and *chedsed* that is done in memory of the deceased is often possible only through the elevation and inspiration received by those in this world through their connection with those in the next world.

Learning about how we can help the merit of the deceased opens up an entire world of ideas on this extremely rich subject. It profoundly changes the way that we think about the continued

existence of the *neshamot* (souls) in *Olam Haba* (the world to come), and our ability to maintain an ongoing **relationship** with them.

I am greatly indebted to the many *talmidei chachamim* (Torah scholars) who helped me to find and understand the multitude of sources which I presented. I want to specifically mention two of them — Rav Yavruv, *Talmid Muvchak* (close student and disciple) of Rav Chaim Kanievsky, whose book *L'iluy Neshama* was invaluable for my research, and Rabbi Hebel, whose very helpful book — *The Neshama Should Have an Aliya* was published almost exactly when I began exploring this topic. Both of them also took the time to answer many of my specific questions afterwards.

Hashem should grant us the *siyata d'Sh'maya* (Heavenly assistance) to actively maintain our precious relationship with all of our loved ones, through our increased involvement and dedication to Torah and *mitzvot*. And Hashem should help it to be a two-way relationship as much as is possible — with them helping to elevate us to continually greater heights in terms of our awareness in this world, while we provide the **physical** vehicle for them to continue to grow closer and closer to Hashem in the world of complete truth and clarity.

And Hashem should grant **all of us** the *siyata d'Shimaya* that our children, all those we positively impact, and all of our good deeds, should continue producing more and more good, and that, after *me'ah v'esrim* (120 years), it should all be an enormous *zechut* for each of us that will last forever.

This should be *I'zechut ul'illuy nishmat Ruchama Rivka, a"h, bat Asher Zevulun*