

“I CAN’T HELP AT ALL!”

RISHE DEITSCH

A *chossid* from Vitebsk, a town whose tightfisted townsmen were reputed to be less than fully generous with *tzedakah*, came to see the Tzemach Tzedek. His only son had been summoned to appear at the local conscription office, to be forced to join the czar’s army. This was a particularly tough year when even only sons were being taken to the army. The distressed *chossid* asked the Tzemach Tzedek to give him a *brachah* that this terrible fate should not befall his son.

The Tzemach Tzedek replied, “I can’t help you at all.”

Despite the *chossid’s* earnest pleading, the Tzemach Tzedek insisted that he could not help him—not at all.

The *chossid* was close with the Tzemach Tzedek’s youngest son, Reb Shmuel (who would later become the Rebbe Maharash). So the *chossid* went to the Maharash and told him about the Tzemach Tzedek’s refusal to give a *brachah* and his statement that he could not help the *chossid* at all. The Maharash went to his father, the Tzemach Tzedek, and repeated the request. The response was the same: “I can’t help at all.”

Two days before the appointment at the conscription office, the father dispatched a messenger to the Maharash, who again relayed the *chossid’s* request to his father. The Tzemach Tzedek replied, “What do you want? I can’t help at all.”

The Tzemach Tzedek then instructed his son to bring him the *Midrash Tanchuma*, and opened it up to the words: “It is written, ‘He who has compassion on the pauper makes a loan to G-d, and He will repay him his due.’ [Mishlei 19:17] ... The Holy One, Blessed be He, says: When the soul of this pauper was writhing and expiring from starvation, you provided him with food and gave him life. I swear that I will compensate you, a life for a life. If on some future day your son or your daughter will be ailing and on the brink of death, I will recall ... the *mitzvah* you performed ... and will compensate you, a life for a life.”

The Maharash did not understand why his father was showing



Top: In keeping with the theme of this editorial, this issue's Moshiach Page is dedicated to the memory of Shimshon and Martha Stock. To read more about these unusual and unforgettable people, see the Moshiach Page in this issue. This photo shows Shimshon raising money for Chevra Simchas Shabbos V'Yom Tov (CSSY).

Bottom: Volunteers at Chabad of Five Towns serving food to those rendered homeless (or just hungry) by Hurricane Sandy in October 2012.

him this, but listened quietly. Sometime later the news arrived that the *chossid's* son had been discharged, for no apparent reason. The Tzemach Tzedek was delighted. The Maharash, however, wanted very much to understand what had happened. Soon after, when he had to travel to Vitebsk for another reason, he told his wagon-driver to take him to that *chossid's* home. He asked him what had happened on the day of his son's appointment. The *chossid* had no answer, so the Maharash suggested he ask his wife.

At first she remembered nothing in particular, but then she recalled that on that day, a poor man had come knocking on the door, asking for food. She had told him that she had no time to prepare any food for him because they were leaving on a trip to *kivrei tzaddikim* for the purpose of "*raissen kvarim*," to "tear open graves" asking that their son be spared. But the poor man had begged her for something to eat, saying he hadn't eaten in a very long time. Then she remembered that she had plenty of cooked food; they had been unable to eat because of their anguish about their son. She served the man a full and satisfying meal.

At this point the Maharash stopped her: "Thank you. I've heard enough."*

Oh, the irony! She would have done anything to save her son from the czar's army. But while she was doing the thing she was sure would work (visit graves of holy people), she almost neglected the very thing the Tzemach Tzedek knew would work (feed hungry people). So she was her own obstacle to success. Where am I my own obstacle to success? I can think of a few possibilities...

On behalf of the entire staff of the *N'shei Chabad Newsletter*, I would like to wish you and yours and Klal Yisroel a Kosher and Happy Pesach, with the ability to leap over all obstacles, especially those of our own making, and enjoy the true *simchah* that we are all working, waiting, and praying for. •

**This story was told by the Frierdiker Rebbe on the eve of the last day of Pesach in the year 1941 (5702). The Malamed Family, together with Sichos In English, published four magnificent volumes of the Frierdiker Rebbe's sichos (elegantly translated from Yiddish to English by Uri Kaploun); this story may be found in the fourth volume (Sefer Ha-Sichos 5702), on page 182. These volumes are guaranteed to provide hours upon hours of reading pleasure and inspiration. They may be bought at Sosover Seforim, 524 Empire Blvd.; Kehot Bookstore, 291 Kingston Ave.; or other fine Judaica shops.*