

Priceless Opportunities

“STOP THE TRUCK!”

R' Mair Abuchatzzeira would generally avoid riding in cars, but one time, when he happened to be on the highway, he did something peculiar that carries a deep lesson. When the car he was riding in came behind a Coca Cola truck, R' Mair instructed his driver to speed up so that they could pass the truck and bring him to a stop.



The driver hesitated. “Doing that would be very dangerous,” he explained to R' Mair. “It not only endangers the car, but it endangers our lives and anyone behind us.” But R' Mair insisted that he must do it; and so the driver sped up until he was in front of the Coca Cola truck. Then he slammed on the brakes, causing the truck behind him to suddenly stop just short of hitting their car.

As you can imagine, the driver of the Coca Cola truck was not so happy. “Why did you brake right in front of a racing truck?” he demanded to know. “It’s unsafe and unlawful!”

R' Mair was sitting in the passenger seat, and so he answered. “I told him to do so. I wanted a Coca Cola, and I figured this was the only way I could get you to stop. Could I have a bottle?”

The driver was flabbergasted. “That is not the way to ask for a Coca Cola! No matter how thirsty you are, rabbi, you don’t stop a speeding truck!” He angrily jumped back into his truck and sped off.

Very soon after, the truck got into an accident from which the driver did not come out alive. That’s the last thing we know about the driver.

R' Mair later explained himself. When he had first seen the Coca Cola truck, he saw the *malach ha'maves* hovering over the driver. The only thing that would spare his life would be to do a mitzvah, so R' Mair offered him a *zechus* to be saved. By giving him a drink, an act of *chesed*, the driver could’ve saved himself. Unfortunately, he declined, forfeiting his chance, and thus he was taken to the Next World.

This story shows us how one kind act can save one from a grave ending, and how stubbornness could otherwise take away this opportunity.



THE TWO-MILLION-DOLLAR KADDISH

R' Binyamin Cohen is a rabbi in a community with both religious and non-religious Jews. At one of his nightly classes, R' Cohen noticed a teenage boy standing outside, here and there peeking his head in the window to see when the *shiur* was over. As it were, when the *shiur* finished, the boy put on a yarmulka, said *Kaddish*, and then disappeared. When this happened consistently for a few weeks, R' Cohen ran after him and asked what was going on.

The boy explained himself: “My father passed away and left an inheritance of eight million dollars. In his will, he gave two million to me, his son, and two million to my sister. The remaining four will be mine on condition that I say

Kaddish during the entire year. But, if I miss even one day, then my sister and I split the remaining four million.”

Determined to get some of that remaining four million, the sister hired private detectives to catch her brother missing his daily *Kaddish*. However, a few months into the year, they reported back that her brother had yet to miss one day!



Realizing that she was dealing with a very determined brother, she approached R' Cohen and offered him a deal. If the rabbi will somehow arrange it that her brother will miss one day of *Kaddish*, leaving her with the remaining four-million shekels, she would give 400,000 shekels toward any of R' Cohen’s needs, either to any of his tzedakah purposes or for his own personal use.

R' Cohen was faced with a dilemma. He had lots of community work which could be done with that money, things that would have a much greater impact than the brother’s single *Kaddish*. Anyway, he reasoned, the teenager saying *Kaddish* wasn’t doing anything else spiritually. Still, he brought the matter before **Rav Aharon Leib Steinmann** to ask him what he should do.

R' Steinmann didn’t agree with R' Cohen’s logic at all. “If one day of *Kaddish* is missed, their father won’t have a *Kaddish* said for him. You don’t know what the father would prefer—a *Kaddish*, or all that ‘honor’ from the tzedakah. You can’t do it.”

R' Cohen suggested that perhaps the boy saying *Kaddish* and nothing else is an embarrassment to Torah.

R' Steinmann asked him, “Are you the Torah? Do you know that the Torah would rather 400,000 shekels over one *Kaddish*?” R' Cohen was thus disproven, and he never tried to foil the brother’s *Kaddish*.

One day, the brother didn’t run away after *Kaddish*, but instead asked R' Cohen, “How are you so kind to let me sit outside every night, not partake in any of your classes, and yet you don’t chase me away?”

Knowing that the boy was only coming to the shul to secure his extra four million shekels, the rabbi responded, “I’m offering diamonds. If you don’t want them, I’m not going to force you.”

“Diamonds?!” the boy asked, his interest piqued. “What diamonds?”

“Come to our next class, and you’ll see what diamonds I’m talking about.”

He did just that. The newcomer was warmly welcomed, heard the rabbi’s “diamonds,” started attending more frequently, and as a result renewed his commitment to Hashem. (R' Shlomo Farhi)

The lesson from R' Aharon Leib stands strong and firm; we don’t know the value of even one *Kaddish*. The 400,000 shekel could’ve supported many people in learning, and yet R' Aharon Leib said that one can’t decide the value of one mitzvah.

But there’s another thing to learn from here: Through valuing the mitzvah, the boy was able to return. Had R' Cohen stopped his *Kaddish*, even just once,

זכרו תורת משה

the boy wouldn't continue saying *Kaddish* after losing the money, and thus he wouldn't have begun his journey toward Torah and mitzvos.



SAVED THE GADOL HADOR

The yeshivos in Europe were unlike the yeshivos in our days. Today, the yeshivos take full care of all the needs of the *bachurim*, but it wasn't so in Europe. The yeshivos didn't have dormitories; most *bachurim* were away from home, and so boys would sleep on the benches in the local shul. Even then, the benches weren't enough for all the boys; often only the older *bachurim* had the privilege of sleeping on a bench(!), while the younger *bachurim* slept on the floor.



One particular thirteen-year-old boy, who was having a hard time sleeping on the floor and was thus getting tired of yeshiva, got a telegram from his elderly uncle. It read: "We are offering you to take over our successful business. We don't have any descendants to continue it, and you're the most capable relative to continue it, so please come and we'll set you up."

The boy was very tempted by the offer. Sleeping on a cold stone floor on a wintery night wasn't so enjoyable, and with uncomfortable sleep every night, he asked himself what he was really getting out of yeshiva. "I can't continue like this, enough is enough. I'm going to take him up on the offer."

The night before he left, the door of the shul opened, and a woman who'd just lost her husband walked in with a stack of blankets. Her late husband owned a blanket shop, and she was giving the *bachurim* what she hadn't sold from her business. All the *bachurim*, especially this boy, happily took her gift.

Many years later, in 1976, the Rosh Yeshiva of Ponovezh, the great **Rav Elazar Menachem Man Schach**, called his grandson into his office. "We need to go to Haifa today," he told him. "There's a woman who passed away, and I want to be at her *levayah*."

The grandson complied, and they drove through the rain to the cemetery in Haifa. However, the grandson was surprised to see how few people were there; R' Schach and he completed the minyan. This perked up the grandson's curiosity. "Why is he partaking in this *levayah*?"



The rain persisted through the *levayah*, and after she was buried, everyone quickly made their way back to their cars. The grandson brought R' Schach to the passenger seat, but R' Schach didn't immediately get in, instead he stood out in the rain for more than a few moments. Eventually, he got back into the car, and they drove back to Bnei Brak.

R' Schach was aware of his grandson's wonder, and so he explained himself. "This woman was responsible for making me who I am. If not for her, I wouldn't have continued in yeshivah, and I wouldn't have become 'the Rosh Yeshiva.'

"This lady was the woman who gave us the blankets that night when I was ready to leave the yeshiva. I had been so cold, so fatigued, and was ready to take up my uncle's offer. When she arrived and gave us those blankets, it gave me the courage to stay on, and I declined my uncle's offer."

"But what was the reason," asked the grandchild, "that you stayed out in the rain when we'd gotten back to the car?"

"I wanted to remember how it felt laying on the stone floor every night during those cold wintery nights, and what her gift had spared me from feeling. That way, I can properly appreciate what she did for me." (R' Joey Haber)

There are several lessons to take for this story. First is the degree to what R' Schach did to show his *bakaras ha'tor*, going all the way to Haifa amidst his busy schedule. Also important is how R' Schach wanted to feel the discomfort of the cold and rainy day to properly appreciate the *chessed* that she did. But what I want to bring out is the effect of her good act. Her *chessed* had an unbelievable effect that saved the entire generation.

The mitzvos that we do have unbelievable power to them. Sometimes we're given a picture of the effects, and sometimes not, but the effects are regardless.



SNIFF OF TABAK

Sitting on the train, the great *tzaddik*, the **Divrei Shmuel**, noticed a commotion in the first-class compartment. He asked his *gabbai* to inquire what was happening there that was making everyone so excited.



After inquiring, the *gabbai* returned to tell the Divrei Shmuel that there's a certain non-observant Yid, a former chassid of the Divrei Shmuel, who had become a great philanthropist. Everyone was coming to seek him, whether for advice, guidance, or money.

The Divrei Shmuel told the *gabbai* to call this former chassid over. The *gabbai* nervously approached the philanthropist, not knowing what his reaction would be, and told him that the Rebbe insisted that he come to talk with him. Initially, the former chassid was hesitant, but out of the Rebbe's awe and respect, he came to him. After the initial greetings, the Rebbe asked him how much he was worth.

"For what reason do you ask?" asked the philanthropist. "I'm no longer an observant Yid, and I therefore have no intention of giving you any donation."

The Rebbe answered that he's not looking for any donations. After persisting, he responded that he was worth 2,000,000 golden coins.

The Rebbe smiled upon hearing that. The philanthropist then restated that he had no intention of giving the Rebbe any money, so why was the Rebbe grinning?

"Listen here," said the Rebbe. "In your youth, we have learnt together, and even back then you weren't so religious. Your mitzvos weren't worth a sniff of tobacco, and yet, the *yetzer hara* had to give you this enormous wealth to distract you from continuing the minimal mitzvos that you were performing. You see for yourself how great your mitzvos are valued.

"Had they not carried much value, he wouldn't have to give you so much wealth to distract you. But since they were so special, he therefore had given you so much money to distract you and prevent you from that minimal amount. From this itself, you should see how much value your mitzvos hold and start a new commitment to perform Hashem's mitzvos."

Baruch Hashem, our lives are loaded with many mitzvos. Each one is a goldmine unto itself. Hashem, with His infinite love, gave us endless opportunities to do them. Thank you, Hashem, for so many privileges!