

Chapter One

Chessed in His Youth

Candies for the Children

Reb Shmuel's love of *chessed* did not suddenly appear the day he started to be successful in his business. His good heart and ability to understand others' perspective was apparent from a very young age. He spoke about his love of *chessed* to his friend Rav Chaim Welcher of Kiryat Vizhnitz in Bnei Brak:

When I was nine years old, World War II broke out. I was forced to become an adult rather quickly.

My parents both became ill with typhus, and terrible poverty pervaded our home; we were literally starving. When the local school closed, I worked as an apprentice to the local shoemaker. In exchange for my work, I received a free pair of shoes for the winter and another pair for the summer.

In addition, the customers gave me tips, which they tossed into a little tin can. With these coins, I bought candies for the children of the village. Everyone knew that each Thursday night, Shmuel



Reb Shmuel as a youth

Yehuda'le gave out candies. Those moments when I was able to bring enjoyment to other children were my consolation for our poverty. It was a source of chiyus for me!

During these terrible years of extreme hunger, when every slice of bread was priceless, Reb Shmuel was able to find opportunities to do *chessed* and benefit others. It is the nature of young children to view the world through a narrow lens, concentrating on their own needs and wants. They think about themselves and are less aware of the emotions of others. But as Reb Shmuel himself said — he was never a child!

Potatoes for Pesach

One Erev Pesach, Reb Shmuel related a story he experienced as a child in the town of Pashkan in Romania:

The winter of 5702/1941 was a hard one — the snow kept accumulating higher and higher, the roads were impassable, and the wagon drivers preferred to stay warm in their homes rather than trying to navigate the roads of the village.



Reb Shmuel as a youth

As Pesach drew near, Yidden began to prepare for the upcoming Yom Tov. They were very worried — how would they obtain potatoes, the primary staple for Pesach food? The wagon drivers had clearly declared that they were not interested in getting stuck on the muddy roads, because the melting snow had left rivulets of water running down the thoroughfares, making travel very difficult.

I was then eleven years old, and I was as worried as the adults. No potatoes on Pesach meant there would be nothing to eat. I thought and thought until I found a solution — I would pledge to share my

profits from selling the potatoes with any wagon driver willing to undertake the journey with me.

I approached one of the wagon drivers and asked him to take me to the place where the potatoes were grown, in exchange for a large sum of money. He flatly refused; the idea of trying to travel through the muddy roads did not tempt him at all.

I went to another wagon driver, and got the same answer, but I did not give up. In the end, I found a driver who agreed to travel with me. Although it was a long, arduous journey, we reached our destination safely. I collected the potatoes, paid for them, and the carriage set out for the return trip to Pashkan.

The potatoes were mixed with soil and mud, and weighed down with the heavy load, the wagon made very slow progress. I knew that after we would finally finish the journey, I still had a tremendous amount of work awaiting me — rinsing and cleaning the potatoes that I'd brought for the whole town. We traveled slowly and neared the river bank.

“Oh, no, the bridge has collapsed!” the wagon driver cried out in consternation. He wondered how we would cross the river, then finally decided that the river was shallow enough to cross with the carriage.

He drove into the water, and at that moment, I recognized the tremendous Hashgachah pratis. When we drove out of the river on the other side, the potatoes were totally clean of mud! From that point on, we traveled very quickly. The wagon was light and we reached the town with our precious cargo.

The entire town was in an uproar. “Shmuel Yehuda'le brought potatoes!” they exclaimed to one another. Within a few hours, all the potatoes were sold.