

What Can One Do For Someone Who Has Passed Away?

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Introduction

It is with turbulent emotions that I am delivering this lecture. I loved my mother-in-law very much, and found it natural to refer to her as “Ema.” There’s a genre of mother-in-law jokes which is very widespread, yet I was never able to relate to them. Ema was never critical or interfering; she was invariably welcoming, accepting, kind and loving. It was an extraordinary blessing to have such a mother-in-law. In all the years that I knew Ema, the only time that she ever forced her will upon me was when I had a severe stomach-ache but refused to go to see a doctor; she forced me to go, whereupon the doctor rushed me to the hospital for the removal of a ruptured appendix. She quite literally saved my life, and I was stunned when she lost her own life so suddenly.

In the aftermath of her passing, I was struck by the diversity of potential responses. At one extreme, my wife was given a book which presented itself as a guide to giving an *aliyah* (spiritual elevation) for the *neshamah* (soul). While noting that any mitzvah provides an *aliyah* for the *neshamah*, the book presented an order of priorities – how to give an *aliyah* to the *neshamah* in the best possible way. Top of the list was Torah study that is performed for this purpose, and the book stated that the mourner can accomplish this either himself, or by paying others to do so.

At the other end of the spectrum, there was a unique memorial event held at the Young Israel of North Beverly Hills. Aside from a Torah lecture and *hespedim*, this also featured poetry, cantoral and choral singing, and a string quartet. It was an extraordinarily moving tribute – but very, very different from the type of activity recommended in the aforementioned book.

And then there is tonight’s event, which is different again – a banquet inducting Anne Samson into the Ben Zakkai Honor Society, and launching the Anne Samson Memorial Fund, to help NCSY programs.

There is such diversity in the potential responses to someone's passing, in terms of what we do for them. How are we to understand this? And which ways are sanctioned, or preferred, in Judaism?

A Variety Of Approaches

When it comes to losing a loved one, and dealing with that loss, we may wonder: What types of deeds can we do for them? Can anyone do something for them, or only certain people? And in which way can our deeds be of benefit?

If we analyze all the sources and practices in Jewish history, we see that there are four distinct approaches with regard to doing something for someone who has passed away. Some of these are complementary – that is to say, one who does approach A will simultaneously value doing approach B. But others are not – that is to say, one who does approach B will not necessarily perceive any value in doing approach A.

The goal here is not to delegitimize any particular approach. Rather, it is to clarify the fact that there are indeed several distinct approaches, which are not all acceptable to everyone. This is important, because we live in an era where different schools of thought in Jewish history are forced together, even when they are at odds with each other. Judaism is often presented as a single, homogenous outlook. This leads people who identify with a particular historical approach to be confused, and feel disenfranchised, when they are expected to conform to a different approach. Studying this topic, as with many others, reveals that there have been many different voices in our tradition.

The four approaches to doing something on behalf of someone who has passed away can be briefly described as follows:

1. **Aliyah** – an **elevation** of the person's soul in the afterlife, that anyone can enable via studying Torah or performing good deeds for their sake. This is a modern notion associated with the mystical approach.
2. **Zecher** – creating a **remembrance** for the person in this world by honoring them.
3. **Kapparah** – providing **atonement** for the soul of the person in the afterlife, via prayer and/or charity. This is mentioned in the Midrash and in the Talmud, though there is a dispute as to the extent of its applicability.
4. **Zechus** – providing a **merit** for the person, by way of their descendants and disciples. This is mentioned in the Talmud, and has different permutations.

We shall now explore these different approaches in detail.

“An Aliyah for the Neshamah” - The Modern/ Mystical Approach

The mystical approach essentially does not accept that the person has ceased to be. Rather, the person continues to exist, albeit in Heaven rather than earth, but in a very real and present sense. Specifically, just as a living person exists under a continually changing set of circumstances, so too a person who has passed on is living under a continually changing set of circumstances. Just as you can help out a living person – give them a ride, host them for a meal – so too you can help out a person who has passed away.

How can one help them out? According to the mystical approach, mitzvos create spiritual rewards as discrete entities. These can be transferred to other people, just as one can transfer material goods to other people. This would apply to any mitzvah at all. By doing mitzvos, you can make someone’s afterlife a more pleasant experience, by bringing them into a higher spiritual realm – one can “elevate their soul.”

Furthermore, according to the mystical approach, the study of Torah creates the most “spiritual energy” of all mitzvos. Accordingly, it provides the greatest elevation for the soul.

Another aspect of this approach is that anyone in the world can provide this benefit to anyone that has passed away. All that is required is for them to make a declaration that the Torah study or mitzvah that they are performing is being done in order to elevate the soul of so-and-so. As long as this declaration is recited, the reward for their study and actions is directed appropriately.

Later, we shall discuss the concept of a descendant or disciple of the deceased helping them via learning Torah and performing mitzvos. But the mystical notion that *any* person can do this on behalf of the deceased appears to be of very recent introduction.¹ As we shall see, the classical sources from the Talmud, Midrash, and Rishonim do not support such an idea, and in fact oppose it. However, it has become very prevalent today – to the extent that most people would be very surprised to learn that it is of such recent origin.

¹ The earliest source for this notion appears to be the work *Sukkas Shalom*, published in 1883 by Rabbi Yisrael Gutmacher of Greiditz, which innovates a complicated combination of arguments in order to explain the mechanism via which this works. A contemporary work that seeks to present this notion, entitled *The Neshamah Should Have An Aliyah* (Chevrah Lomdei Mishnah/ Judaica Press 2009) , is only able to quote Rabbi Gutmacher and later rabbinic authorities in support of it. Neither of these works discuss the views of the Gaonim and Rishonim regarding this topic, which we shall explore.

Problems with the Modern/ Mystical Approach

The modern/ mystical approach is contrary to the position of the Geonim and Rishonim who weighed in on this topic. They state that ordinarily a person cannot do mitzvos to help the deceased (with the exceptions that we shall later discuss of a person's descendants or disciples), for two reasons.

One is that according to the rationalist approach, someone who has passed from this world is no longer under changing circumstances. Rambam makes it clear that the person who has passed away exists in a fixed and timeless relationship with God.² Maharam Chalavah, a prominent 14th century Torah scholar who was a disciple of Rashba, writes as follows:

אין ספק בדבר כי לא יועיל ולא יציל מה שיעשה בשביל אדם אחרי מותו, כי כל אדם נדון לפי מה שהוא בעת מותו, כי לפי מעלתו והשגתו כשתפרד גופו מנפשו ישיג מעלה ויזכה לאור באור החיים, ואין לה תוספת מעלה ותועלת במה שיעשו אחרי כן להועילו...

There is no doubt that what one person does for another after their passing is of no benefit or aid, for each person is judged according to what they are at the time of their death. In accordance with the person's level and attainments at the time that his soul departs from his body, so will he attain elevations and merit light with the Light of Life, and there is no additional elevation or benefit in that which others do afterwards to benefit him... (Maharam Chalavah, Responsa, #17)

But there is a second and more fundamental reason why the Rishonim maintain that one cannot do mitzvos to help the deceased. One cannot do something to elevate or otherwise benefit someone else's spiritual position, whether they are alive or not. According to Rambam, mitzvos affect society, our intellects and our personalities; other authorities express the function of mitzvos as creating a relationship with God. Either way, mitzvos do not produce spiritual energy, such that one could transfer this to others.

Rashba cites a responsum from Rav Sherira Gaon making this point. Rav Sherira suggests that it might be possible that someone who has passed away can be saved from punishment in the afterlife via the prayers of a righteous person, or via charity, though he stresses that this is not certain. However, he notes that there is no way in which a person can transfer the reward from his mitzvos to someone else:

...ולזכותו למתן שכר אין ביד אדם כל עיקר, ואין מעלתו וגדולתו והנאתו מזיו השכינה אלא לפי מעשיו, ואפילו כל צדיקי עולם בקשו עליו רחמים וכל צדקות נעשו לזכותו, אין מועילין לו בזאת...

A person cannot merit someone else with reward; his elevation and greatness and pleasure from the radiance of the Divine Presence is only in accordance with his

² Rambam, Commentary to Avos 4:22. Note that Rambam was also of the view that mourners do not recite *kaddish* for the deceased.

deeds. Even if all the righteous people in the world were to seek mercy for him, and all the righteous acts were to be done in his merit, it would be of no help to him... (Rashba, Responsa, Vol. 7 #539)

Maharam Alashkar cites Rav Hai Gaon who firmly rejects the notion that one can transfer the reward of a mitzvah to another person and explains why this is impossible:

דברים אלו דברי הבל שאין לסמוך עליהן. ואיך יעלה על לב כי שכרו של זה של מעשים טובים שעשה זה לזה? והלא הכתוב אומר צדקת הצדיק עליו תהיה וכן אמר ורשעת הרשע עליו תהיה, כשם שאין אדם נתפס בעון זולתו, כך אין אדם זוכה בזכות זולתו. היחשוב כי מתן שכר של מצות דבר שישארו אדם בהיקו וילך כדי שיתן זה מתן שכרו לזה?

These concepts are nonsense and one should not rely upon them. How can one entertain the notion that the reward of good deeds performed by one person should go to another person? Surely the verse states, "The righteousness of a righteous person is on him," (Ezek. 18:20) and likewise it states, "And the wickedness of a wicked person is upon him." Just as nobody can be punished on account of somebody else's sin, so too nobody can merit the reward of someone else. How could one think that the reward for mitzvos is something that a person can carry around with him, such that he can transfer it to another person? (Maharam Alashkar, Responsa #101)

The same position was expressed earlier by Avraham bar Chiyya in *Hegyon haNefesh Ha-Atzuvah*,³ and later by Rabbi Yehudah HaChassid in *Sefer Chassidim*.⁴ It is also implicit in the writings of many other authorities, who speak only about the possibility of descendants and disciples of the deceased being able to benefit them (in a way that we shall later discuss). They make no mention of other people being able to benefit the deceased via studying Torah or performing mitzvos.

A Zecher for the Neshamah

Although classical sources maintain that with the exception of descendants and disciples, one cannot perform mitzvos to assist the deceased in the next world, this does not mean that we cannot do anything for them. We can express our love towards them and honor their memory by creating a *zecher*, a remembrance, in *this* world. An honor in this world is not to be trivialized. God Himself, when addressing those who faithfully follow His will but are unable to conceive children, does not speak of their

³ *Hegyon haNefesh Ha-Atzuvah* p. 32. He states that generally, prayers and other deeds performed after a person dies cannot help the deceased, with the exception of returning an item stolen by the deceased, and teaching Torah that originated with the deceased (which is the concept of a merit for the deceased that we shall later explore).

⁴ *Sefer Chassidim* 605.

reward in the next world, but instead speaks of their *yad vashem*, monument and name, in *this* world:

וְנָתַתִּי לָהֶם בְּבֵיתִי וּבְחוֹמֹתַי יָד וְשֵׁם טוֹב מִבְּנִים וּמִבָּנוֹת שֵׁם עוֹלָם אֲתֵן לוֹ אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִכָּרֵת: (ישעיה נו, ה)

And I shall give them, in My House and within My walls, a monument and a name, better than sons or daughters; I will give them an everlasting name, which shall not perish. (Isaiah 56:5)

There are many different ways of remembering and honoring someone, but there are two aspects to providing the greatest honor. One is with regard to the objective value and extent of the honor. The second aspect is that the honor is made more meaningful if it is related in some way to the person who has passed away. Rashi refers to the Geonim as describing how on the anniversary of the passing of a great person, rabbis from all around would gather at his grave and give classes to the public. But instead of saying that this was done to elevate their souls, Rashi says that this was done to *honor* them.⁵ A Torah scholar is honored by institutions and lectures of Torah study; a person who helps the community is honored by institutions and deeds of kindness to the community.

Atonement – Charity and Prayer

Thus far, we have seen that the modern mystical approach is that even those who are not descendants or disciples of the deceased can help them in the next world with every mitzvah, while the classical approach is that they cannot do any mitzvah to help them in the next world. But there is an intermediate position, which maintains that there are two things that anyone can do for the deceased in the next world: prayer and charity. These are presented as being done to atone for the deceased.

The earliest reference to praying on behalf of the deceased is found in the Second Book of Maccabees. This speaks of an incident where people had died as a result of a particular sin. Judah the Maccabee collected money to pay for sin offerings, which is described as being performed as atonement on behalf of those who died.⁶ There are also references in the Talmud to praying on behalf of the deceased.⁷

The Midrash *Sifre* discusses the concept of providing atonement for those who have passed away. In discussing the mitzvah of *eglah arufah* – the calf that is sacrificed to atone for an unsolved murder – the Midrash explains that the Kohanim seek

⁵ Rashi to *Yevamos* 122a s.v. *telasa riglei*.

⁶ Book 12:43-45.

⁷ See *Makkos* 11b, regarding Moshe praying on behalf of Yehudah. Note that this is praying to God for Him to intervene, not changing the spiritual level of the deceased.

forgiveness not only for all living members of the nation, but even for all the members of the nation who have *ever* lived:

הכהנים אומרים כפר לעמך ישראל. כשהוא אומר אשר פדית ה', מלמד שכפרה זו מכפרת על יוצאי מצרים. כפר לעמך, אלו החיים, אשר פדית, אלו המתים, מגיד שהמתים צריכים כפרה. נמצינו למדים ששופך דמים חוטא עד יוצאי מצרים. אשר פדית, על מנת כן פדיתנו שלא יהיו בינינו שופכי דמים. (ספרי דברים פרשת שופטים פסקא רי)

“The priests say, Forgive Your people of Israel, O Lord, [whom You redeemed]” (Deut. 21:8). When it says, “whom You redeemed,” this teaches that this forgiveness atones for those who left Egypt. “Forgive Your people” – this refers to those who are alive. “Whom you redeemed” – this refers to those who are dead. This teaches that the dead require atonement; hence, we learn that a murderer effects sin all the way back to those who left Egypt. “Whom you redeemed” – You redeemed us in order that there should not be any murderers among us. (Midrash *Sifre*, piska 210 on Deut. 21:8)

However, this Midrash, according to several authorities, is limited to a very restricted context. It is referring specifically to a case of atonement on behalf of the entire community for the crime of murder.⁸ As the Midrash states, because the Jewish People were redeemed from Egypt with the understanding that they would be a morally upright people, a case of murder calls the entire redemption from Egypt into question; hence, atonement is required.

There is another way in which we see a difference between atoning for a deceased individual and atoning for a community. The Talmud states that if a person was due to bring a sin offering but died, the offering is no longer brought; however, if the sin offering was being brought for the community, it is still brought.⁹ It relates this to the view of Rav Pappa, based in turn on the Midrash cited above, that only for a community is it possible to gain atonement after their death.

Accordingly, some authorities maintain that Midrash is only presenting an option (or perhaps: a need) to obtain atonement after death in the case of a community, and according to some, only in the case of atoning for murder. Normally, one cannot benefit the souls of those who have passed away by giving charity on their behalf.¹⁰

⁸ Maharam Chalavah, *ibid*; Rabbeinu Avigdor, cited by *Shibbolei HaLeket*, quoted in *Beis Yosef, Orach Chaim* 384:7. Levush, cited by *Pri Megadim* 47:2, suggests that since many people also engage in embarrassing others, which is similar to killing them, it is also appropriate to offer prayers and charity for anyone who has passed away, as an atonement for any acts of embarrassing someone that they may have done.

⁹ Talmud, *Horiyos* 6a.

¹⁰ Maharam Chalavah, *ibid*.; Rabbeinu Avigdor, cited by *Shibbolei HaLeket*, in *Beis Yosef, Orach Chaim* 384:7.

Still, others see charity as always atoning for those who have passed away, regardless of the nature of their sins. A late addition to the Midrash Tanhuma¹¹ refers to the aforementioned Midrash Sifre and applies the concept to broader circumstances. It states that we mention the dead on Yom Kippur and allocate charity on their behalf. (This is the origin of the custom of Yizkor, which only later spread to the other Festivals.)

However, several authorities point out that charity is only being mentioned here as a way to save a person from punishment, not as a way to actively provide reward to someone in the next world.¹² In other words, an account of how one can elevate someone from purgatory does not mean that one can elevate a person already in Heaven to higher levels.

It should also be noted that even according to those Rishonim who are of the view that charity benefits the deceased, it is the exception that proves the rule. It is specifically and only charity and prayer that are mentioned as being done in order atone for those who passed away. No other mitzvos are said to be of benefit in this regard. But why would charity be unique, and what is the mechanism in which it would work? R. Elazar of Worms, an important 13th century authority, suggests that giving charity for the dead on Yom Kippur is associated with the half-shekel contribution to the Tabernacle, which is described as a *kofer nefesh*, a ransom for the soul. This works as a form of prayer; one is pleading to God that this person would surely have given charity were he still able to do so.¹³

Whatever the mechanism, we see that the original sources regarding giving charity on behalf of someone who has passed away are very few, limited in scope, and not relevant to other mitzvos; in fact, they indicate that other mitzvos are *not* of benefit to the deceased. Furthermore, as we have seen, the rationalist Torah scholars rejected any notion of being able to perform righteous deeds that would benefit people who have passed away. Nevertheless, others accepted that charity, if not other mitzvos, are of benefit. Rashba, for example, says that anyone can pray or do charity to help the deceased.¹⁴

¹¹ *Tanhuma, Devarim* 32:1. It is presented as being “an additional section.” This view is attributed to a Rabbi Shemaryah by *Tashbatz Katan* (#440) and by Maharam Chalavah (who sharply disputes its legitimacy).

¹² This point is explicitly made by Rav Sherira Gaon and *Sefer Hassidim* 605.

¹³ *Rokeach* 217, cited in *Beis Yosef Orach Chaim*, end of 621, and later by *Magen Avraham*.

¹⁴ Rashba, Responsa 5:49. He refers to the Talmud, *Sotah* 10b, about David praying on behalf of Avshalom and raising him from Gehinnom.

Eventually it became normative to rate giving charity as appropriate in all cases of people who have passed away. In any case, aside from the concept of atonement, giving charity provides an honor for the person who has passed away.¹⁵

“A Child Grants Merit To A Parent”

The fourth and final way of doing something on behalf of the deceased is very different from the first three. There is a story in the Midrash about how Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai (or, in another version, Rabbi Akiva) encounters a person undergoing tremendous suffering. The suffering person relates that he is actually dead, and he is suffering for his sins. The person says that he will only gain atonement when his son studies Torah and says *Barchu*. The rabbi finds the man’s son and makes it happen, whereupon the man enters Heaven.¹⁶

Today, this story is commonly cited to show that one can study Torah to benefit the soul of someone who has passed away. However, this story is specifically *not* conveying that idea – note that it was *not* an option for Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai to study Torah and thereby save the man from his suffering. In fact, the story is teaching a different idea: the concept expressed in the Talmud with the phrase “a son can grant merit to the father.”¹⁷

There are several references to people in the Torah receiving a favorable judgment, or a blessing, as a result of their descendants. Noah is said to have been saved from the Deluge in the merit of his descendants;¹⁸ Abraham is said to have been promised the Land of Israel in the merit of his descendants who would bring the Omer offering.¹⁹ In all these cases, the person is being rewarded for the deeds of other people, but this is possible because they are people who exist as a result of him.

Such a merit cannot be provided by people other than descendants.²⁰ Merits cannot be outsourced, because they are not something that you *give* to the deceased. Rather, it is something that is revealed about what the deceased brought to the world. As Rabbi Yehudah HaChassid explains:

¹⁵ With regard to the possibility of giving charity via supporting Torah study, here too there are fundamental differences between various schools of thought amongst the Rishonim and Acharonim, but this is beyond the scope of our discussion.

¹⁶ The earliest source of this Midrash is in *Tanna Dvei Elyahu Zuta* 2:17, which mentions Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai. In *Maseches Kallah Rabbasi* 2, a similar story is told about Rabbi Akiva. *Menoras HaMaor* (Klal I, Ner I, 2:1) attributes this story to *Midrash Tanhuma*.

¹⁷ Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 104a.

¹⁸ *Midrash Rabbah, Bereishis* 29:5.

¹⁹ *Midrash Rabbah, Vayikra* 28:6.

²⁰ See Rabbi Ben-Zion Uzziel, *Mishpetei Uziel* (Tel Aviv 1935) vol. I *Orach Chaim* 2 p. 8.

But how can a deed atone for someone who did not perform that deed while he was alive? ...However, thus stated the Holy One: A son provides merit for the father. For example, if the father was a sinner, but ensured that his son studied Torah and performed good deeds, then since it was due to the father that the son thus merited, the son provides merit to the father. If the parents instruct the children to perform [good] deeds after their passing, then when the children perform these deeds, it is as though the parents performed them. (*Sefer Chassidim* 101)

Rabbeinu Yonah likewise writes that the merit of a woman for the next world comes as a result of her children acting appropriately; when they are God-fearing and busy with Torah and mitzvos, it is rated as though she is alive and doing this.²¹ Several other authorities explain similarly.²² (Note that the reason why all these justifications/explanations are necessary is that normally it is *not* possible to benefit someone who has passed away; this indicates that they did not believe in the mystical approach of transferring reward from mitzvos to benefit the deceased.)

Merits accrued via the descendants in this way are automatic. There is no need for any declaration to be made that “this mitzvah is being performed as a merit to my ancestor.” The achievements of the descendants of the person are automatically a credit to them.

What does “providing a merit” actually mean? There are different possibilities. Some will see it more in terms of providing a favorable judgment in the next world, whereas others will see it more in terms of providing a special form of honor in this world. But, whatever one’s approach, the uniqueness of *zechus* is that it only comes about as a result of the person who has passed away. It is not something that can be independently created by someone else.²³

While the Talmud only describes a child as providing a merit for the parent, this can be understood to likewise encompass anything in this world that exists as a consequence of the person who has passed away. Rabbi Yaakov Skili, a disciple of Rashba, notes that although, generally speaking, someone who has passed away

²¹ Rabbeinu Yonah, *Iggeres HaTeshuvah* 3.

²² Rashba, Responsa 5:45; Maharsha, *Chiddushei Aggados, Sanhedrin* 104.

²³ A friend of mine related that when he was studying in the yeshivah of Rav Tzvi Kushlefsky, a student once asked if Rav Kushlevsky could dedicate that day’s lecture to elevate the soul of his grandmother. Rav Kushlevsky replied that this was impossible; while his delivering the lecture would be a credit to his own grandmother, there was simply no way by which to transfer that credit to someone else’s grandmother, who had no role in enabling the lecture to take place.

remains in a fixed state according to their character at the time of their passing, their judgment can be changed as a result of the actions of their children or their disciples.²⁴

Furthermore, with the story of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, we see that even though he was unrelated and formerly unknown to the man who died, he was nevertheless able to assist him by bringing to light the latent potential of his son. Creating a *zechus* cannot be outsourced in the way that one can outsource an *aliyah*, a *zecher* and a *kapparah*. But others can enhance and amplify the *zechus* that begins with the descendants or disciples of the person who has passed away. It becomes part of the person's merit, since he/she provided the raw material for others to develop.

Anne Samson – Connected to Everyone

When a loved one passes away, we try to find meaning in it. We want to be proactive and do something. But what can we do? As we have seen, there are diverse answers to that question.

My mother-in-law was connected to many, many different people. Over a thousand letters of condolence were sent to my father-in-law, which indicates how many lives she touched. And since she was connected to so many different people, we see that all four approaches - *aliyah*, *zecher*, *kapparah* and *zechus* - are being done for her.

The mystical approach to providing an *aliyah* for the *neshamah* is being fulfilled by many family members, who are learning the entire Shas, all of Talmud, *l'iluy nishmasa*; it is also being fulfilled by all the mitzvos being done in her name. The tribute in Beverly Hills honored Anne Samson's memory in this world. According to the view that an atonement is provided by charity, this is being fulfilled in no small measure, with extensive donations to Yeshivat Hesder of Kiryat Shemonah, amongst many other causes. And finally, we have the *zechus* for a *neshamah*, which only occurs as a consequence of a person. "A child provides merit for a parent" - and Anne Samson's children are certainly a great merit. But a merit, while it can only occur as a consequence of a person, can be brought to light and amplified by others - and this brings us to tonight's event.

In the story recorded by the Midrash, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai cultivated a merit for the person who had passed away by enabling his child to develop into a good Jew. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai is also known for enabling a spiritual legacy on a larger scale. He assured the survival and continuity of the Jewish people after the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash by securing the safety of the Torah academy of Yavneh. Jerusalem was destroyed, but the study of Torah kept the Jewish People alive through the centuries. Due to this achievement, when the Orthodox Union decided to

²⁴ *Toras HaMincha, Parashas Nitzavim.*

provide a forum in which to recognize “the distinguished achievements of NCSY Alumni who have demonstrated personal Torah growth and the promise of future meaningful service to the Jewish people and the Orthodox community,” it named this forum “The Ben Zakkai Honor Society.”

Tonight’s event is not only a great honor to the memory of Anne Samson and a great charitable cause. It also reveals her merit, similar to how Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, in the story in the Midrash, helped reveal a merit. In her quiet, behind-the-scenes way, Anne Samson was a driving force in NCSY. Not only did she enable Lee Samson to do his job – even accompanying him to camp just two weeks after delivering my wife via caesarian section – but she also affected the NCSYers directly. My father-in-law told me that even he did not realize the extent of the impact that she had upon people, until he received the numerous letters of condolence from people that had been guided and inspired by her. Everyone here, by supporting the NCSY programs in which Anne Samson was involved, is amplifying and bringing to light her contributions to this world. We are helping to reveal and develop her merit.