



### **Its Taking Away is Like its Giving**

The Lelover Rebbe, Rabbi Moshe Mordechai, and Rabbi Simcha Bunim, the Gerer Rebbe, were known for their close friendship, which was not always fully comprehended by their flocks because of its lofty status.

I merited accompanying the Lelover Rebbe, my mentor, on his visits to the Gerer Rebbe. I will never forget one of the visits which occurred in the summer of 1974.

The Gerer Rebbe was on vacation in Tiberius, and the Lelover Rebbe went to visit him, and invited me to come along. Their conversation was mesmerizing.

One of the issues discussed was the burial place for the Gerer Rebbe's father, who passed away on Shavuot holiday exactly 70 years ago, in the midst of Israel's War of Independence.

He was buried temporarily in Tiberius because of the battles, although he had explicitly asked to be buried on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, where he had acquired a burial plot in the cemetery. After the Six Day War and the liberation of Jerusalem, Rabbi Simcha Bunim wished to fulfill his father's will and reburied him in Jerusalem.

He shared his desire with the Lelover Rebbe and asked his opinion. The Lelover Rebbe replied by sharing a story about Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady, the founder and first Rebbe of Chabad. He was buried in Russia, and one day the authorities demanded that his grave be relocated.

A great rabbi was consulted on the issue, and his response was that under the given circumstances it was permissible to relocate the grave. However, Rabbi Shneur son's refused to answer the question and apparently opposed having it relocated. A public dispute ensued, at the end of which it was decided to relocate the grave.

The grave was relocated, and the rabbi who said it was permissible to do so died suddenly the same day it was moved. All were shocked.

The Rebbe's son was asked if he knew that this would be the tragic outcome, and if so, why did he not give a warning?

He replied that he did not know that this would be the outcome. However, "the righteous know how to take care of themselves," he added, meaning he had expected some drastic outcome.

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My father of blessed memory, Rabbi Yisroel Grossman, was present during the eulogies said during the funeral for the Gerer Rebbe's father 70 years ago, and often quoted the one given by Rabbi Isaac Herzog, the Chief Rabbi of Israel at the time.

"He passed away on the day the Torah was given, 'it's taking away is like its giving,'<sup>1</sup>" Rabbi Herzog said. "The Rebbe enshrined righteousness, genius and leadership, for more than being a holy person, he was also a great leader who led the Jewish People in wisdom, and all enjoyed his sharp perception."

Israel will find other leaders, Rabbi Herzog said, there are other righteous leaders, but this unique combination that the Rebbe embodied is unique and rare, and therefore we mourn his loss, and of his death the Sages have said that the passing of a righteous person is harsher than the destruction of the Temple.

Father stood next to his rabbi, Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Dushensky, who was supposed to eulogize the Rebbe as well, but after hearing Rabbi Herzog's words, said "he took my words. He said it all. Its taking away is like its giving."

The words of the Emri Emes about the blessings recited over the study of Torah, "to engage in Torah," are well known. He likened it to a vendor, who is still called a vendor even when he is not in his store. The carriage driver is always called that, because that is his source of livelihood. In this way, the Torah should be in everyone's heart, an inseparable element of his personality, the focus of his existence.

When one is asked what he does for a living, he should respond gladly: "I engage in Torah."

"It's taking away is like its giving." This is how the Gerer Rebbe's passing was defined by the righteous.

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The Lelover Rebbe then shared that after the Six Day War ended he wished to visit his father's grave, and sadly found it desecrated by the Jordanians. They had completely dug up his grave.

"When the horrific scene was discovered we paced back and forth and were deeply upset," he said, adding that he was sure that his father was buried elsewhere, as "the righteous can take care of themselves," even after death.

I then left the two alone for a long period of time, and then the Lelover Rebbe returned home.

The Lelover Rebbe's words took effect on the Gerer Rebbe, who did not mention the issue again.

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<sup>1</sup> Talmud, Tractate Ketubot 17a.

"Rav Shesheth, and some say Rav Johanan said: Its taking away [the Torah] is like its giving. As its giving was in the presence of sixty myriads of people, so has its taking away to be in the presence of sixty myriads. And this is the case only with regard to one who read [Torah] and studied [the Mishnah]."

The talmud's discussion is on ways to mourn the passing of a Torah scholar.