



THE GLITTERING WORLD OF CHESED

RABBI PAYSACH KROHN, ARTSCROLL

FLYING HIGH WITH A GRACIOUS BURD

In October 2013, a beloved young man, who was married with children, drowned on his 40th birthday, in a tragic swimming accident in the ocean. His name was Gershon Burd.

He was a young child when his family came to America from Russia. Gershon grew up in Chicago, became a *baal teshuvah*, went to Ohr Somayach in Eretz Yisrael, and ended up in a yeshivah called Birchas HaTorah in the Old City of Yerushalayim. Gershon was known for his gregariousness, his signature smile, and his willingness to always help people. Yet, as much as people loved and respected him, no one realized how much of an incredible *baal chessed* he was until after his *petirah*. Even his wife didn't know, because he did many of the *chassadim* secretly.

After his death, so many stories came to be known that his sister, Jessica Zimmerman, decided to collect them in a book. She enlisted my dear friend Yaakov Astor to craft the raw material into a book, *The Secret Life of Gershon Burd: A Master of Hidden Chessed*. The book is truly inspirational. One cannot help but be awed when reading about the ingenious ways Gershon thought of doing *chessed* and how relentless he was in his pursuit of helping others.

Let me give you some examples:

One of my favorite involves a stationery shop in the Old City, near where Gershon and his family lived. He arranged that every child in the Old City would be given a colorful helium balloon at no charge on the day of his or her birthday. That may not sound like much to some people, but for children in the Old City it was very special. When boys became bar mitzvah or girls became bas mitzvah, they would get two balloons. People used to think that the stationery store did it as a promotion to drum up

business. They didn't realize that every month Gershon paid for all the balloons. Even his wife didn't know he was doing this. Nor did Gershon's children when they came to get their balloons.

Another example: Gershon had a friend who wanted to borrow a *sefer*. Gershon didn't have that *sefer*, but went to Yerushalayim and bought it. He then gave it to his friend, not telling him that he had just purchased it just for him.

Gershon would buy suits — even designer ones — and give them to *bachurim* in need. He told them that they used to be his, but he didn't need them any longer.

One of the most moving chapters in the book is about The Secret Chessed Chaburah that friends and strangers formed after he passed away. This group shared their stories about the hidden *chassadim* they would do that nobody would know about. It was all *l'zecher nishmas* Gershon Burd.

One woman, Atara,* who was part of this Secret Chessed Chaburah, organized the women in Ramat Beit Shemesh and Beit Shemesh to visit young wives whose husbands were sent to the front during one of the Gaza wars. These wives were home alone with little children, and they were extremely frightened about their husbands at the front. Atara and her volunteers would secretly bring them cakes on Erev Shabbos or visit them and give them *chizuk*. One of the wives told a volunteer that she wasn't managing well, and the group found her a therapist. Many women volunteered their services.

Even if you don't read the book, if you begin doing secret *chassadim*, they will be a *zechus* for Gershon's *neshamah* and for you and your family as well. I think he is most deserving of that *chessed*.