

## An Unusual Gift From My Grandfather

by Rachel Naomi Remen

Often, when he came to visit, my grandfather would bring me a present. These were never the sorts of things that other people brought, dolls and books and stuffed animals. My dolls and stuffed animals have been gone for more than half a century, but many of my grandfather's gifts are with me still.

Once he brought me a little paper cup. I looked inside it expecting something special. It was full of dirt. I was not allowed to play with dirt. Disappointed, I told him this. He smiled at me fondly. Turning, he picked up the little teapot from my dolls' tea set and took me to the kitchen where he filled it with water. Back in the nursery, he put the little cup on the windowsill and handed me the teapot. "If you promise to put some water in the cup every day, something may happen," he told me.

At the time, I was four years old and my nursery was on the sixth floor of an apartment building in Manhattan. This whole thing made no sense to me at all. I looked at him dubiously. He nodded with encouragement. "Every day, Neshume-le," he told me.

And so I promised. At first, curious to see what would happen, I did not mind doing this. But as the days went by and nothing changed, it got harder and harder to remember to put water in the cup. After a week, I asked my grandfather if it was time to stop yet. Shaking his head no, he said, "Every day, Neshume-le." The second week was even harder, and I became resentful of my promise to put water in the cup. When my grandfather came again, I tried to give it back to him but he refused to take it, saying simply, "Every day, Neshume-le." By the third week, I began to forget to put water in the cup. Often I would remember only after I had been put to bed and would have to get out of bed and water it in the dark. But I did not miss a single day. And one morning, there were two little green leaves that had not been there the night before.

I was completely astonished. Day by day they got bigger. I could not wait to tell my grandfather, certain that he would be as surprised as I was. But of course, he was not. Carefully he explained to me that life is everywhere, hidden in the most ordinary and unlikely places. I was delighted. "And all it needs is water, Grandpa?" I asked him. Gently he touched me on the top of my head. "No, Neshume-le," he said. "All it needs is your faithfulness."

This was perhaps my first lesson in the power of service, but I did not understand it in this way then. My grandfather would not have used these words. He would have said that we need to remember to bless the life around us and the life within us. He would have said when we remember we can bless life, we can repair the world.

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