

Lend to Your Brother

Knock, knock. The man opens the front door. Standing before him is his brother, Meir.

"Meir! I haven't seen you in a long time! How are you?"

"Not so good, Chezi."

"Oy vey! What is the matter?"

"I'm having problems with parnassa (livelihood)."

"Really? What happened?"

"I had a good job, but I was laid off. I managed to find another job. It was going well; however, yesterday I received a note from my boss."

"Oh no."

"Yes. I lost this job too. I could look for another one. At my age the possibilities are slim."

"You are not an old man, Meir. You are a dedicated hard worker."

"I realize that, Chezi. However, the job market is tough. I would like to start my own business."

"What would you do?"

"I have always been good with my hands. I would like to get into home repairs. I know that a good, reliable repairman is hard to find."

"I agree, Meir."

"I went to the bank for a loan to help me start the business. I need to buy tools, and I need help covering the family expenses until my income increases. The bank charges 10% interest for small business loans. They also require a lot of paperwork, collateral, and guarantors. I just cannot manage all of that."

"I understand, Meir."

"After the bank, I went to a money lender. He wanted an even higher interest rate. If I do not quickly succeed in my business, I will have to borrow more money to pay off this loan. The interest will just keep building up and up and I will be working just to pay interest. It is a vicious cycle. I don't want to get involved."

"I agree, Meir."

"That is why I am coming to you, Chezi. Perhaps you can lend me the money. B'eizat Hashem you will help me stay afloat until I can stand on my own two feet."

Chezi smiles warmly and gives his brother a big hug.

"I will lend you the money, Meir. We grew up together. We played together. We helped each other in school. We have shared the good times and hard times together our whole lives. We are from the same flesh and blood! Of course, I will help you. I am your brother!"

The Torah states, "If your brother becomes poor...you shall strengthen him...Do not take interest from him...let

your brother live with you." (Vayikra 25:35-37). The Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 66) explains that lending to a poor person ingrains within us the *middos* (good character traits) of *chesed* (kindness) and *rachamim* (compassion). Why not charge *ribbis* (interest) on the loan? Because *ribbis* will ultimately make the borrower even poorer. He will lose his possessions paying off the *ribbis* (Mitzvah 68). The verse refers to the downtrodden Jew who needs a loan as "your brother" (Vayikra 25:35, Devarim 23:20). Would a person ever refuse to do a kind act for his brother? His own flesh and blood?

Finally, the Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 573) points out that Hashem loves us. One reason is that we serve Him by keeping His Torah and mitzvos. He loves us, therefore, we should love each other, and be kind to each other by lending money without interest.

Kinderlach . . .

Did you get a nice gift of money for your birthday? Did you make a little money working during the vacation? What will you do with it? Do you want to put it to good use? Lend it to a gemach - an organization that lends money to Jews - interest free. You may say to yourself, "I can get interest when I deposit in the bank. Here I get no interest." True, but just think about your brother who needs help. He may have lost his job, he may have medical expenses, or his home may need major repairs. He needs you. Who else can he turn to but you, his own brother? Hashem promises great rewards for those who help their brothers. Kinderlach, lend your money to a gemach, and earn much more than interest: prosperity in this world, and schar (reward) in the World to Come.



Leiv Tahor

"Excuse me; can you please direct me to Rechov Leiv Tahor?"

The man opened his eyes. He had been enjoying a nice afternoon nap in the beautiful public park when this stranger came along.

"What? Which street do you want?"
"Leiv Tahor."

"He has some nerve," the man thought. "He woke me up to ask me directions. Didn't he see that I was sleeping? I will fix him good. I will give him directions to a street so far away that he will be lost for hours." He stands up to point the man in the wrong direction.

"Let's see - Leiv Tahor."

He repeats the words to himself. "Leiv Tahor". "Leiv Tahor". Leiv tahor means pure heart. Am I really doing this with a pure heart? I am taking revenge. I am giving someone bad advice. That is onas devarim (wronging him with words). Perhaps he did not realize that I was sleeping. Even if he did, perhaps there was no one else around to ask. He may be under pressure to make an appointment. Why should I take revenge? He did not do anything wrong. I am going to give him the answer with a pure heart.

"Rechov Leiv Tahor. I am going that way myself. Follow me."

The Torah prohibits wronging a person with words as the verse states, "You shall not wrong your fellow (Jew) with words, and you shall fear your G-d" (Vayikra 25:17). Rashi asks the following question: If someone gives bad advice, who will know if he really intended to wrong the person? Perhaps he just made an honest mistake. Therefore, the verse states, "You shall fear your G-d." He knows your thoughts. He knows the intentions of your heart. He cannot be fooled.

Kinderlach . . .

Onaas devarim is a sin of the mouth and the heart. The mouth should never utter words that hurt one of our fellow Jews. However, even if these words are spoken there is another partner in the crime - the heart. Did the speaker really intend to hurt the person? Only two individuals know the answer to that - Hashem and the speaker. The Almighty cannot be fooled. He knows everything. Do not try to fool yourselves either, kinderlach. Do not try to convince yourselves that you are right, when you know in your heart that you are wrong. Keep your hearts pure. Serve Hashem with a leiv tahor.

Parasha Questions:

- May we eat from the fruits of the Shmitta year? (25:6 and Rashi)
- Which slaves go free in the Yovel year? (25:10 and Rashi)
- How big will the crop be in the sixth year? (25:21)
- What is the source of the sequence of events that leads a person to sell himself as a slave to a non-Jew? (Rashi 26:1)
- What is the danger of being a servant in a non-Jewish home? (Rashi 26:1)