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The Right Kind of Giver

In Behar, Hashem tells us that if another Jew should become impoverished, we must help them by lending money, and we may not charge interest.

It is common today to charge interest when lending money to someone to ensure it is fully returned. Why can't we charge interest?

The first powerful lesson we learn from this commandment is that all blessings we are given in life, including how much money one has, come directly from Hashem. Since it is Hashem's money to begin with, He has the right to tell us not to charge interest on the money we lend out.

The second lesson is designed to help us ensure that we never forget the first. Today, we are surrounded by a selfish society where people often do things for selfish reasons. Many people subconsciously will think through a "cost/benefit" analysis to see what kind of benefits they can expect to receive for their actions.

By giving us this commandment, Hashem is ensuring that when we lend money to someone, it will be completely about the person we are helping and not about us, about the other person's needs

and not our own gain.

The ultimate form of giving is selfless giving. No matter what we give to someone in need, be it money, time, or advice, we must make sure that it is about the other person. Coming full circle this type of giving allows us to emulate how God gives! Just as He gave us this money completely selflessly, so too when we pass it on, we should try to be completely selfless as well.



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In the last year, there's been a downturn in the economy. People are losing their jobs, companies are closing down, and it's caused a lot of hardships for many families. This week's Parsha addresses these kinds of situations and how to help others.

The Parsha starts off talking about people who are in very difficult situations. When talking about the Yovel, the fiftieth year after seven Shmita cycles, the Torah talks about a person who had to sell off all of their land and only in the fiftieth year will they get their land back. Then, it talks about a Jew who becomes so poor they have to sell themselves as a slave.

The Torah advises us and gives us a special mitzvah to help others before it gets that bad. In Vayikra 25:35 it says, "When

your brother becomes impoverished and loses the ability to support himself in your neighborhood you must strengthen him.” Elsewhere in the Torah, (Devarim 14:8) it says when your brother is poor give him money to support himself and his needs. Why does the Torah say it differently here in our Parsha?

The Torah says that before he even gets to the point that he’s poor, right when he starts to struggle you must help him before the situation gets worse. Rashi on our Pasuk gives an example of a donkey who has a heavy burden on his back and is starting to fall. While the donkey is still standing, one person could grab hold of the load before the donkey falls whereas once it falls you would need more than five people to bring it back up.

This idea is presented by The Rambam

in the eight levels of Tzedeka (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Charity, 10:7-14) where he tells us the eighth and highest level of tzedaka is to help another Jew by giving them the ability to support themselves rather than giving them charity to take care of their immediate needs. This could be done by giving them an interest-free loan (this is also a Mitzva mentioned in this week’s Parsha) to start a business, involving them in a partnership, or finding a job opportunity for them. Give them a fishing rod rather than a fish.

I think this is a very good teaching from the Torah because the person who is receiving charity might feel a little embarrassed and helpless. This way of helping others makes them feel empowered so they are not dependent or reliant on others while still getting the help they need. ■



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