

If your brother becomes impoverished ... and let your brother live with you. (25:35, 36)

It is our responsibility to see to it that our brother does not descend to the level of poverty such that he will have great difficulty sustaining himself. We must attempt to help him before he becomes poor, so that, with help from his brother, he can maintain his independence and raise himself up to his prior status. Lending him money or investing in his business is among the highest and noblest forms of charity, since the beneficiary is not made to feel like a charity case. The Torah admonishes us not to lend money for interest. This is not the Torah way. When we perform a *mitzvah*, it should be for the purpose of carrying out Hashem's dictate – not for personal profit.

We wonder why taking interest is prohibited. Is it any different from any other form of business, whereby one makes a profit on his investment? How is this different from renting a space or an appliance from someone? The rental fee is the premium one pays for the favor he receives. It is a simple business deal. One is, so to speak, charging rent for the use of his money. Is this so bad?

Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, explains that, veritably, charging interest is neither morally reprehensible nor is it benign and inoffensive. People do it all the time, and it is a recognized and acceptable manner of doing business. In the context of "family," however, it becomes reprehensible. It takes on a noxious image. Profiting from family members is just not right. One should reach out with complete equanimity to a member of the family. Imagine one charging his brother interest for a loan! It would be considered outrageous. (This does not mean that people do not act outrageously and reprehensibly to their siblings. These individuals have basically removed themselves from the human race.) This is why the Torah emphasizes that the person who is descending into poverty is "your brother." We are all brothers. The sooner we accept this concept and act upon it, the quicker we will realize it and act with greater compassion and decency toward one another.

The following *dvar Torah* from the **Ponevezer Rav, zl**, is not only timeless, it also represents the standard by which the *Rav* lived. His incredible success with people was the product of his love for all Jews. He treated them all as family, because they were. In *Parashas Vayeitzei (Bereishis 29:7)*, when Yaakov *Avinu* arrived at the well in Charan and met the local shepherds, he set about rebuking them, saying, "The day is still young! It is not yet time to gather the livestock. Give the sheep to drink and go pasture them." We do not find the shepherds taking umbrage with Yaakov's rebuke. Imagine coming into a new place and, by way of an introduction, one begins by rebuking the community!

Yet, amazingly, they not only did not respond negatively; they even apologized and gave an excuse for their seemingly indolent behavior, "We cannot give them to drink until all the flocks are gathered and the shepherds roll the stone off the mouth of the well, and then we shall give the sheep to drink" (ibid. 29:8). Why, indeed, did they respond so "nicely"?

The *Rav* explains that the key to understanding their exchange is in Yaakov's greeting to them. He addressed the shepherds as "brothers." That was the secret of his influence: *Achai*, "My brothers!" Or, as the *Rav* put it, *Briderlach*, "(My) precious brothers," indicated the closeness and fondness he had for them. When Yaakov addressed the shepherds as "family" they felt he was close to them, that he loved them as brothers. They viewed him neither as a stranger nor as a newcomer sitting in judgment on them. They did not mind a rebuke from a "brother." When a person radiates genuine love and brotherly feelings, he can deliver his rebuke, and it will be accepted in the spirit that it is rendered. His message will penetrate the most obdurate heart and elicit a positive response.

This was the secret of the *Ponovezer Rav's* success. The overflowing love he manifested towards each and every Jew was a major component of his character. When he referred to fellow Jews as "*Briderlach, briderlach*," it was not a pejorative in order to impress. He meant it, and they knew this. His love penetrated, because it was real.