

If your brother becomes impoverished... you shall strengthen him. (25:35)

It is not always about money. Some of the wealthiest people are depressed, and, conversely, some of the poorest people are filled with joy. A person's attitude reflects his needs. *V'chi yamuch achicha*, 'If your brother becomes impoverished,' is not necessarily about money. He might need a shoulder to cry on; a hand to pat his back; a smile to brighten his day; a compliment to make him feel relevant. Emotional depression is worse than financial woe. People cover up their feelings. They smile, laugh, joke, all while they are crying bitterly from within. A number of years ago, a student in a mainstream *yeshivah* in *Eretz Yisrael* sadly succumbed to his overwhelming depression. Afterwards, the *Mashgiach* of the *yeshivah* lamented, "If one of us would have smiled at him that day, if someone would have included him in a conversation, if someone would have greeted him with a resounding "good morning," this gathering might not have been necessary.

We have no idea concerning the therapeutic value of a greeting, a smile, a "have a good day." It elevates a person's self-esteem and makes him feel valued. It can also save a person's life. In *Sefer Tehillim* 41:2, David *Hamelech* says, *Ashrei maskil el dal*, "Praiseworthy is he who contemplates the needy." He does not say *nosein el dal*, who gives to the needy, but rather, who contemplates; who understands; who delves into their psyche to figure out what it is that they truly need. The *Yerushalmi Peah* 37b relates the story of a poor, blind man who approached Rabbi *Eliezer ben Yaakov* for alms. R' Eliezer seated the man at the head of the table in the chair reserved for the Chief Rabbi of the community, while he sat on a lower, farther removed seat. Thus, people would say that this must be a very distinguished man, for otherwise, R' Eliezer would not have accorded him such honor. As a result, people supported the man handsomely. He did not have to suffer the abuse of walking blindly throughout the streets, knocking on doors, asking for help. Afterwards, the blind man discovered what R' Eliezer had done for him. He blessed him, saying, "You performed a *chesed*, act of kindness, for one who is seen, but himself cannot see. May the One Who is not visible, but yet sees everything, repay you in kind."

This is what is meant by *maskil el dal*. R' Eliezer not only sustained this poor man materially, but also emotionally. He lifted his spirits and gave him the opportunity – even if but for a short interval – to feel like everyone else. When we help people – and many of us do – we must approach our aid-giving rationally. Are we giving them what they really need? Do they need money – or do they need guidance? Perhaps they need help determining how to spend the money, where to spend the money. Is it possible they need help getting back on their feet? Reaching out to help is all-important. Indeed, it is the Jewish way – but, with *seichal*, common sense.