

And if your brother becomes poor, and his means fail with you, then you shall uphold him. (25:35)

One would think that he who helps sustain the poor is to be commended. In fact he is. The poor man who is the object of his beneficence should also be commended for availing the benefactor an opportunity to give. Yet, *Chazal* say, "Greater is what the baal habayis does for the ani, than is what the ani does for the baal habayis." What does this mean?

Horav Eliyahu Meir Bloch, zl, explains that when we examine closely the middah of chesed of Avraham Avinu, the pillar of kindness, we note a concept of chesed that is not congruent with the usual definition of kindness, Chesed, kindness as expressed by the world community which greatly influences our own perspective, is defined purely from a socialistic standpoint. In order to have a viable community, it is essential that we help the poor and needy and see to it that no one is left out in the cold. Thus, we provide hospitals for the ill, homes for the aged, and services for the poor and needy. Those not in need could live a relaxed life if services were not provided for those who require assistance. Obviously, if we could create a situation in which there would no longer be a need for *tzedakah* or *gemilus chesed*, we would definitely do that. Furthermore, if we would determine that for the good of the community not all people should be helped, whether they are too ill, or from other towns, or simply do not fit into the criteria set for *chesed*, they will be excluded. We have only to look around us today to perceive how a distorted value system has played havoc upon the concept of kindness. Today people with myopic vision who cannot see beyond their own vested interests determine who should be sustained and who should be ignored. Is this the concept of *chesed*? The Torah teaches us that *chesed* benefits the benefactor. In fact, the underlying motif of *middas ha'chesed* is for the *nosein*, the giver, not the *me'kabel*, one who receives.

This is what inspired Avraham to look for travelers for whom he could perform *chesed*. After all, if there were not any travelers it was because they were all at home, in no need of a place to eat or sleep. Avraham Avinu realized, however, that a person achieves *shleimus*, perfection, only after he has performed *chesed* for others. Character refinement is dependent upon our helping others. One who does not perform *chesed*, regardless of the reason, is missing a vital component in his spiritual/moral development.