

Do not take from him interest and increase; and you shall fear your G-d. (25:36)

The *Navi Yecheskel* says (18:13) "(If he) Gives (loans) with usury and takes interest should he live? He shall not live!" Regarding this *pasuk* the *Midrash* comments, "The Almighty says, "He who has lived/sustained himself with usury in this world, will not live in the World to Come." Simply, the individual who does not have the sensitivity and human decency to provide his fellow man with a loan without squeezing interest from him will not merit the *Olam Habah* reserved for every Jew. There is a famous incident that occurred with **Rav Akiva Eiger, zl**, which underscores this statement.

In the city of Posen in western Poland, a very wealthy person passed away who had attained his wealth by lending money to people for a fixed usurious return. For years, this man had gouged the community without the slightest compassion. When his children turned to the *Chevra Kaddisha*, who were in charge of the cemetery plots, for a gravesite, they were asked for an enormous sum of money. This angered the rich man's children very much. After all, the more they spent to bury their father the less of his ill-gotten money would be left for them. They turned to the gentile governor of the city in anger, claiming that the Jewish community was prejudiced against them. The governor, who was not the greatest advocate of Jews and certainly not observant Jews, demanded that the rav of the community, *Rav Akiva Eiger*, immediately present himself before the court to offer an explanation for this apparent case of "intolerance."

Rav Akiva Eiger came before the magistrate and presented the following argument, "We observant Jews believe that everyone has been granted a portion in *Olam Habah*. At the time of *Techiyas Ha'Meisim*, resurrection of the dead, all who are deserving will rise and take their rightful portion. Consequently, since they have no need for a "long term" grave, the price is set appropriately. Our *Chazal*, however, have stated that he who has taken usury will not be resurrected. The person in question, was a usurious lender who will be making use of this burial site forever! It is only right that the family should be charged accordingly." When the magistrate heard the rav's counter-claim, he decided not to get involved.

This story has been recounted by many, regrettably, for its anecdotal message. It is unfortunate that we fail to see the depth of *emunah* exhibited by *Rav Akiva Eiger*. He believed in the words of *Chazal* to the point that it became *halachah*. One who does not observe the laws regarding usury will not rise with *Techiyas Ha'Meisim*. Final!- Consequently, he should pay more for his gravesite. We also see the attitude with which these people lived. They viewed death in the manner it should be viewed - as a bridge between life in this world to life in *Olam Habah*. May we merit to be imbued

with such *emunah*.