

"When you lend money to My people, to the poor that are with you, do not be to him as a demanding creditor, nor shall you place any interest upon him. (22:24)

Chazal, when explaining this *posuk*, detail the various forms of kindness necessary in lending money. The lender should perceive the sensitivities of the borrower, and experience feelings of shame and embarrassment as he stands before him. Yet, the *Torah* strongly admonishes the lender not to take any interest. *Yechezkel Hanovi*, when castigating the usurer declares "*And he shall not live!*" (*Yechezkel 18:13*), which is a very unusual punishment for a negative commandment. However, rather than considering this a punishment, it should be viewed as an evaluation of the usurer's unworthiness to live. Nevertheless, why is there such strong rebuke and judgement; are we not describing an individual who was kind enough to lend money to his fellow man, and who expressed sympathy at his plight?

We therefore suggest that the quality of a *mitzvah* is not evaluated only in terms of its form, but also by its accompanying motives. The slightest motivation of self-gratification or personal indulgence can destroy the very essence and beauty of a *mitzvah*. A person should perform a *mitzvah* solely for its sake. Not being able to perform an act of kindness without deriving personal benefit makes the individual unworthy of the gift of life. Life has purpose, and to the extent of the fulfillment of this purpose, one may measure the value and quality of life. Hashem commands us, that when performing the noblest form of charity, it should be done with the proper motives purely for the sake of the *mitzvah*.